

THE Garden's EDGE



Dear Garden's Edge Family,

This year has been filled with excitement and hope from our projects, as well as a lot of heartache as we face the loss of people we deeply love who have helped seed the heart of our work. Since we started this work twenty years ago, several of the original founders have passed away. Now we look to the next generation of leaders to step up to face the challenges of our times. Many of you know Maria Magdalena, whose playful spirit has motivated many of us to plant gardens and preserve ancestral traditions. When I first met her in Rabinal, she told me, "We have to work with women!" Since then, she has been like a mother to me. We are so sad to report that she is in palliative care after a valiant fight with cancer.



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The pandemic continued to limit movement and gatherings across Guatemala. In August, vaccines became available and, despite widespread vaccine hesitation, many people are now vaccinated. This year, we built a bamboo outdoor classroom to continue safely hosting workshops, like the Youth Leadership Course, harvest celebrations, and agriculture and cooking workshops.

We have many exciting things to share this year, including that **150 families in the village of Chixolop had their first corn harvest in 10 years!** We also **planted over 4,000 trees to help mitigate climate change**, and worked to **empower leadership among youth** at risk for migration out of their homelands.

Thank you all for supporting the people of Guatemala to bring back their traditional seeds and farms; plant native trees; and improve nutrition, health, and educational opportunities. We are so grateful that you are part of our work! Best wishes for 2022 and may we all continue to plant seeds of hope in the hearts of our communities during these challenging times.

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



Through her vast network, she connected us to many groups of widows who had organized after the horrific Guatemalan civil war and we began planting gardens. **What started as an initiative of 12 people to reclaim their seeds and work toward justice grew to a movement of over 500 Maya Achi families, and eventually into QA.** Over the years, the work spread nationally and now internationally, as she has traveled, given lectures, and visited communities across the globe. QA now has gardens, dormitories, a commercial kitchen to process foods for their nutrition program, a traditional medicine clinic, an office, and a store that offers locally made products. Elena also helped found a local radio station and an elementary school to preserve the Achi culture and language.

Through QA, Elena has played an instrumental role in re-introducing the highly nutritious Amaranth plant to Guatemala. Amaranth had all but disappeared in the region due to colonization and the civil war, but now hundreds of families produce Amaranth on a large scale, helping many children and families recover from malnutrition. Perhaps Elena is best known for the charismatic and encouraging way she teaches others traditional recipes, inspiring healthy eating, community building, and celebration wherever she goes. We are forever grateful to you Elena!

Thank you to those who know and love Elena, and have donated toward her medical fund.



Honoring Maria Magdalena

Maria Magdalena (Elena) Alvarado Ixpatá is an esteemed elder and founding member of the Qachuu Aloom Mother Earth Association (QA). Defender of women's rights, survivor of genocide, Achi linguist, and single mother, Elena has inspired generations of women and youth to step up and speak out as leaders in their communities.

Special thanks to our wonderful supporters!

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Thank you for partnering with us.

COVID Updates

Josselin Chun

The lockdown of 2020 impacted access to markets, schools, and other institutions, threatening household income and food security. In 2021, with no coordinated governmental relief, the restrictions were lifted and markets and public transportation re-opened. Economic necessity forced Guatemala's most vulnerable populations to assume the risk of exposure to the Delta variant. By June, many people had experienced COVID either personally or within their families. Public hospitals are overwhelmed and deficient, so people are afraid to seek medical attention. Sadly, we've received reports of deaths among elders and people with underlying health conditions, especially in the community of Chixolop where we built the sand dam.

This year, Josselin Chun, our Communications Coordinator, led monthly workshops in organizational strengthening with Qachuu Aloom.



Youth Leadership Course

This year we had a group of **six youth between the ages of 15 and 32 working on Creative Solutions Projects** to combat the lack of economic opportunity and forced migration. The group participated in a course that explores creative ways to positively impact local communities. They learned how their values impact their actions; they also learned communication skills, budgeting, and how to write a report. At the end of the course they were each given \$110 dollars to create and manage their own project, with the hope that these projects will grow and create income for the youth, while preserving local traditions. Their projects included animal husbandry, diversifying the family store with healthy foods, and weaving and seamstress services. This first cohort has expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn new skills and put into practice what they have learned in a supportive environment.



The pandemic couldn't keep the community of Chixolop from planting 4000 trees in 2021! During the rainy season, Julian Vasquez, our Agroecology Coordinator, worked with community leaders and youth to implement soil conservation techniques and tree planting campaigns. Reforestation stabilizes microclimates, which leads to more bountiful harvests and healthier communities.

Educación (Becas)

Zoel Ramos

Qachuu Aloom has 10 scholarship recipients, mostly young women enrolled in high school. One of our organizational values is Gender Equity. This is why we prioritize scholarships for young women from rural communities where *machismo* (sexism) often prevents them from attending school.

Many Guatemalan youth have lost their sense of belonging to their cultural values and traditions. In the formal education system, the importance of our cultural beliefs and traditions is often devalued. For this reason, **our scholarship students participate in workshops on cultural identity, Maya cosmology, home gardens, communication, radio broadcasting, and videography.** This way, they get a better understanding of themselves, while preserving their culture, history, and language. During the pandemic, the students have also been giving talks on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



Sand Dam Update

After observing the sand dam function for a year, the community of Chixolop made a few improvements to the design, expanding the charcoal filter system and stabilizing one of the walls of the catchment system. They also continued planting vetiver grass and trees on contour as a soil conservation technique above the sand dam. **The sand dam delivers water to 500 households!**

Construction of the second sand dam in Las Minas will begin in early 2022.



Seed Travels

Seed Travels works in partnership with Qachuu Aloom and organizations across the Southwest to share seeds and knowledge between cultures and to inspire others to plant gardens and care for their seeds.

This year, The Guardian published an article called, “It could feed the world: amaranth, a health trend 8,000 years old that survived colonization,” in which many Seed Travels partners were interviewed about their work with Amaranth.

In the article, Cecilia Nowell highlights the “growing networks of Indigenous women across North and Central America who have been sharing ancestral knowledge of how to grow and prepare amaranth. Seed exchanges, including those in New Mexico and California, are part of a larger movement to reclaim Indigenous food systems amid growing recognition of their resilience in a time of climate crisis and industrialized agriculture.”

Find a link to the full article at gardensedge.org/blog

Our food and our ability to feed ourselves is the foundation of our freedom and sovereignty as land-based peoples.

Beata Tsosie-Peña, Tewa Women United



Milpa Movement

Julian Vasquez



Over the last decade, Chixolop, which once had a reliable planting season, has experienced a drastic reduction in rainfall. All of the native seeds in the village were lost to drought. By 2010, the families lost hope that they could ever grow corn again. Many turned to hybrid seeds, but also had no luck. Two years ago, I visited a longtime member of Qachuu Aloom, who also lives in a community with dwindling water. I asked her for some seeds, hoping they held the genetic adaptations to withstand long periods of no rain.

I gave some of these seeds to a few leaders of Chixolop, and they were able to get a small harvest. **This year, we were able to give 300 pounds of this drought resilient seed to 150 families, who had their first harvest in 10 years!** As we face a more unpredictable climate, the resilient native seeds that we preserve are important to our survival.

Sign up for our seasonal online newsletter under SUPPORT US on our website and add info@gardensedge.org to your contacts so the emails don't end up in your spam folder. Follow Garden's Edge on Facebook and Instagram for weekly updates on our work!

Climate Resilience

With devastating flash floods, extended droughts, new pests, unpredictable weather, and increased migration, it is imperative that we work with communities on strategies for building climate resilience. Fortunately, we have a head start. Community seed banks, agroecology practices in soil conservation, reforestation, planting highly nutritious native crops using traditional practices, protecting springs, replenishing aquifers, strengthening local solidarity markets, and support to traditional healers builds the capacity to confront future human and planetary health crises.

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