Purpose of the Giving Garden

• To demonstrate a sustainable (and affordable) urban food resource.
• To provide a learning space for college students to design and implement experiments.
• To offer a space for children in the Tacoma School District to learn science in a hands-on, outdoor classroom.
• Helps provide healthy food to the low-income and homeless population in Tacoma.

Benefits of Service Learning

• Increases student engagement, improves self-esteem, teaches social responsibility, and enhances academic achievement (Wade 2011).
• Brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds, helping to build community.
• Garden spaces in urban areas serve as a refuge as well as a place to learn about biological systems (Hale 2011).

One UWT student said, “I understand how the community garden works now and plan on applying for a plot here in Lacey with my family so that we can grow our own crops and learn about the environment.”

An Experiment in Sustainability

In Spring 2011 I coordinated with UWT professor Erica Cline to use the Giving Garden as an experimental plot for her Sustainable Agriculture course. I designed an experiment in which students would compare the growth of vegetables in different soil amendments. The City of Tacoma produces a Municipal Solid Waste compost called TAGRO, in which the waste is treated and blended with sawdust and sand to create compost with high levels of nitrogen and high water absorption. UWT composts yard waste and food scraps. Students in three groups compared the growth of plants in soil amended with University compost versus TAGRO.

Project Set-up: Nine beds were used in the experiment: 3 control beds with no treatment, 3 beds amended to 50% UWT compost, and 3 beds amended to 50% TAGRO. Three crops were selected and planted in each of the beds: Oregon snow peas, cherry belle radishes, and winter density lettuce.

Monitoring: Students from each group measured the height of each plant for a period of six weeks. The last day, final height measurements were taken and the radishes were harvested and weighed for comparison.

Results: Beds treated with TAGRO exhibited the fastest growth in all plants, and highest average weight per radish. The results were similar for each group participating in the project.

More Activity in the Garden...

First Creek Middle School:
Below, a group of local middle school students learning about sustainable practices visit the garden to learn about composting, the use of rain barrels, and planting native plants within and around the garden to attract pollinators.

Community Involvement:
Community members, youth, and UWT students are invited to learn how to build a raised garden bed, build a worm bin for composting food scraps, and how to plant a garden. These skills can be utilized at home to create a low cost, sustainable means by which to provide their families healthy fruits and vegetables.

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