EMERGING EVERGREEN:

GROWING RESILIENCE IN DEMETER'S GARDEN

by

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ABSTRACT

Emerging Evergreen:
Growing Resilience in Demeter's Garden

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Urban community forest gardens have incredible potential to support social-ecological resilience. One of the oldest forms of agriculture, forest gardens tend to incorporate trees, shrubs, vines, and groundcover species along with annual plants and herbs, creating their own resilient ecosystems that have little need for chemical fertilizers or pesticides. This thesis explores the interest of The Evergreen State College's community in shaping Demeter's Garden, a neglected forest garden on campus, into a wholesome community space. With the beginning of its revitalization this academic year by a student club and faculty, this overhaul provides an opportunity to establish a strong foundation of guiding mission values for the garden.

Using an emergent strategy framework, I designed an online survey and on-site workshops to explore (1) whether the Evergreen community is interested in interacting with a campus forest garden and (2) what attributes and interactions would draw them to the garden. These results bring to light how the wider community's particular interests and needs intersect with what a community forest garden can offer. Beyond Evergreen, this project has the potential to connect and expand upon various studies examining the interrelation of community gardens and food justice, the applicability of socio-ecological knowledge in public spaces, and the potential resilience of community forest gardens.

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Acknowledgments

Community truly is the foundation of this thesis. Without my friends and family, I may not have been able to complete it.

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Thank you Steve Scheuerell for being open to and advising this project. Knowing you were genuinely excited to receive these results assures me that this thesis will not be set aside on a metaphorical shelf to collect dust.

Finally, my thanks to everyone who participated in the survey and workshops for this thesis. Not only are you helping me and the Evergreen community, you are helping a world of people trying to understand how to live in balance with their environment. Thank you all.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Demeter's Garden is a student-managed forest garden at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA. Forest gardens, also known as food forests, heavily incorporate food-bearing trees, shrubs, and other perennial plants. These gardens can become their own mini-ecosystems if they are well designed and consistently cared for. However, over the last twenty years, various student clubs have steered the direction of Demeter's Garden to fit their differing interests. The garden was not maintained for some years, and the COVID-19 pandemic left the garden without coordinated care for two years. By Fall Quarter of 2022, it was impossible to pass through the garden gate without battling a wall of stinging nettle, and anyone bold enough to enter was greeted by a fortress of innumerable bees, massive comfrey, and more nettle.

Fig. 1. Entrance to Demeter's Garden in Summer 2022.

Demeter's Garden needs people who will consistently maintain it, people who will govern its direction, and a sustainable management plan. These elements are necessary to ensure Demeter's Garden can serve as a reliable educational and recreational space for the Evergreen community. To that end, Evergreen faculty member Steve Scheuerell and the Students for Community Agriculture and Regenerative Farming (SCARF) club vowed to support the garden. Together Scheuerell and SCARF began clearing the space of herbaceous overgrowth during the

Winter Quarter of 2023. Scheuerell also plans to have his classes support the garden through permaculture design and field work each year.

Two paths now lay before Scheuerell and SCARF. On one hand, they could design and manage the garden for themselves, catering to students who are already passionate about agriculture, gardening, herbal medicine, etc. Lesson plans and current club interests would determine how the garden is spatially designed and what activities occur in the space. On the other hand, they could aim to support the wider Evergreen community. There are many students, faculty, and staff who have never heard of nor visited Demeter's Garden because it is not marked on any major campus maps and is in a corner of campus only accessible by forested dirt trails or vehicle. Garnering a wider interest in the space could secure increased funding for developing and maintaining the garden over time. This in turn could provide a stable space for improving social connectedness and broadening educational opportunities for the greater Evergreen community. Strategizing to curate the garden space for the entire Evergreen community would require understanding how the wider community's particular interests and needs intersect with what a community forest garden can offer.

Using adrienne maree brown's [sic] framework of emergent strategy as a foundation (brown, 2017; Sawyer, 2017), I designed this study to assess (1) the Evergreen community's interest in interacting with a campus forest garden and (2) what attributes and interactions would draw them to the garden. I created an online survey to gather general interest and ideas from students, faculty, and staff to examine if they currently value ecological relationships, as well as if and how they would like to interact with Demeter's Garden. I then facilitated in-person discussions in the garden to explore and expand upon these findings, ultimately crafting mission elements to re-envision Demeter's Garden as an accessible and supportive community space.

While I primarily designed this study to support Demeter's Garden, I hope it can also help groups interested in implementing their own community forest gardens. This sort of community space intersects with other topics in the academic and social spheres like food justice, food security, climate resiliency, and environmental stewardship. Many scholarly studies examine how these gardens are impacting sensitive populations, though most of the ones written in English focus on white, middle- and upper-class community gardeners (Burt et. al, 2021). The existing body of research is valuable, but it is imperative that we continue to grow this foundational knowledge because community spaces must be tailored to the needs of their particular community *and* environment if they are to serve both well. Just as I pored over past studies to assess what questions have already been asked, I hope that the questions I ask here, and the results I find, will be built upon by future researchers, community organizers, and gardeners.

Chapter 2: Culture of The Evergreen State College

The main campus of The Evergreen State College sits in the midst of Western Washington's temperate rainforest. Of its 1,000 acre campus, 700 acres are forest, wetland, creeks, and shoreline along the Southern Salish Sea. It is nestled amongst the traditional homelands of the Squaxin Island Tribe and Puyallup Tribe, both of whom contribute to Evergreen's courses and environmental stewardship. While Evergreen offers a wide range of courses, its strong ties to outdoor learning is undeniable. Both the forest and the Organic Farm near the site of Demeter's Garden are considered "Living Laboratories." These spaces are utilized extensively not just by environmental and agricultural classes, but also psychology, poetry, drawing, and other interdisciplinary courses. Small signs detailing plants' common and Latin names dot the main campus and trails.

Evergreen also offers small "Teaching Gardens" across campus that lend themselves to more casual learning. For example, there is the Waterwise Pollinator Garden in the heart of campus. A large sign explains its purpose and contents with illustrations of various pollinators and plants. The stormwater run-off garden and several areas of forest offer similar educational signs. The Ethnobotanical Gifts Garden near the main campus buildings is notable for its complexity. A sizable portion of this garden highlights native plants in a natural ecosystem, with small plaques displaying the "common" English, Latin, and local Indigenous (e.g. Twana, Lushootseed) names of plants. The other portion of this garden organizes plants in garden beds based on their traditional uses, such as the South Bed that hosts plants used for cardiovascular, immune, reproductive, and urinary health. Everyone is welcome to visit these spaces, and most of them are accessible by sidewalks within the main campus. Relative to these spaces, Demeter's

Garden is much more ‘out of the way’, and people with physical movement difficulties might not be able to reach Demeter’s Garden without the use of a personal vehicle.

Along with its lands, Evergreen’s unique academic style draws in students seeking a non-traditional education. It promotes students crafting their own interdisciplinary degrees and courses are taught by one to three faculty members of complementary disciplines. At the end of each course, faculty write an evaluation of each student rather than assigning a traditional letter grade. Likewise, students may submit evaluations of their own progress and the performance of their faculty.

Recent Evergreen surveys show that approximately 60% of Olympia campus students identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer and 31% identify as gender non-conforming (Student Experience Survey 2021). People identifying as being of color include 28% of students, 27% of instructional faculty, and 25% of staff (First Time, First Year Applicants and Students, 2021; Faculty and Staff Data Fall 2021). Fifteen percent of Olympia campus undergraduates identify as having a disability (Student Disability Statistics 2018). This diversity suggests a wide set of emotional and physical needs amongst community members, and it is possible that Demeter’s Garden can help meet some of those needs.

Chapter 3: Planning a Successful Community Garden

Building a community garden begins with understanding the garden's purpose. Is it meant to provide food, sensory experiences, or education? Is it open to residents of a select neighborhood or anyone who wanders by? Will it be built for autonomous gardeners or a group of people looking to grow something together? Managers should understand a garden's purpose in advance so they can align the garden's mission, physical design, and interactive activities with its management plan early in the design process.

3.1 Establishing a Mission Statement

The success of a garden starts with establishing a mission statement. A mission statement says who the garden is meant to serve and in what way(s). The "who" can refer to gardeners, community members, tourists, and even plants and pollinators. Some missions specify that a garden is tailored to all abilities or demographics, or conversely to specific populations (e.g. elementary school students, elder-care residents, hospital patients). A mission statement would also differentiate Demeter's Garden from the many other garden and agriculture spaces across the Evergreen campus.

The term "community garden" most frequently refers to a tract of land gardened by a group of people who grow food and foster community bonds. These gardens often relieve financial strain on gardeners by providing a space to grow less expensive produce, flowers, and medicines than what gardeners can find in stores (if the desired products are even available locally). While gardeners can certainly focus on maximizing food production, many groups start with a vested interest in organic gardening, sustainable local food systems, food justice, and/or food sovereignty (Aptekar & Myers, 2020; Burt et. al, 2021; Smith II, 2019). Concerns about

pesticides, pathogens, and the distance traveled by store-bought produce drive many people to begin gardening without agricultural chemicals. This organic gardening focuses on producing quality foods rather than maximum quantity. Similarly, gardeners who wish to support a sustainable local food system recognize that far-traveling foods often suffer diminished nutrition and flavor, offer less variety of species, and depend on petroleum-based fertilizers, pesticides, packaging, and transportation (Nordahl, 2009).

For many marginalized demographics in the United States, community organizing became inseparable from community gardening from the 1970s onward. For example, the New York City government specifically targeted working class communities of color for shrinkage during the economic downturn of the late 1970s by bulldozing their living spaces and removing city services. As a result, locals guerrilla-planted gardens in the unoccupied lots to combat growing food deserts with healthy, culturally relevant, and communally stewarded foods. By the time residential investors returned to these areas in the 1990s, the gardeners were well-organized and able to save hundreds of gardens from being developed over (Aptekar & Myers, 2020; Burt et. al, 2021). Immigrants, people of color, 2SLGBTQIA+, and other minorities have increasingly supported their own food and cultural sovereignty by taking charge of land and defending their right to safe, nourishing spaces. (Aptekar & Myers, 2020; Beacon Food Forest, n.d., Smith II, 2019).

Many scholarly studies beyond the U.S. have found similar correlations between community gardening and social bonds. Burt et al. (2021) explored whether community gardens across the world aid local food justice efforts. They examined peer-reviewed scholarly articles on the dietary and social outcomes of community garden participation. Thirty-one articles in ScienceDirect, PubMed, CINAHL, and ProQuest Public Health fit their criteria. They found that

participants generally ate more fruit and vegetables than non-participants, and that they had access to more diverse and higher quality produce than non-participants. They also found that community garden participation (CGP) had a positive relationship with social benefits, neighborhood participation, and community sharing:

> "CGP was correlated with participation in a variety of other projects, including neighbourhood clean ups, beautification projects, knowing the police, being involved in the neighbourhood, littering less often, and food distribution projects (to name a few). One qualitative study described CGP as a "gateway" for participating in other neighbourhood revitalisation projects."

Education is another common priority for community gardens. For example, Beacon Food Forest is a free-harvest forest garden in Seattle, WA, that regularly hosts permaculture lessons for the public. Some lessons require a fee to attend, while others are free for the day's volunteers. Beacon's managers are currently installing small plant identification signs detailing species' English and Latin names, place of origin, traditional uses, characteristics, harvest season, nutrition, cooking and eating tips, and relevant warnings so that tourists and gardeners alike can casually learn from the space.

Similarly, many schools run gardens for students to learn about the life cycles of native and agricultural plants. While some curriculums focus mainly on the biology of the plants, others incorporate garden-themed math, art, and language lessons. In the Pacific Northwest, there is a growing effort in child education to equally emphasize decision-making, self-reflection, and reciprocity through gardening. One notable example is the K-12 *Tend, Gather, and Grow Curriculum* put together by an array of Pacific Northwest Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers. Built for inclusion of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous schools, these lessons teach native and naturalized plant identification, wild food traditions, ecosystem relationships, apothecary skills, and plant technologies. Lessons include different activities depending on the

age of students, ranging from leaf rubbings to aromatherapy and medicine making. Personal and community well-being are constantly supported by these lessons, such as associating cedar with kindness and generosity, fireweed with restoration, and nettle with building inner strength. Evergreen's own Ethnobotanical Gifts Garden — or *s'uləxw taqwšəblu* (Gifts of the First People) in the Twana language — details the traditional uses of many local species and organizes them by which systems of the human body they affect.

Sensory gardens invite mindfulness of the surrounding plants in a more passive manner. These gardens prioritize aesthetic beauty by cultivating pleasing color and texture arrangements, smells, sounds, and even tastes. They might also encourage body mindfulness, such as focusing on one's position and balance. They may be open to the public, but are often utilized at institutions like hospitals and special needs schools to soothe or energize people. Having layouts and activities that are accessible for people of varied abilities is a necessity for such gardens.

The examples above are some of the major purposes of community-focused gardens. Each has its advantages, but it is unlikely one garden with limited resources can excel in all categories. The managers of Demeter's Garden need to establish a mission that encompasses the essential purpose(s) of the garden while allowing room for adaptation. In the analysis "Attributes of a Successful Ethnobotanical Garden," authors Jones and Hoversten (2004) suggest that the three key elements of a mission are understanding the reason for the project, its measures of success, and a set of values. Once the mission is established, managers should set up smaller goals and strategies to bring it to life.

3.2 Designing a Forest Garden

Forest gardens are cultivated all around the world. These multi-layered gardens can incorporate various trees, shrubs, root vegetables, and ground cover that magnify the abundance

of their local environment (Beacon Food Forest, n.d.; Pilgrim et al., 2018; Whitefield, 2008). Their diversity of berries, nuts, and fruits coupled with various vegetables, tubers, and leafy greens offer lengthy and varied harvests. These microecosystems require little or no tilling and improve local soil and water retention while sequestering carbon. Successful gardens create closed-loop nutrient cycles and control pests with companion planting. For example: planting deep-rooted species next to shallow-rooted species draws water upward without overtaxing soil nutrients; aromatic and spicy plants repel pests from other plants; and ground cover like strawberries prevent weeds from taking hold. Along with producing foods, medicines, and aesthetics for humans, they serve as oases for local and migrating pollinators.

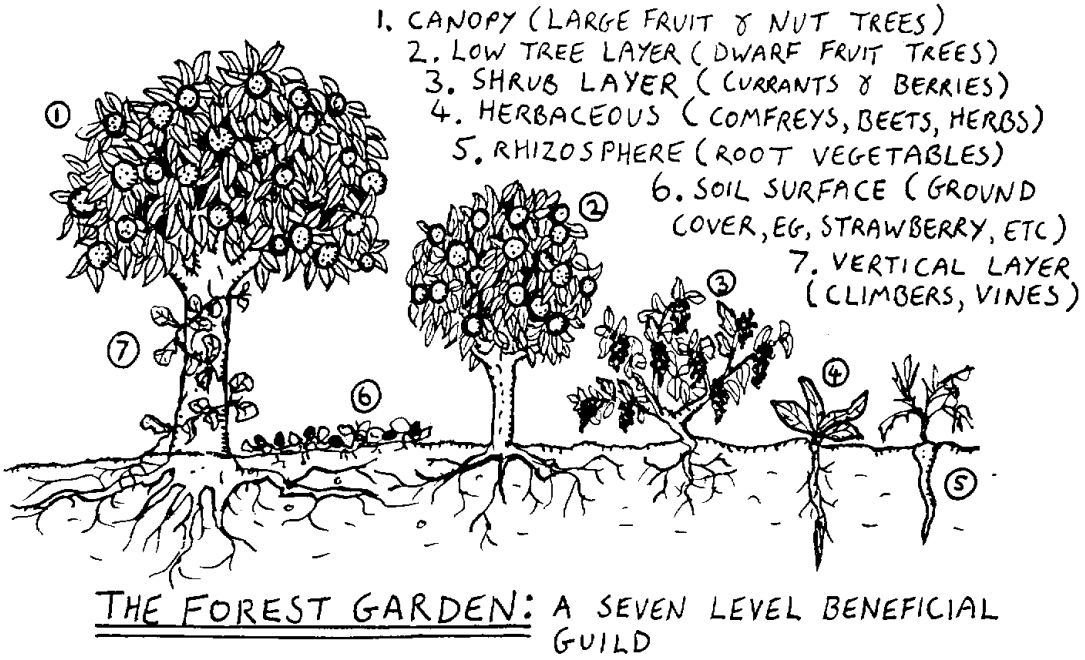

Fig. 2. Forest Garden Diagram by Graham Burnet.

The most commonly cited design for forest gardens in Eurocentric studies is the seven layer permaculture model seen above. While this model is popular, Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest have cultivated their own forest gardens for centuries based on the different

kinds of ecosystems here. A recent study of four archaeological village complexes in British Columbia, Canada, revealed cultivated forest gardens circling the sites. These food forests were defined by fruit- and nut-bearing trees and shrubs with a forest floor of medicinal and culinary herbs. Despite being forcibly abandoned in the late 1800s, the gardens are still functionally distinct from the surrounding coniferous forest. The gardens produce larger seeds than those of non-cultivated plants, suggesting higher drought tolerance and fruit production. In addition, they continue to provide a higher diversity of food and habitat for forest mammals (Armstrong et al., 2021). Armstrong et al. theorize that the impressive number of ecological interactions (higher functional evenness) in these forest gardens are a significant factor in slowing conifer encroachment over the last 150 years.

But we must consider that Demeter's Garden is not a typical community garden; as a garden managed for college-level agriculture classes and a gardening club, it is likely that this space will focus more on education than on growing as much food as possible. As such, it is ideal to consider what designs favor educational gardens. In a study of nine botanical gardens and interpretive facilities throughout Nevada and Arizona, researchers Jones and Hoversten (2004) determined that there are five attributes of successful ethnobotanical garden design, which I believe should be considered for any educational garden. These attributes are that the garden (1) adheres to a clearly defined mission; (2) focuses on its visitors and capitalizes on the resources of its site and institution; (3) tells a compelling story; (4) provides an environment conducive to learning; and (5) adapts through time.

For Demeter's Garden, a focus on visitors could be built into its physical design, such as having an inviting entrance, covered seating, or plaques with indented pictures of plants for visitors who are hard-of-sight. It could also include engaging activities like guided or self-guided

tours, plant care workshops, medicine-making demonstrations, or providing space for a collaborative art event. A community as diverse as Evergreen would likely benefit from an assortment of passive and dynamic experiences.

In his article “People-plant interactions and the ecological self,” DelSesto (2019) explores the possible spectrum of interactions people can have with plant environments. This can be used as a guide to explore the types of activities Demeter's Garden can offer:

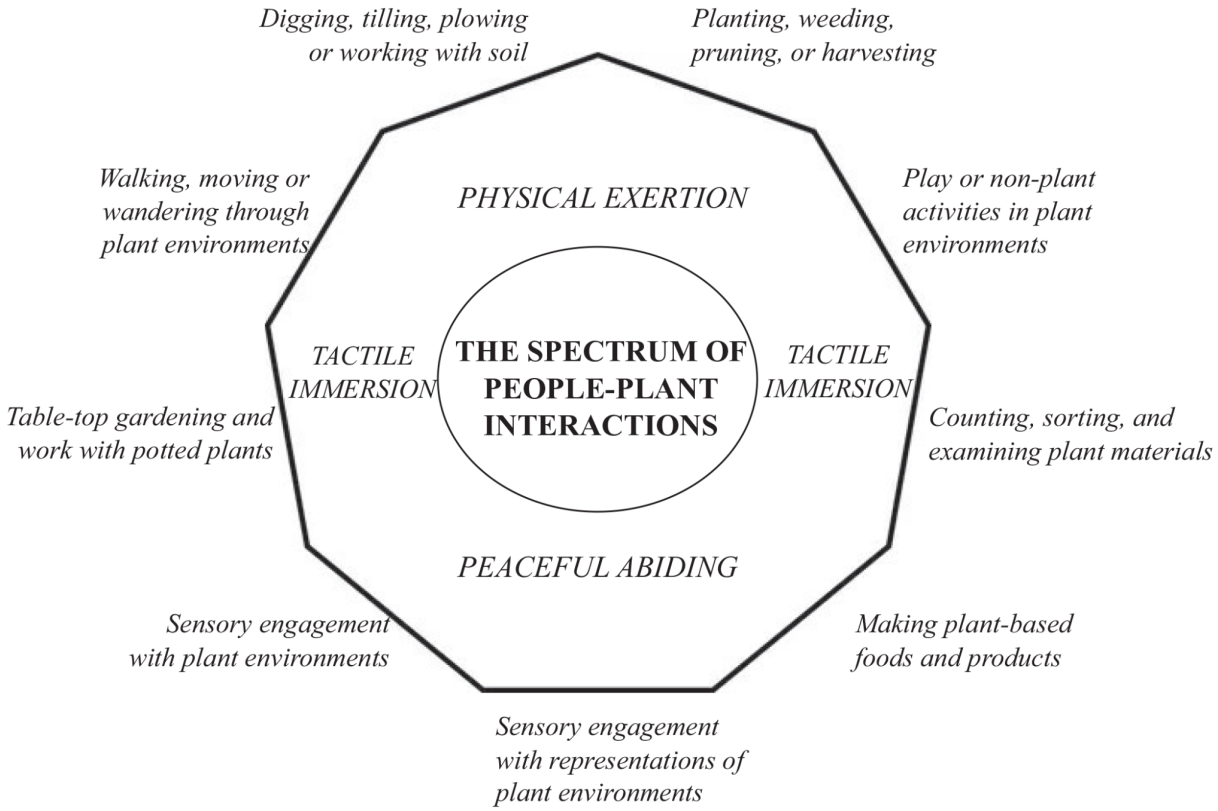

Fig. 3. DelSesto’s 2019 spectrum of people-plant interactions, which depicts various degrees of physical exertion, tactile immersion, and peaceful abiding.

Demeter’s Garden will inherently attract people who are capable of and enjoy pairing physical labor with harvesting and plant care activities. To broaden the space’s audience, garden managers can support other activities in this spectrum. For example, offering lessons on making

plant-based foods and products from the space can teach business, medicine, and survival skills. An open-air shelter could be utilized by people looking to paint, read, grade papers, make music, etc. Sensory experiences from plant variety, wind chimes, and art installations might appeal to community members who desire passive stimulation.

Structures could be made from local wood to capitalize on local resources, and artistic elements could be made by college members. Signage, audio recordings, and art along pathways could aid in storytelling. Jones and Hoversten suggest that the true potential of ethnobotanical gardens is to help visitors relate to the ecosystem through education and engagement, which I believe can be a mission element even for non-ethnobotanical gardens.

Allowing for adaptation is the final element to promote sustainability. While it is important to set a guiding direction for Demeter's Garden, a management plan should not prevent it from evolving with the needs of its people, plants, and pollinators. It is very possible that some plants installed in the next few years will not thrive over the next few decades. Also, people's interests in the garden may shift unexpectedly because the garden's labor pool largely consists of students who will only spend one to four years in the space. To cater to each generation of users, the garden management plan must be proactive and adaptive.

3.3 Managing with Community

Depending on a garden's predetermined measures of success, managers may consider a garden to be "successful" if it draws in community members. This is acceptable if that is the garden's true mission. However, it is well-documented that the very systemic issues community gardens are often built to resist — environmental racism, classism, homophobia, food inequality, etc. — can also persist in these spaces when managers (intentionally or unintentionally) cater to their white and economically sound neighbors (Aptekar & Myers, 2020; Burt et. al, 2021; Smith

II, 2019). In their study of green aesthetics versus food justice in New York City community gardens, Aptekar and Myers (2020) warn:

> "Alternative food movements tend to devote little space to building an inclusive movement and fighting race and class inequities in favor of focusing on environmental sustainability, a green aesthetic, and healthy eating… In the context of racial neoliberalism, community gardens can end up reproducing oppressive ideologies and practices that emphasize personal responsibility, consumerism, and entrepreneurialism while eschewing the right to food, collective action, and systemic change."

In the context of Demeter's Garden, the demographic in power would be SCARF and the agricultural classes — people who have a distinct background or interest in agriculture or gardening. Inclusivity would require empowering communal input and a wider sense of belonging in the space. As opposed to planning *for* different demographics, it is better to invite community members into the garden's decision-making processes and truly hear their input.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Licorice Fern *sq̓ičəy* - Lushootseed *ƛ̓aʔsíp* - Klallam

> In a traditional Coast Salish story, a long time ago, people had small voices. They could barely hear each other. I offered my medicine to soothe sore throats and to give people a clear, strong voice. When we effectively communicate with others, we can move toward achieving our goals and building healthy relationships.
>
> *Find Your Voice*
>
> - from *Plant Teachings Toolkit* (2020)

Much of my inspiration for this project was adrienne marie brown's vision of "emergent strategy" — a social movement philosophy that examines how humans shape systemic change (brown, 2017). Emergent strategy is rooted in Afrofuturism, pleasure activism, and biomimicry. It builds upon the definition of emergence put forth by Nick Obolensky, a speaker and writer on complex adaptive leadership, who defines emergence as "the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions" (Obolensky, 2016). In brown's book *Emerging Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (2017), she explains that we can intentionally direct these fractal patterns toward collective liberation. Based on her own social movement work and that of her current and ancestral colleagues, she asserts that emergent strategies mirror the adaptive communities of resilient ecosystems. They celebrate diversity rather than uniformity, and exercise collective and transparent leadership. Truly listening to oneself and others is a core tenant of making positive transformation possible and irresistible.

Examining this philosophy made me realize that a true community space requires community participation in its design. For Demeter's Garden to be a lasting community space, it must support the varied and complex needs of Evergreen's students and employees — and these must be reflected in each step of its creation. As brown asserts, "We must create patterns that

cycle upwards" (brown 59). This includes the garden's mission statement, its physical design, and its management. From this foundation, the garden can better support community members over time. Without involving the community from the outset, it is a guessing game as to whether the public would most appreciate a garden focused on maximizing food production, ecological diversity, sensory experiences, learning opportunities, volunteer activities, etc., or even whether it should support *more* than one priority.

This methodology gave me two goals. The first was to reach as many community members as possible. This required my study to be accessible and far-reaching so that I would receive input from students and employees, gardeners and non-gardeners, majority and minority groups alike. However, this felt like a one-sided approach. Leaning into brown's assertion that "[e]mergence emphasizes critical connections over critical mass, building authentic relationships, listening with all the senses of the body and the mind" (brown 3), my second goal was to facilitate deep, in-person community discussion. To enable both this breadth and depth of visions, I chose to collect data through a survey and on-site workshops.

4.1 Breadth: Community Survey

To gather input from as many people and demographics as possible, I created an online survey to assess whether individuals already have significant relationships with plants or gardening; what gardening and ethnobotanical assets they value or would alter across the Evergreen campus; and what assets might draw them to Demeter's Garden. Each of these aspects would inform what ecological, edible, and ecocultural needs Evergreen is already serving and where participants desire change.

The true success of this project depended on gathering input from a range of community members, so I chose several means of advertising. I posted survey flyers in academic, office, and

recreational buildings across the Evergreen campus; discussed the survey with staff as I passed by their offices and with students in my own social spaces; presented my study to two agriculture classes, framing it as an voluntary opportunity to help guide the future of Demeter's Garden; and advertised the survey for several weeks in Inside Evergreen, the college's official news email. To minimize potential emotional risk to respondents, I made no questions mandatory. All respondents were granted anonymity, though they could opt into allowing me to quote them with or without identifiers.

Because I had access to recent demographic data of the campus population, I chose to minimize the risk of survey response fatigue by not collecting respondents' traditional demographic information (race, language spoken at home, age, gender, sexual/romantic orientations, etc.). Instead, I asked for their primary relationship to Evergreen (student, faculty, staff). I also included an open-text space for respondents to list any plant species significant to them that they would like to interact with in the garden relating to their activities, values, gender identity, spirituality, etc., which offered space to voluntarily share personal or cultural information. I asked whether respondents have participated in any Evergreen agriculture or gardening activities to assess what percentages of respondents were or were not inclined to visit Demeter's Garden without prompting.

Following the demographics section, I asked for respondents' opinions about the ecological signage and garden spaces around Evergreen. This was to establish what elements respondents already appreciate and where they see room for improvement. This would provide valuable insight into how Demeter's Garden can meet the community's existing standards. From there, I asked whether respondents were interested in:

- Learning traditional ecological relationships with the local ecosystem.

- Learning how a forest garden ecosystem functions.
- Exploring non-local cultures through having non-local plants (significant to Evergreen community members) in the garden.

I offered yes-no options for each question to assess respondents' reflexive interests. These interests could be worked into the mission of Demeter's Garden if any of them received enthusiastic support. I also asked respondents to explain *how* they would like to learn in the garden, what physical structures they want in or around the garden, and how they would like to use the space. I intended for these to catch any concerns or interests participants might have about accessibility, aesthetics, and engagement.

Getting to the crux of this project, I asked respondents whether they feel community in any Evergreen social or physical spaces, and if so, why. Thoroughly understanding *why* there is community in these spaces can help managers determine what atmosphere and activities they want to support in the garden's design and management plan. If it appears that there are any demographics who *do not* feel community, managers could take particular interest in supporting those demographics. I then asked whether there was anything else respondents would like to share.

The final section asked whether respondents were interested in participating in the workshops following this survey. If so, they could input their email address for me to send them further details. Additionally, they could select days and times they would likely be available for the workshops from a multiple choice list I provided. **Appendix A** lists the survey questions.

As responses came in, I copied them into a password-protected spreadsheet to evaluate them for themes. For open response questions, I coded responses in batches over the three months the survey was open. I adjusted how I coded responses to better reflect growing themes

while noting less-common themes. I investigated any values that appeared to correspond strongly with specific demographics.

4.2 Depth: Envisioning Workshops

After analyzing the survey responses for aggregate and less-common themes, I hosted workshops in Demeter's Garden during the week between final classes and Spring break of 2023. The workshops were semi-structured and focused on how the aggregate survey responses might be practically applied in the space. It was not necessary for workshop participants to have taken the survey, but I used respondents' survey answers to schedule the three workshops:

- ***Workshop 1: Monday 3-5PM***
    - Establish the ecological and emotional priorities for Demeter's Garden.
    - Explore how to promote Demeter's Garden to the community.
- ***Workshop 2: Tuesday 1-3PM***
    - Explore passive and hands-on ways of learning in Demeter's Garden, emphasizing learning accessibility.
- ***Workshop 3: Friday 10AM-12PM***
    - Envision architectural, plant, and artistic arrangements for the space.
    - Finalize elements of the mission statement.

In the emails notifying participants of the workshop times, I invited them to bring other Evergreen members to the workshops. I encouraged participants to come to any and all workshops, as the second and third days would build upon the discussion of the previous meeting(s).

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

Douglas Fir *sčəbidac* - Northern Lushootseed

> Douglas fir has been here for millions of years - adapting to extreme changes in the land, climate, and species living around it. What can plants teach me about being resilient in times of change?
>
> *Adapt*
>
> - from *Plant Teachings for Growing Social-Emotional Skills* (2020)

5.1 Survey Results

Of the 78 survey responses, the vast majority came from students, then staff, then faculty. 33% of respondents reported participation in a gardening or agriculture club or class and 12% reported gardening in one of the plots across campus located near student living.

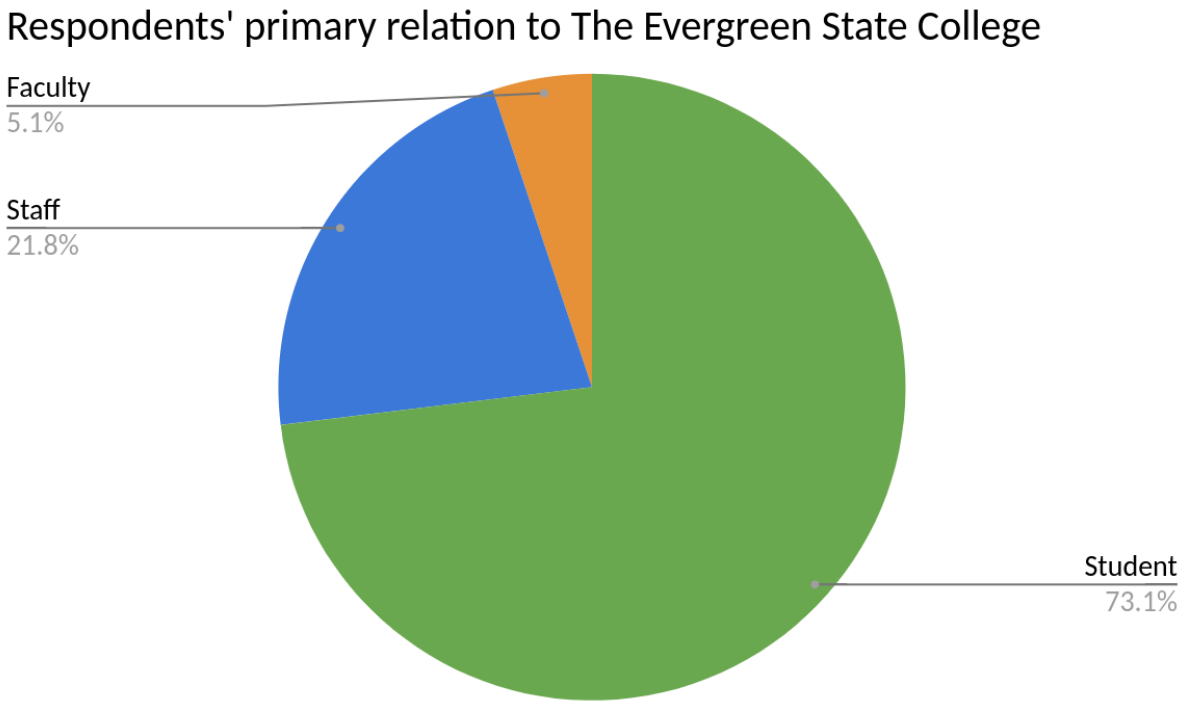

Figure 4 - Results of the 78 respondents' primary relation to Evergreen: 73.1% students, 21.8% staff, and 5.1% faculty

Eighty-four percent of respondents stated they appreciate the ecosystem and plant identification signage across Evergreen's campus. This suggests that they value casual interactions with their environment. Some respondents explained that this signage is their primary way of learning about the plants around them, and satisfaction with signs positively correlated with the amount of information present on signs, e.g. listing a plant's Indigenous names, its cultural uses, or its role in the ecosystem. Several respondents stated that this signage helps them feel more connected with the landscape of Evergreen and the South Sound area. These signs also suggested to some respondents that Evergreen as an institution values its relationships with the land and local Indigenous peoples. A student in their first year at Evergreen wrote that these signs are "absolutely important for the development of community, for people to be able to see something they helped with or their neighbors did grow over time, and for students and people on campus to see the spaces as common spaces to be used."

Respondents who did not leave positive reviews overwhelmingly stated there are not enough signs, and many of those that exist lack beneficial information, are covered in moss and graffiti, or placed where a plant no longer exists – further establishing that the Evergreen community values educational signage. One student wrote "I often find the font too small to stop and read it, there are not often pictures identifying the plant I'm reading about." A few other students complained that there were no signs with braille or indented images for visually impaired or tactile learners.

More than half of respondents have visited the Ethnobotanical Gifts Garden surrounding the House of Welcome, close to the heart of campus. Most respondents expressed a positive experience. They value the thoughtful design, relaxing atmosphere, educational signs, and walkability of the space. Many respondents wished for more extensive ethnobotanical

information, either from a guided tour or more detailed signs. Signage suggestions included adding the pronunciation of Indigenous plant names, pictures of individual plants, and uses of individual plants. Several people noted that they would like to harvest from or help maintain the garden, but the space lacks any indicator of acceptable practices or how to get involved. Of the 30 respondents who have not visited the Ethnobotanical Garden, 18 either did not know it existed or where it is. Nine respondents said it was out of their way, two that they passed it but it did not catch their interest, and one has not visited for "other" reason(s). Given that Demeter's Garden is further away than the Ethnobotanical Gifts garden from most academic, office, and residential buildings, it appears that attracting people to Demeter's Garden will require active engagement. Making sure Demeter's Garden is on the map, literally and figuratively, will be key to bringing in the wider community.

These findings are further supported by respondents' general lack of experience with Demeter's Garden. 50 of the 78 respondents have not visited the garden, typically because they did not know of its existence prior to the survey. Of those who have been to Demeter's Garden, several stated they are interested in the potential of the garden and that they would like to participate in its revitalization. Most responses suggested improvements to the space such as taming the overgrowth, adding signage, implementing workshops, and involving academics (i.e. hosting fungi logs for mycology classes).

As for what plants participants would like to interact with in the garden, almost every response suggested focusing on native plants, either generally or a specific local plant. A few people explained why their requested plant is special to them:

- Raspberries - Reminds respondent of their family
- Sage - Useful for spiritual practice
- Wild sage - Respondent misses the smell from their childhood

- Lavender, Violets, etc. - Flowers with sapphic symbolism
- Cilantro - Important to respondent's Mexican heritage
- Stinging nettle - Important spring food for respondent's mind, body, and spirit

A full list of requested plants is available in **Appendix B**.

When specifically asked what physical structures respondents would like in or around the garden, most stated they want seating (chairs, benches, a swinging bench), tables (for reading, eating, gardening), and rain cover. Less common suggestions included providing drinking water, food, definitive paths, trellises, a greenhouse, archways, water features, a small pond for the local amphibians and bats, and exercise equipment surrounding the garden. Some more socially-collaborative suggestions included having space for group art, Indigenous heritage sculptures, a mini library, a fire pit, and a pizza oven. Four respondents specified that structures should be built sustainability, unobtrusively, and/or with natural materials.

The desire for greater accessibility was present in many responses. One student shared that due to their mobility and pain issues, it would be easiest to participate in gardening if there are raised beds or work tables that are accessible when standing. They also suggested that Demeter's have adaptive gardening tools, knee pads, a water station, and non-latex gloves. Flat paths with paving stones would make walking through the garden easier for them. Similarly, another student hopes that the garden will be wheelchair accessible, stating that "I would spend more time on campus if green and plant-focused spaces were truly accessible. I want to pursue a botany degree but hands-on and experiential learning opportunities are difficult to come by with my disabilities. Especially in non-lab settings. Spaces like Demeter's, with dedication, can change this for students like me."

Learning accessibility was another predominant topic. Several respondents suggested that signs should cater to people with impaired vision, namely providing signage with large

high-contrast or indented pictures of plants and/or braille descriptions. Other suggestions for making learning accessible in Demeter's Garden included:

- Hands-on workshops on
    - Starting one's own herb garden
    - Respectful foraging
    - Wildcrafting
    - Gardening
- Educational website, app, or signs with
    - Stories sharing Traditional Ecological Knowledge or Indigenous teachings
    - Written ecosystem and plant descriptions
    - Timelapse photography
    - Reflective writing
    - Audio stories
    - Animations
    - Podcasts
- Regular learning segments on KAOS (Evergreen's student radio station)
- Herbarium for plants not present
- Zines, fliers, or pamphlets
- Interactive self-guided tours
- Family-friendly tours
- Formal courses
- Inclusion with annual Evergreen events
    - Rachel Carson Forum
    - Harvest Festival

Workshops and signage were *highly* requested, showing strong desires for both hands-on and passive engagement. Furthermore, there are strong desires for social engagement, sensory playfulness, and quiet decompression. Seventy-two respondents said they are interested in

learning about traditional ecological relationships with the local ecosystem. Seventy-three respondents said they are interested in learning how a forest garden ecosystem functions.

Of the 70 responses to whether respondents feel community somewhere on campus, 22 selected “no”. Notably, three of the four faculty who responded to this question selected “no.” While only five faculty members took the survey, this in itself may be an indicator that faculty are less likely to participate in community-related activities than students and staff.

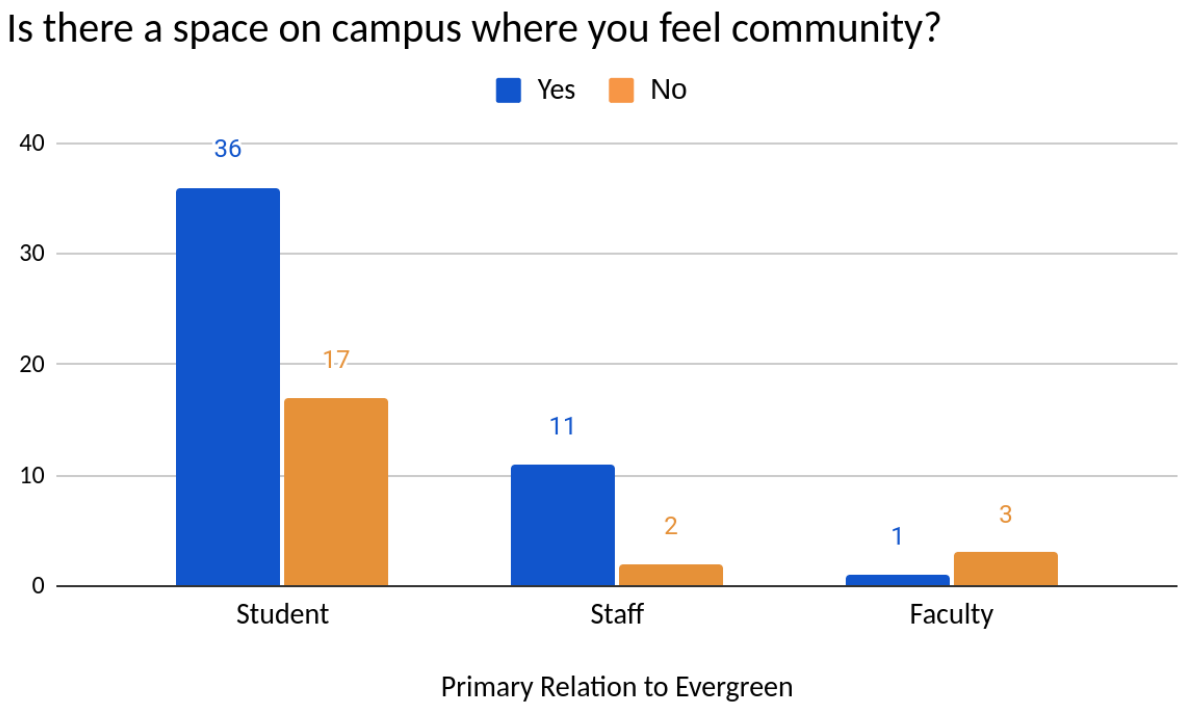

Figure 5 - Results of the 70 respondents who answered whether they feel community on campus. Two-thirds of respondents selected “yes”.

For respondents who selected “yes”, almost every written answer included human social spaces, such as the respondent’s workplace, classes, clubs, and social events. Common responses for why people felt community were their shared interests/values with others, hands-on and social activities, social eating, feeling taken care of by others, and feeling acceptance from others (often connected to acceptance of 2SLGBTQIA+ identity or cultural heritage). One employee

explained that they feel community in their workplace "because I know that it is a safe space to bring my whole self. Even when I am imperfect, I know that my coworkers know me well enough to assume I was trying my best."

Of all the responses to where people feel community, only two cited the natural environment itself. These included feeling community with (1) the plants in the Ethnobotanical Gifts garden and (2) a particular log at the edge of the forest. Another respondent stated they feel community in front of the Welcome Woman, an Indigenous carving at the main entrance to Evergreen, explaining "I like to say hi to her on Saturday mornings while I wait for the bus."

5.2 Workshop Results

Workshop 1:

The goals of this session were to discuss possible mission statement values for Demeter's Garden and explore how the garden could better connect with the community. No one came to this session, so I merged these topics into Workshop 2.

Workshop 2:

One participant, highly active Students for Community Agriculture and Regenerative Farming (SCARF) club member Joshua Espada, attended this session. While I had expected a larger turnout of participants based on survey takers' suggested dates and times for this workshop, Joshua and I had a productive discussion due to his volunteer efforts in the garden and deep investment in the outcome of my research. We first discussed possible mission values based on aggregate results from the survey. I shared the mission statements of The Evergreen State College, Evergreen's Ethnobotanical Gifts Garden, and Beacon Food Forest as example

references, which can be found in **Appendix C**. Additionally, I prompted discussion on exploring possible ways of learning in Demeter's Garden.

Joshua agreed with the survey results that physical and educational accessibility should be priorities. He suggested that sections of the garden should be pre-planned so that there could be at least one main path throughout the garden that is navigable by wheelchair. Additional lesser paths could be made of gravel.

Both Joshua and I are interested in ethnobotany and growing social-emotional skills through plant relationships, so we discussed resources that could be referenced to build educational material. We agreed that the organic farm Garden Raised Bounty (GRuB), which is developing lesson plans in their *Plant Teachings* and *Tend, Gather, Grow Curriculum*, could serve as a valuable partner or reference for developing educational material for Demeter's Garden.

Joshua suggested a few aesthetic improvements to make the garden a more welcoming space for the wider community. Demeter's could benefit from a wider, grander entrance and an updated sign detailing information about the garden. Creating a second entrance on the east side would easily connect the garden with the Agriculture Lab building since there are already steps that stop within a few feet of the garden fence. Installing a gate there would better connect the garden to the full agricultural learning space. Additionally, the composters within a few feet of the current entrance could be moved inward in favor of displaying aesthetic plants. Other enticing elements could include sculptures and playful interactive pieces. A "little library" close to an entrance could also draw wanderers to the space. Joshua emphasized that physical elements of the garden should always use natural, non-polluting building materials.

Workshop 3:

Another SCARF member, Dustin Augsburger, joined Joshua and me for the third workshop. Our goals were to envision the physical elements of Demeter's Garden (e.g. paths, seating, plant arrangements, learning stations) and revisit possible values for its mission. I presented aggregate results of the survey in lists detailing respondents' desired physical structures, activities, accessibility aids, and emotional atmosphere, as well as why respondents felt community in other spaces around campus. We quickly acknowledged that it is critical for Demeter's Garden to differentiate its mission from that of other spaces on campus. This will require being selective about what the mission encompasses so that managers can support the mission well.

Demeter's Garden would not support many annual planting events. Once trees, shrubs, and other perennial species are planted, they will likely live for 10+ years. The maintenance in Demeter's will involve activities like pruning, watering, composting, and harvesting only parts of the plants. Due to this emphasis on long-term care, it makes sense to focus on planting native species rather than species that maximize food output. However, we discussed that the food and medicines grown here will likely be utilized in future agro-ecology classes. Food from this garden and Evergreen's Organic Farm will also likely aid the reopening of The Flaming Eggplant, a student-run cafe using local produce that closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community members who wish to experiment with farming non-local species or harvesting larger quantities of food for themselves can do so in the Residential and Dining (RAD) garden plots near student housing.

There was a strong consensus amongst survey responses and our workshop discussion that Demeter's Garden should serve as an educational space for both academics and the wider

community. Passive education can be supported through many small plant ID signs, several larger plaques, or even a handful of signs with QR codes that direct visitors to online resources. Utilizing QR codes may allow more space for braille and/or indented pictures on signs. Many survey respondents echo Dustin's sentiment that "we have such a plethora of medicinal and native plants in Washington… Every single thing in this [garden] is usable in some form and giving notice to how the Natives used them is extremely important. That's what I would definitely put on the plaques."

Our discussion came to the light consensus that if there are to be annual plants in the garden, they should be managed under the direction of faculty. This led us to consider that space could be set aside for agricultural and ecological research plots, further ingraining the usefulness of the garden to the Evergreen institution and community. Creating interdisciplinary opportunities could make Demeter's a more appealing space. For example, a journalism class could partner with Demeter's Garden to offer visitors a web- or app-guided tour of the garden. Students could each write an article on a particular plant with pictures, audio, video, or other media. This would help visitors access information beyond what onsite signs could offer due to space limitations, such as a plant's family tree, medicinal uses and preparation, ideal harvesting times, etc. Arts classes could also make for promising partnerships. Students and faculty could craft permanent fixtures, or have spaces with which to rotate through sculptures, chimes, and creative writing pieces. Demeter's could even host eco-art workshops, such as making leaf rubbings to display in one of the academic buildings. There are an abundance of collaborations that could celebrate the interdisciplinary nature of Evergreen.

Both Joshua and Dustin would like to utilize the design for Demeter's Garden created by former Evergreen students Jenny Pell and Jordan Fink in 2012. This design is quite similar to the

one currently displayed at the entrance of Demeter's Garden, with additions of a greenhouse and cob oven in the center of the garden and a wetland food forest in the north-west corner. While Demeter's Garden has not yet reflected either of the designs, this study and the commitments from SCARF and Scheuerell can help to make those designs a reality.

Chapter 6: Mission Recommendations

Survey and workshop participants want a permanent invitation to Demeter's Garden. They want structures that invite them to relax and create while outdoors in any weather. They want plants that hold meaning. They want to build relationships with the land and with each other. And they are excited to contribute ideas to the (re)creation of this space. As such, these are my suggested values for crafting the mission of Demeter's Garden:

- Make local plants the foundation of the garden
- Value the relationships amongst plants and people
- Pursue accessibility, both traveling to and within the garden
- Prioritize education, hands-on activities, and relaxation above food production
- Regularly engage the wider community in garden activities and management decisions

Chapter 7: Conclusion

> "We need to move from competitive ideation, trying to push our individual ideas, to collective ideation, collaborative ideation. It isn't about having the number one best idea, but having ideas that come from, and work for, more people."
>
> - from *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (brown 59)

The Evergreen State College's mission statement says that "Evergreen emphasizes collaborative, interdisciplinary learning across significant differences." Demeter's Garden is a perfect space to embody this interconnectedness. A forest garden thrives on diversity and cooperation, and this extends to the human community that creates and supports it. As a classroom, the garden will demonstrate the relationships amongst its plants, pollinators, pests, and caregivers. As a social space, it can bring together numerous demographics and disciplines. Leaning into these relationships can help Demeter's Garden gain relevance in the wider community, making it a more resilient, *evergreen* space.

This study is meant to provide a strong foundation from which to build the mission of Demeter's Garden, and my hope is that SCARF and faculty will continue listening to other community members over the coming decades. Additionally, I hope that this study will give other gardeners a starting point for understanding how to reach out to their own communities. Beyond Evergreen, this project has the potential to connect and expand upon various studies examining the interrelation of community gardens and food justice, the applicability of socio-ecological knowledge in public spaces, and the potential resilience of community forest gardens. Understanding what elements are valued in a designed ecological community space by a highly diverse community — largely consisting of students charting new life paths and seeking new social groups — could inform future efforts to craft public gardens which support

ecological, bodily, and emotional health of individuals in other communities. While a garden honoring Indigenous knowledge is inherently region-based, communities in other regions may be able to use information from this study to support their own local relationships.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. What is your primary relation to The Evergreen State College?
    a. Student
    b. Faculty
    c. Staff

2. How many quarters have you been on campus?
    a. None
    b. 1-2
    c. 3-5
    d. 6-8
    e. 9+

3. Have you participated in any agriculture or gardening classes or clubs on campus?
    a. Yes
    b. No

4. Have you gardened in any of the garden plots across campus? (This includes the community garden next to the Organic Farm and the plots near the dorms.)
    a. Yes
    b. No

5. Do you feel that the plant signage around campus is valuable to you? Please explain.

6. Have you visited the Ethnobotanical Garden surrounding the Longhouse?
    a. Yes
        i. How was the experience? Do you have suggestions for how to support your connection with the space? (i.e. accessibility, style of information sharing, plant species present)
    b. No
        i. Why not?
            1. You don't know where it is.
            2. It's out of your way.
            3. You've passed it, but it didn't catch your interest.
            4. It's inaccessible to you.
            5. Other

7. Have you visited Demeter's Garden?
    a. Yes

        i. How was the experience? Do you have suggestions for how to support your connection with the space? (i.e. accessibility, style of information sharing, plant species present)
    b. No
        i. Why not?
            1. You don't know where it is.
            2. It's out of your way.
            3. You've passed it, but it didn't catch your interest.
            4. It's inaccessible to you.
            5. Other

8. Are there any plants special to you that you would like to have access to in Demeter's Garden? (i.e. relating to your activities, values, gender identity, spirituality)

9. Are you interested in learning traditional relationships with the local ecosystem?
    a. Yes
    b. No

10. Are you interested in exploring non-local cultures through having non-local plants (that are significant to Evergreen community members) in Demeter's Garden?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. Are you interested in learning how a forest garden ecosystem functions?
    a. Yes
    b. No

12. Are there particular ways of learning that interest you? (i.e. signage, audio stories, workshops)

13. Are there physical structures you would like in or around Demeter's Garden?

14. How would you like to use a forest garden space? (i.e. gardening, resting, learning, social organizing)

15. Is there a space on campus where you feel community? (indoor or outdoor, built or social)
    a. Yes
        i. Please explain where and why.
    b. No

16. Is there anything else you would like to share?

17. All answers will by default be considered in aggregate. However, you may have provided notable wording that I would like to quote word-for-word in my thesis. May I quote you?
    a. No
    b. Yes, anonymously
    c. Yes, with identifiers

18. The second part of this project involves transforming the results of this survey into actionable items through workgroups, which will occur during Winter Evaluations Week. If you are interested in volunteering for one or more workgroups, please enter your email here so I can send you updates.

19. If you wish to participate in one or more workgroups, please provide your likely availability below for Winter Eval Week, March 20 - 25. This will help me set up times that work well for everyone. I will allot 1.5 - 2 hours per workshop.

    Monday 10AM - 12PM
    Monday 1PM - 3PM
    Monday 3PM - 5PM
    Monday 5PM - 7PM

    [I offered options for each of these times Monday through Saturday, except for Saturday 5PM - 7PM.]

Appendix B: Respondents' Requested Plants

Highlighted rows indicate general requests without a specific species mentioned.

PLANTS REQUESTED	# REQUESTS
Native plants	6
Lavender	3
Logs inoculated with local edible/medicinal mushrooms	3
Medicinal plants	3
Sage (i.e. white, wild)	3
Easily tended plants	2
Edible plants	2
Stinging nettle	2
Sunflowers (i.e. woolly)	2
Apple trees	1
Berries	1
Brassica	1
Camus	1
Cat grass	1
Catnip	1
Cilantro	1
Climbable trees	1
Comfrey	1
Cut flowers	1
Dahlias	1
Flowers with sapphic symbolism	1
Forget-me-not	1
Fruit	1
Grapes	1
Hardy kiwi	1
Low-fragrance plants	1
Mugwort	1
Multi-use plants	1
Pacific bleeding heart	1
Pearly everlasting	1
Plants already present	1
Plants for artistic use, photography development	1

Plants w/ potential for environmentally friendly technological innovations	1
Pollinator plants	1
Raspberries	1
Rose	1
Spiritually/culturally significant plants to Evergreen students	1
Statice	1
Vegetables	1
Violet	1
Wild ginger	1
Yarrow	1

Appendix C: Garden Mission Examples

Mission of Evergreen:
As an innovative public liberal arts college, Evergreen emphasizes collaborative, interdisciplinary learning across significant differences. Our academic community engages students in defining and thinking critically about their learning. Evergreen supports and benefits from local and global commitment to social justice, diversity, environmental stewardship and service in the public interest. (Official college policy, last revised April 2011.)
Core Themes:
Integrated, interdisciplinary learning
Individuals engaged in community
Environmental stewardship and social justice
Diversity and equity

Mission of Evergreen's Ethnobotanical Gifts Garden:
Five purposes of The Gifts Garden

1. To honor, preserve and better understand native plants of the Pacific Northwest
2. To acknowledge the close traditional relationships between Native people and native plants
3. To provide a living resource for learning
4. To provide opportunities for interdisciplinary, intercommunity and intercultural exchange and collaboration
5. To restore and enhance the landscape at the Longhouse [House of Welcome]

Mission of Beacon Food Forest in Seattle, WA:
Community grows here. We cultivate a community dedicated to building equitable food systems for all people, and stewarding our environment for the benefit of all species.

We believe in Caring for the Earth. We steward our local ecosystem by building healthy soil and increasing the diversity of plants and habitat.

We believe in Caring for the People. We bring people together to grow and share food, learn from each other, and know their neighbors.

We work to create a Fair Share for all. We are on land stolen from the Duwamish, Suquamish, Muckleshoot, and other peoples, stewards and co-creators of abundance with the land since time immemorial. We work to dismantle an unjust food system rooted in white supremacy and

conquest by nurturing its replacement, already alive and ready to grow. Through open harvest and collaboration within and among communities, we work to create a fair share for all.