

# Sunny times at urban farm

The Urban Farm was an exciting place to be Tuesday afternoon at 4:30.

The sun was out for the first time in days. Some 138 garden beds, abandoning their excess moisture to the air, were slowly changing from a dark waterlogged brown to a lighter hue. Here and there, a few soggy green plants popped up from between the clods.

Taking advantage of the good weather, several groups of people were working in various corners of the one-acre plot. Some were turning compost into the soil. Others were occupied with finer details, weeding and planting. The atmosphere was gay, the chatter light:

"A little radish! Little baby radishes..."

"How many beds we got left?"

"We got most of it fertilized, don't we? Except for the corn..."

"That's good-looking shit you've got there."

The bright afternoon was a good reason for the congenial mood. But there was another factor involved. Something wonderful had happened earlier that day. For the first time in the history of the urban farm, the Department of Architecture and Allied Arts had lent the project an official stamp of approval, giving the farm permission to use the land.

Richard Britz could hardly contain himself. Racing from the farm house to the garden and back to the house, the professor of landscape architecture couldn't check the grin on his face.

"I've been working on this for four years, to get the dean over here and get the O.K.," he effervesced to everyone whose path he crossed. "It's been a great day. A great day."

High in a cherry tree, a group of bees swarmed around a new queen. Two ducks paddled next to the Mill Race. Spring was everywhere, and it was a great day, indeed.

Britz deserved to celebrate. The road has been long and confusing since the land and house were purchased by the University nearly 20 years ago.

Located behind Murphy's Tavern between the Mill Race and the ceramics building, the land began to be used sporadically for gardening classes in the mid-sixties. Organization was minimal, and much of the time crops planted in the spring were left untended to waste over the summer.

In spring of 1975, a design studio in the landscape architecture department used the garden site as its project. From this course developed the concept of a year-round program in which students would

supervise a demonstration farm while learning about every aspect of growing food in the city. The plan was to focus on solar greenhouses, composting, organic gardening, non-chemical pest controls and raising small livestock.

Manifesting the ideas proved to be an unenviable task. The site had become what Britz called "a no-man's land," and no one seemed to want to assume the responsibility for its supervision. Even campus security avoided it, leaving illegally parked cars unticketed and itinerants to camp out at leisure. The farm house rotted, the blackberry bushes wandered at will, and a family of rabbits began to populate the area.

Despite the obstacles, the garden continued to lumber along, experiencing its first full year in 1976-77. Under the direction of Lynn Mathews and John Karlick, the farm's use peaked in the spring. The class cultivated virtually all of the available space, started a greenhouse, and developed a composting system. The 40-odd class members grew a wide variety of crops, including several patches of experimental corn.

But summer came and once again the situation deteriorated. The garden became overgrown and untended. Mathews became Eugene's community gardens coordinator and Karlick became a resource recovery researcher downtown. Fall came, and the garden was once again without leadership or University support.

Still, the garden wouldn't let itself be forgotten. At the beginning of winter term, the landscape architecture department was awarded a CETA position for a full-time supervisor for the farm. The new coordinator, Nano Tuuk, began working with Britz, developing a full program and using Britz's winter term class, Living in the Environment, to generate ideas and energy.

"Generally people in the winter get fired up and want to try things out," says Britz. "They want to actualize their visions."

Spring has arrived again, and lo and behold, the urban farm is once more a center of activity. In fact, a quick look at the land reveals that the farm is experiencing its greatest success.

The dilapidated farm house has been nursed back to usability. The mass of brambles circling the entire project has been cleared. Several dying trees have been cut down. Several rabbits, this time in cages, are provided a home in return for fertilizer.

"All it takes is commitment and stick-to-it-iveness," Britz says, "and a willingness on the part of the leadership to get very, very dirty."

The garden has been divided among five groups of six to eight people, each respon-



sible for some 20 beds. The class, LA 406G, meets for two hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays, though some people aren't enrolled and everyone puts in far more than four hours a week.

The course has never been very well-known, and many of the students are from the landscape architecture department. Sophomore Marc Russell, for instance, learned of the farm through Britz's Living in the Environment class.

"This is a great class," he said over a bed of freshly raked compost. "I'm learning something every day."

Russell saw the project as closely related to the development of neighborhood awareness in Eugene. He pointed to the large amounts of usable land in the city, and said that the urban farm could be an important educational tool.

"In the alleys there's a lot of wasted space," he said. "A lot of alleys could be turned into gardens. I see the urban farm as a kick-off to getting communities to use their space for gardening, and to making people realize the power of the community."

Other class members have more personal reasons for taking the course.

"It seems that most of the people in our groups are here to learn how to garden," said graduate student Cindi Girling. "But we also found out the importance of working in a group."

Girling's group is working about 20 beds, growing traditional crops like beans, cabbage, lettuce, and carrots. There are no

class fees, and the group has supplemented whatever seeds it found in the house with seeds bought with pocket money. Each person has chipped in with about \$6, "less than you'd spend on books for most classes."

"Well, that's the last bed," she said, as another student put on the finishing touches with one of the garden's two rakes. "Now we can finish planting — or start planting again. We've been pretty lucky with slugs, but these little beetles, the flea beetles, are a problem. And we've had trouble with seeds because of too much water."

There was a slight note of fretfulness in her voice, but she had confidence in her group.

"We've got the group together enough so that almost everyone will be here over the summer. I just wonder what's going to happen if we see other gardens left untended."

"I have a feeling I'll want to do something just so they don't go to waste."

The farm has finally been given permission to use the land. It has one CETA position, possibly several more in the near future. With their new legitimacy comes the possibility of grant money and light department funding. If the farm has managed to

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