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THE Gardens' EDGE

Issue 10



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We continue to be grateful for the ongoing support of **individual donors like you**, whose contributions year after year allow The Garden's Edge to grow!

We would also like to thank the organizations whose partnerships strengthen our programs in Guatemala: **Baker Creek Seed Company, Emily Sandall Foundation, End World Hunger 2030, Gates & Batavia Churches, Owl Peak Farm, Metabolic Studio, New Field Foundation, Scott Evans Foundation, Undaunted Carnival Foundation, and the Vibrant Village Foundation**

Thank you for helping us grow and serve more people each year.



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 The Garden's Edge

 @thegardensedge

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Dear Garden's Edge Family,

It's overwhelming to think of how to start this newsletter. Hurricanes Eta and Lota just ripped through Guatemala, COVID cases are soaring around the world, and we've lost many loved ones this year. Amongst such heartbreak, I often try to remember the promise of transformation that a little seed offers and all the sprouts of hope that can germinate from the darkness.

One of the many things that has kept me inspired since I began working in Guatemala is the ability of people to keep moving forward, often with a huge smile, and to create positive change even while carrying the pain of living through tremendous hardships.

In March, a week before the country went on lockdown, partners from our Seed Travels delegation traveled to Guatemala to continue the age-old practice of cultural and spiritual exchange. This journey, cut dramatically short by the pandemic, inspired many delegates to plant their own gardens when they returned home. Even in that short trip, the Maya Achi would plant the seed of hope in our hearts.

As the pandemic hit hard, we quickly positioned ourselves to support our partners in Guatemala. We started a voucher program to provide families with locally produced food, medicines, and other necessities. We re-organized the way our promoters work to keep people safe, and we started a new project called "Creative Solutions During the Pandemic," where people design projects to help their villages. One thing became apparent: we were already ahead of the curve in terms of being able to adapt and quickly support people. We had the infrastructure in place to make and distribute food, seeds, and medicinal plants to communities across the country. More gardens were planted and more people asked to

Visit our blog at www.gardensedge.org/blog for more stories about our programs and the wonderful people we work with.

join our work because they saw the strength and preparedness of our participants.

One of the ways we were prepared was having lots of medicinal plants in the ground to help boost people's immune systems, and practitioners trained in how to help people through some of the anxiety and depression that comes with living in uncertainty. A big part of our traditional medicine program was inspired through the teachings of our comrade, Dr. Arlo Starr, a Cherokee healer, who passed away unexpectedly this September. I'd like

to share some of his love with you in this newsletter.

On a celebratory note, Josselin Chun, a Garden's Edge scholarship recipient, will be graduating from the University of New Mexico with a degree in Organizational Communication this year after living with our family for seven years. I hope you all have been able to find some blossoms and sprouts to celebrate this year, as well.

Maltiox Chawe' | Gracias | Thank you
--Sarah Montgomery

Josselin Chun Graduates from UNM

Having this scholarship was such a blessing! Sometimes parents dream of providing their children with an education, but this is not always possible due to the lack of resources. Scholarships, like the one the Garden's Edge offered me, really helped take a burden off my parent's shoulders. I liked that at the time, many other girls also had the same scholarship!

My parents always encouraged me to do my best and study, but I also knew that they could not entirely afford to give me an education. I was lucky to have parents who never discouraged me from pursuing an education. But I know that this is not the case for every single girl in Guatemala, especially in the rural areas, where young women are often discouraged from pursuing an education, and most of the time they do not study because they cannot afford it. This is slowly changing, as more young women are able to pay for school with the help of scholarships and people are starting to realize the value of education for both boys and girls. Over the years, I have learned that it is not enough just having the motivation to go to school; being able to afford notebooks, books, uniforms, and tuition is also crucial.

Your support for me, as well as the support of others, is greatly appreciated because it has helped me achieve a big part of my educational goals!

- Josselin Chun



Creative Solutions During the Pandemic

During the pandemic, we're supporting emerging changemakers on the ground with Creative Solutions Grants to continue working in their communities while following COVID-19 safety recommendations. Projects funded by these small grants include compost worm farming, medicinal plant gardens, a fruit tree orchard, free-range chicken and pig farming, and a social communications campaign on COVID-19 safety in Maya Achi.



Aurelia Xitumul, Creative Solutions Awardee

In 2019, Aurelia received a Garden's Edge scholarship to study traditional medicine. She learned acupuncture with the late Dr. Arlo Starr of the Cherokee Nation. After that experience, she "began to dream about working with medicinal plants."

We awarded Aurelia a Creative Solutions Grant to start a store offering medicinal plants and classes to her neighbors to help them establish their own gardens and educate them in plant medicine.

Thank you for placing the ability in my hands to heal, not only my heart, but the world. In each acupuncture session I give, I will remember you. Thank you for this gift that has now multiplied in many hearts. You will always be remembered in each medicinal plant, in the air we breathe, in the water, in the land where the seed germinates and in the warmth of the sacred sun each dawn.

-Aurelia remembering Arlo



Monthly Vouchers for Qachuu Aloom

Together with our Guatemalan partners at the Association Qachuu Aloom (QA), we've developed a voucher system to address the serious threats of food scarcity and community health, while re-circulating money within the local economy during the pandemic.

What does recirculating money mean? Most of the products people can buy with their vouchers are made at QA or sourced from surrounding communities. People get to choose what they need, as opposed to us handing out supplies we think they need.

With vouchers, people can buy masks made by local sewers using cloth made by local weavers, and locally made soap and hand sanitizer. Vouchers can also be used for locally grown grains, healthy snacks, and seeds. Other essentials are sold at subsidized rates through the 12 QA Community Health Stores. We're buying extra open-pollinated seeds from farmers to keep QA's seed bank stocked for the upcoming planting seasons. This generates income for families and encourages them to continue planting their gardens and fields.



We use your donations to support the local economy and provide emergency food and supplies to families.



Honoring the Life of Arlo Starr

In September, our community lost a dear friend, healer, teacher, and change-maker, Dr. Arlo Starr. Arlo helped us establish medicinal plant gardens in Guatemala and train a team of healers to offer traditional medicine in their villages.

In Albuquerque, we are continuing a project started with Arlo to bring back his traditional Cherokee seed collection, many of which had almost gone extinct.

Seed Travels

In early 2020, we welcomed our first ever Seed Travels delegation from the Southwest to Guatemala. The group included 12 farmers, seed savers, and community leaders from Paiute, Hopi, Khapo Owingeh, Indigenous Perma-culture in Oakland, and community gardens in LA and San Diego.



Credit: Chasidy Salvador



We honor the deep connections to our ancestors, families, communities, and ourselves. This has been a time of pain, of healing and growth. This moment asks for us to slow down, and to strengthen our relationship to Mother Earth.

- Virtual Seed Travels Gathering Invitation



Credit: Chasidy Salvador

Cosecha de amaranto. Amaranth Harvest



Sand Dam & Reforestation

The Sand Dam is up and running! It's so exciting to see the immense amount of water it is capturing and we have another 1000 trees in the community nursery ready to plant in 2021! Reforestation of the watershed above the dam is essential to the restoration and protection of the community's natural water supply. This is an extremely dry, deforested region of Guatemala and it's exciting to see that this rain harvesting technology is working. Despite erratic rainfall, the Sand Dam provides potable water to 500 households in Chixolop.



The Milpa Project

The pandemic has caused food shortages and disrupted supply chains, creating food insecurity. As a result, our Milpa Project, is becoming very popular.

Before modern agriculture was introduced, farmers planted diverse systems called *milpa*, where corn, beans, squash, greens, and medicinal plants were grown together. That way, if the corn yields were low, there would still be other foods to harvest. These plants also work together in a symbiotic way. Beans replace nitrogen in the soil through their roots, and corn needs a lot of nitrogen. Surprise, natural nitrogen fertilizer!

Most farmers in Guatemala have become dependent on chemical fertilizers, hybrid seeds (seeds promoted by companies that farmers cannot save and replant the following season), and monoculture planting. A monoculture is where you plant only one crop - think of the miles of corn growing in the midwest. Soils have become depleted from the heavy use of chemicals and yields are low.



Julian Vasquez, the Garden's Edge Agro-Ecology Coordinator, worked with families that once grew conventional corn and beans in monoculture to replicate the traditional milpa system using heritage seeds.

But it's hard to change! Doesn't modern mean better? To encourage farmers to find out on their own, Julian conducted an experiment. Each farmer planted two, 10 by 10 meter plots. The first with conventional farming methods using hybrid seeds planted in monoculture and the second, traditional milpa with native, open pollinated seeds.

The comparison in yields between conventional corn and the traditional milpa was remarkable. Julian observed that in times of drought, families without access to irrigation have much higher yields in corn when they plant the ancestral varieties as they are more drought resilient. They also harvested beans, squash, and edible greens, like amaranth, macuy, and chipilin.

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