SCU Lismore Community Garden Guide

Introduction to this Guide

We hope this document will provide support for future members on their community garden journey, to maintain its longevity and productivity for food and friendships. The community garden is both a social resource to connect with the others in the student and alumni community and a resource that provides fresh fruits and vegetables. Joining and contributing to the community garden creates a healthier food secure future. For example, in 2022, major supermarkets closed in Lismore due to major flooding and supply interruption, but the Lismore garden continued to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to its members.

Key Values of the Community Garden

There are some core values that underpin the garden and its future. They are:

- We are a garden that shares food with others.
- Big things grow from small opportunities - we welcome all Southern Cross University students and alumni as participating members.
- We work together to flourish as a community which helps the fruits and vegetables flourish.

Intention of this Community Garden Guide

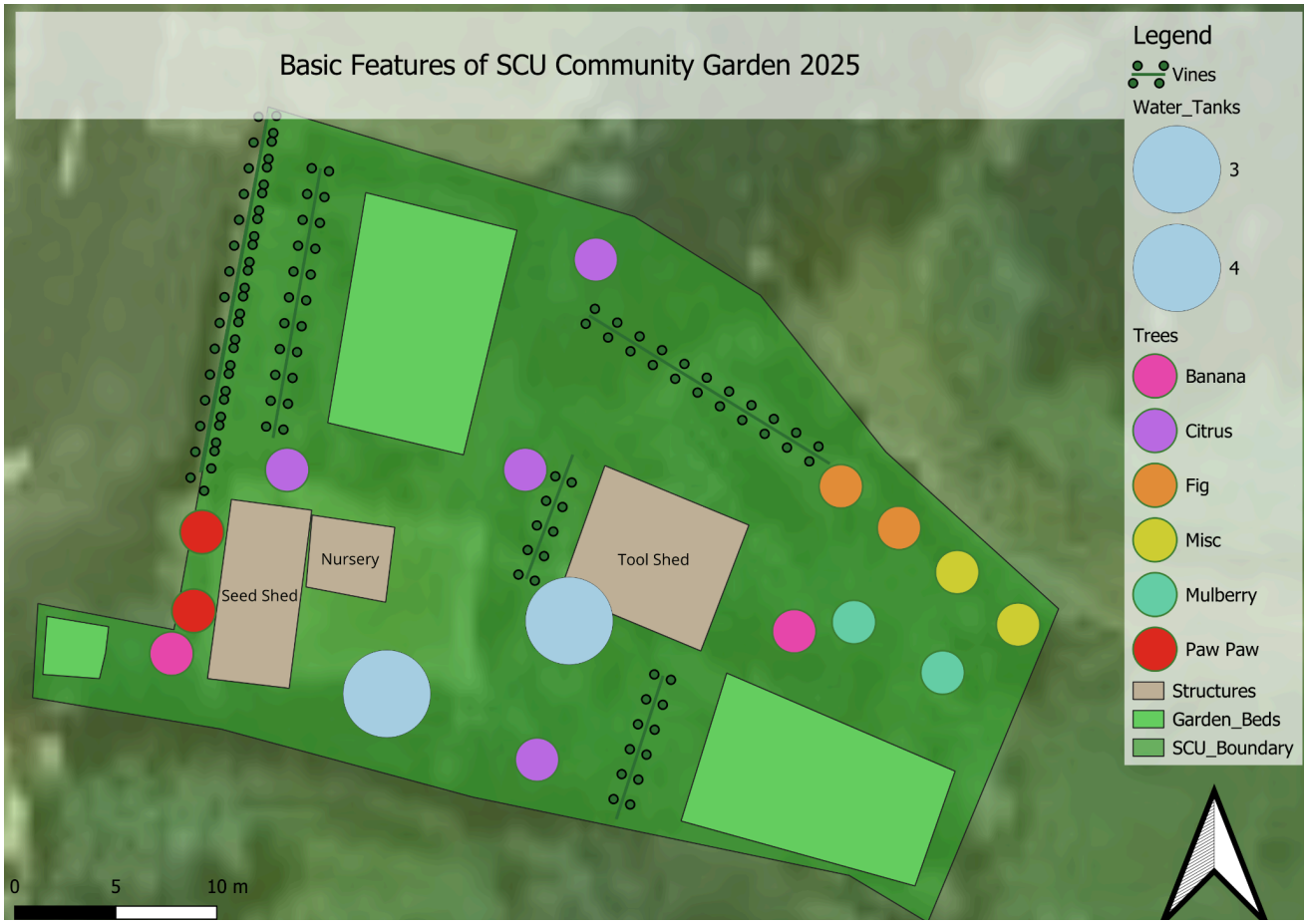
We hope that with the support of this guide you can:

- Produce a bounty of healthy and fresh fruits and vegetables you can eat and share with others for free.
- Feel safe, take time away from a screen and experience horticulture therapy that improves your physical and mental health.
- Provide a place for your learning and experimentation to innovate regenerative food growing research ideas into practice.
- Learn about shared responsibility and connect with others in the garden to make new friends.

Infrastructure and resources of the Community Garden

An overview of the current resources of the garden is provided below:

- Two large vegetable beds and one small garden bed. Each built up with Lismore Shire Council Compost (made from green bin waste):
    - One large vegetable bed in the south-east corner.
    - One large vegetable bed near the gate in the north west corner.
    - One small vegetable bed behind the seed shed (used mostly for seed saving).
- Two water tanks onsite that are filled by rain water.
    - One next to the tool shed.
    - One nearby the seed shed.



- A water pump next to the tool shed. The pump is connected to the rainwater tanks. In dry seasons it can also be used to extract from the dam. There is an increased risk of microbial contamination from the dam.
- A seed shed. The seed shed contains the stored seeds, mains electricity and the BBQ. There is also an undercover area with a table used to sit as a group and share fruits and vegetables.

- A tool shed with a mower, brush cutter, and other hand held tools for volunteers to use. There is also a street light and an SCU surveillance camera. The street light comes on after dark.

An annual budget of $1000 is allocated for the costs of running the community garden by the student association, Lexsa. This money is spent by a volunteer (typically garden facilitator), who is then reimbursed by the student association after providing a receipt of the garden expenses.

Example expenses include:

- Mulch and compost
- Tools
- Seeds
- Catering for events or drinks to share on open days
- Safety supplies
- Building materials.

Welcoming Volunteers, Sharing Produce and Enjoying the Garden

A sharing culture is a very important part of the garden. We believe members gain a lot of benefit from a casual atmosphere that balances productivity with socialisation and leisurely enjoyment of the garden. Furthermore, we promote a sharing culture. One that encourages students to join as volunteers and alumni to continue participating in the garden after they finish their study.

Food is prioritised for regular contributors, followed by casual members, then external staff and students, finally the general public. You can use this food in ways to bring people together through garden parties and BBQ's. This way members meet each other, relax in a garden space and can share their individual histories and food recipes. For example, in the past members have organised days to use the crops of the garden and make marmalade, pickles, sauerkraut and kimchi. Events have also included barbecues utilising garden produce with live music and drinks, courtesy of the student association. Providing a meal has been a reliable way to attract new visitors to the garden.

Happy gardening and community building 🙂

Preparing to Plant in the Community Garden

Creating a Community Garden Growing Plan at Lismore Southern Cross University Garden

Your planting plan is a type of planting strategy. It explains what to plant for the next season and the reason why. For example, you might focus on increasing the number of fruit trees around the garden, or only on the vegetable beds. We recommend you do some research and discuss with

others on how to improve productivity. There are always new ideas and techniques. The plan may involve increased plantings of bananas, vines or mulches to improve water retention, shading and create higher humidity around the vegetable beds for future plantings.

One of the key aspects of resilient gardens is paying attention to what works and what doesn't work. This is why we recommend that you include an experimental design to improve our understanding of complex risk and resilience to climate change. The plants and your data will tell you if they are unhappy, it's your job to figure out why, listen, discuss and keep experimenting.

As part of a growing plan here are a few of the key considerations::

- Keep the soil covered to minimise water loss, and provide a healthy habitat for a diverse soil microbiome.
- Take note of the time of year, weather conditions and the available labour to complete the growing plan.
- Be careful with temperature and heat. The north west garden receives more sunlight and heat so it dries out faster in summer.
- Weeds, especially grassy weeds, grow fast. Factor in weeding maintenance to your growing plan.
- Plan your sowing of seeds for the season ahead. Seeds can take months to germinate and mature and this can give you a head start, but foresight and knowledge of crop needs is important (e.g. Zuchinis enjoy heat, but are affected by fungal disease as humidity increases, or Coriander will bolt once the heat returns.)
- Plants we start from seedlings are grown in a shade cloth area (this is protected from water fowl and other critters). Some crops are more suitable to be sown directly into garden beds, but these must be correctly labelled and thoroughly weeded to prevent confusion or loss of crop.
- Experiment to improve understanding of complex risk and resilience, through monitoring soil health, biodiversity, crop rotation, soil carbon, plant growth comparison, water use, microclimate monitoring etc.
- The cycle of nutrients and composting. Importing nutrients is expensive so food that isn’t used should re-enter the cycle. Ensure practices which reduce potential for disease and toxicity (nematodes, moulds, bacteria, microplastics, heavy metals etc) are included.
- Composting of weeds, pruning waste (not woody), grass clippings and imported mulch or manure can provide a valuable input of organic matter to maintain soil health in the garden.
- Local arborists deliver large quantities (10 cubic metres) of wood chip mulch for good prices, which has been a valuable investment over the years.

Seasons and Vegetable Planting Recommendations

Note: Be ready for sowing up to months ahead of planting time, as seeds germinate and seedlings are nursed to be ready for planting when conditions are right. This ensures the best use of the growing season. We consider it an adaptive strategy to think of the potential rhythms of seasonal conditions and plan crop planting ahead of time to create functional ecosystems that support food production that is bountiful, diverse, delicious and nutritious.

Season	**Food Crops**	**Weather Conditions**	**Functional Ecosystem Planting Strategy**	**Monitoring Potential**
Summer	beetroot, capsicum, cassava, chilli, cucumber, eggplant, kang kong, lettuce, okra, pumpkin, radish, rosella, silverbeet, snake beans and other beans, sweet potato, tomato, and zucchini	Hot and dry. This can dehydrate plants like lettuce. The northern bed receives more sunlight than the eastern bed.	Maintaining clean equipment and shoes to avoid disease. Rotating species to reduce depletion of soil nutrients and disease. Selecting cultivators that are resistant to disease. There are two main planting beds. The northern and the eastern. The northern bed receives more sun. The eastern bed receives less sun. In one planting cycle species that prefer full sun and tolerate drier conditions like tomatoes (*Solanum locypersicum*) and eggplant (*Solanum melongena*) can be planted in the northern bed. While lettuce that dehydrates and is more susceptible to heat stress is planted in the eastern bed. Then in another year	Yearly random sample testing of nitrogen and carbon in the northern and eastern beds. Monitoring of soil temperature and moisture at various root relevant levels. Drawing up planting in QGIS. Writing down total yield during harvest. Recording down incidents of disease and trying to identify the cause.

			climbing beans can be planted in the northern bed to create a more shady environment and fix nitrogen. The shadier environment can favour planting of lettuce in the northern bed.	
Autumn	beans (early autumn), beetroot, broccoli, broad beans, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, celery, kale, kohl rabi, lettuce, onion, pea, radish, silverbeet, and snow peas/peas	Weather cooling and reliable rain for the Northern Rivers.	Conditions are more favourable for planting fruits and vegetables that like cooler temperatures. The growing season can be extended with objects around the beds that absorb and radiate out heat (like rocks or bricks). Plants that like the cooler winter temperatures can be planted in shadier spots in the south area of the eastern bed.	Temperature measurement of garden and of various objects for their ability to absorb and then re-radiate heat.
Winter	beetroot, broad beans, cabbage, carrot, celery, kohl rabi, lettuce, onion, parsnip, pea, radish, silverbeet, and zucchini	Colder temperatures. Continue planting cold loving plants in the more protected areas of the garden, and start spring early by making use of those sunny beds.	Focus on plants that can replenish soils for any intense spring or summer planting routines. Plants that like colder temperatures are favoured.	Monitor for microclimates with higher temperatures within the garden at various times in the day under different weather conditions.
Spring	Rocket, silverbeet, spring onions, chinese	The driest season in Northern Rivers. Temperatures begin to rise.	Planting flowers from the genus nasturtium (*Tropaeolum*), *Alyssum*, and *Viola*.	Planting of pollinators, attracting flowers and monitoring pollinator species in

	cabbage, mizuna, lettuce, zucchini, pumpkin, leeks, cucumber, tomato, eggplants, watermelon, parsley, basil, dill, coriander.		Growing green manure covers crops to till into the soil in summer so that organic matter and nutrient availability is increased. Since beds dry out faster in direct sunlight more drought tolerant and deeper rooted plants are preferred. With more preferable temperatures weeds will increase. This can lead to nutrient robbing and crowding of beds. Planting herbs early prevents the herbs bolting but keeps them competing with weeds. This lower temperature also prevents the lettuces bolting to seed.	the garden. Also of any pests that could be attracted. Monitoring of the soil moisture content due to dry weather. Monitoring weeds in the garden identifying types and where they are located in planting beds.

Weed Management

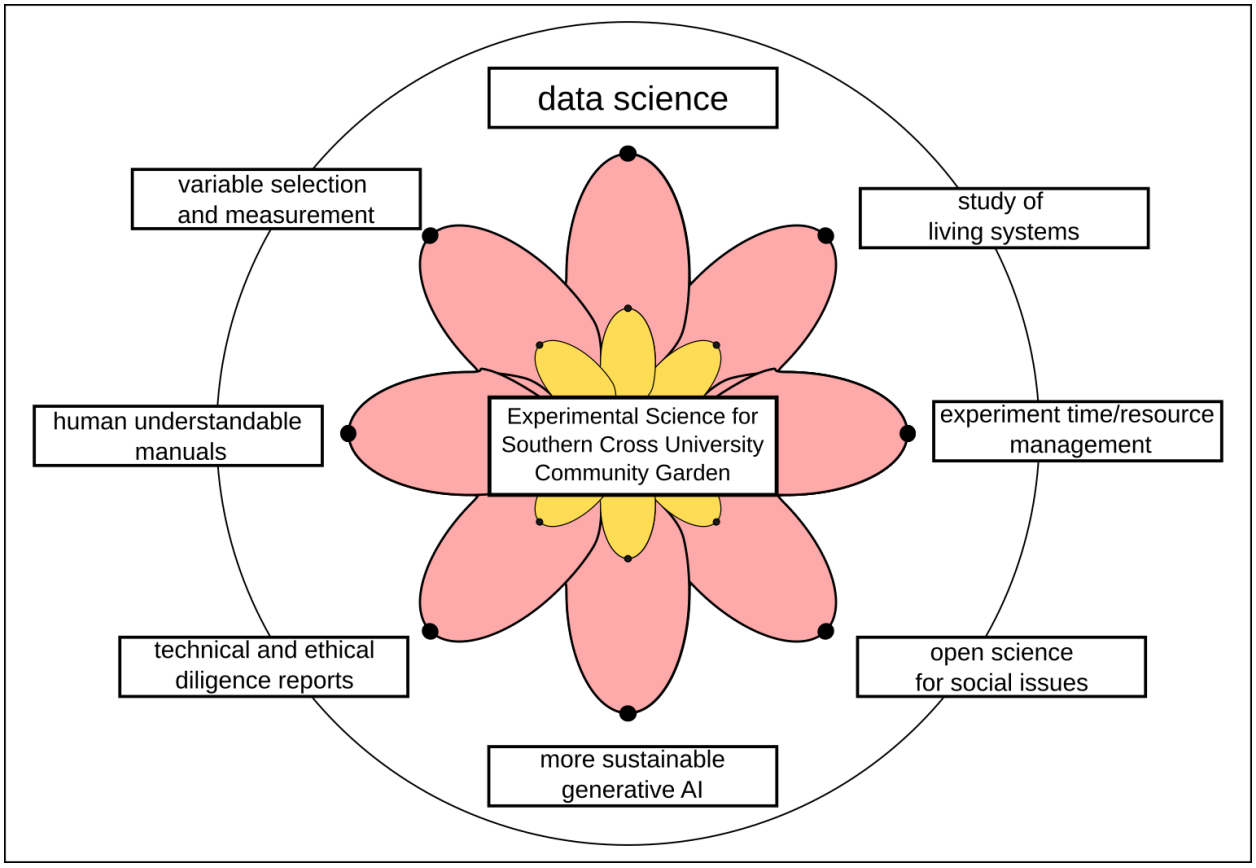
There are different weed issues over the seasons and they change with the variations in climate. Including weed management in your growing plan helps prepare ahead and strategise options that reduce the growth of common weeds such as nut grass, singapore daisy, morning glory, grassy weeds, and caster oil plant.

Season	Weeds	Suggested Management Practice
Warm wet season (Spring, Summer, Autumn).	All major weeds are most active at this time. ● Nut grass (*Cyperus rotundus*) ● Singapore daisy ● Morning glory ● Various Grass species ● Caster oil plant (*Ricinis communis*)	Minimise the spread of Morning Glory (from the family *Convolvulaceae*) and Singapore Daisy (*Sphagneticola trilobata*) by physical removal (manual or chipping hoe). Hand weeding in garden beds of Nut grass and other grassy weeds. Use a fork to remove Rhizomes, and avoid snapping off leaves which can trigger rhizome multiplication.. Caster oil and other tall woody weeds should be pulled out when small in all areas of the garden before they become prohibitively large. Folding back Lantana and Singapore Daisy behind the southern boundary fence. This avoids their encroachment and invasion into the garden.
Cool dry season (Autumn, Winter, Spring).	● Wandering Trad (*Tradescantia* ssp.) and similar. ● Various small herbaceous weeds.	Good time of year to get on top of slower growing weeds. Small weeds in garden beds can be left until of a size to be seriously competitive with cultivated plants. This reduces soil disturbance and contributes to organic matter.

		Specifically problematic weeds can be targeted for eradication (i.e. Nut Grass).

Include Experimental Science in Your Community Garden Growing Plan

We are commencing on a new journey at the community garden. A support network for conducting experimental science to ensure better adaptation to the threats of climate change. We intend this support network to help with the following aspects of experimental science:



Experimental science typically includes:

- A clearly defined research question and experimental design.
- Recording defined variables over time and observing their outcomes.
- A research question with a null-hypothesis.

- Variables we need to control in our experiment and test our null-hypothesis (like temperature, water consumption, growth rates, soil carbon etc.).
- Monitoring networks for these variables.
- Statistical tests to evaluate the data and accept or reject our null-hypothesis.

The aim is to generate knowledge which we can share with other community gardens around the world. This way we can support community garden growing plans that adapt to the challenges of climate change. You can join the experimental science support team or ask a question. Write your interest in the community garden What's App and a responsible member will get back to you.

Co-ordinating the Garden Operations

At Southern Cross University garden we aim to have one main facilitator who is reliable, committed, enthusiastic and motivating other volunteers. This responsible student or alumni communicates with Lexsa and manages the garden on a weekly basis.

Managing the Garden on a Weekly Basis

At the beginning of each week this person will generally open the garden. They can start with a walk around the garden, ideally before everyone arrives and the chatting begins. One recommendation is to make a short priority list of tasks which can include:

- Pressing maintenance issues
- Priority tasks suitable for volunteers according to interests and skills. Keep inexperienced volunteers "buddied up" so no one gets lonely and bored.
- Weeds or disease maintenance.
- The weekly harvestable produce (un-harvested produce is often wasted or attracts pests such as rats, insects and birds).
- Organising the regular water roster for small plants and seedlings.
- Mowing and brushcutting especially in warmer weather to reduce snake risk. Brushcutting should ideally be done outside normal garden hours to avoid risk of flying gravel and eye damage. Grass clippings can be left on the ground, piled under fruit trees, or collected and composted.

Consistent watering is key to the survival of crops and seedlings (which require particular care and can dry out quickly). A roster should be organised, to ensure responsibility is taken for watering plants every 2-3 days minimum in hot, dry periods. This role is well suited to those regularly working, studying, or living on-campus.

A group chat with all garden volunteers is used to coordinate opening times, watering rosters, arrange gatherings, and share information and photos.

Essential steps in closing the garden after a working session:

- Ensure that the pump is turned off at the power point and water valve at the end of the day.
- Harvested produce should be taken or disposed of to reduce rat activity.
- Gates and sheds should be locked up.
- Lights turned off.

Volunteers and Navigating Conflicts

When coordinating volunteers remember they are a precious resource who come from different backgrounds with lots of ideas. This means they can provide a lot of insight. If the dynamic is right then the team work will help you make the garden more efficient, introduce new foods, perspectives and techniques. However, it is important to give clear instructions so that priority tasks are completed. You should be clear about what the garden needs: lawn, watering, weeding, planting, seedling prep, watering, harvesting.

We suggest taking the time to find space for yourself. Remind yourself of who you are at your best. Instead of directing frustration into a narrative that shuns another person or life and calls it hard names, try reconnecting with the key values of the community garden. Often when we assure ourselves there are opportunities in life we can find new approaches to resolve conflicts among minds. After taking space aim to come back with an intention to listen to the other's perspective and attempt to resolve the conflict. This is important since resolving conflict can lead to growth and improvements for the garden and its members, current and future. Moreover, when we ground ourselves in a state of resolve that seeks to understand and negotiate conflicts we can avoid becoming caught up in cycling in negative emotions and prevent ourselves reaching a point where we feel overwhelmed. Also a friendly reminder :), SCU garden is affiliated with LEXSA who can support you through more complicated conflict resolutions.

Common Issues and Suggested Resolutions

Water pumps:

Check sufficient water is in tanks, switch (one at a time) to a new tank once nearly empty. If the pump runs dry, there is a red reset button under the green casing. Always ensure the power and water valve is turned off before leaving the garden.

First aid:

LEXSA often runs reduced cost first aid training, considering appointing a first aid officer for the garden and sending them on this course. The first aid kit should be checked every year to ensure it is up to date and fully stocked.

When new members join the garden, induct them appropriately by showing them where the first aid kit is located (in the seed shed).

Avoid the need for first aid by wearing appropriate clothing, and considering the risks before conducting and tasks.

Most common injuries from the garden include dehydration, small cuts and abrasions, and insect bites. Stay hydrated, wear PPE, and be observant of your surroundings.

Snakes:

Maintain grass level and weeds at a height that doesn't encourage snakes. Avoid piles of rubbish or infrastructure that provide habitat for snakes. If sighted, alert people in the vicinity and avoid location. There are snake catchers in Lismore that can be called to remove the snake if it is continually sighted in the garden. DO NOT attempt to relocate snakes as this is when most snake bites occur. Encourage members to wear appropriate footwear and clothing to provide protection, and keep first aid kit up to date (this needs to be checked yearly to ensure products are in date and it is fully stocked. In the case of a snake bite; remain calm, immobilise the victim. Using a snake bandage, wrap first around the bite and then all the way along the limb. Take note of the bite location using a permanent marker, and the time of bite and bandage application. Immediately call 000.

Future Planning for the Next Year of SCU Community Garden

Exploring the benefits of creating an administrative structure for the community garden that follows the guidelines of starting up a club within a university (published from Western Sydney University) with yearly term appointments of:

- President.
- Treasurer.
- Secretary.
- Garden facilitator.

Each of these appointments would have defined roles in writing that share the responsibilities of administration care for keeping the community garden supported for keeping to the key values of the community garden given at the start of this guide.

The garden facilitator plays a vital role as a principal point of contact for new volunteer and long-term members. This means their role involves remaining openly curious and listening to the new ideas and goals that new volunteer and longer-term members might have. Long-term membership is important since consistent commitment to the garden and its plantings creates a group that can explore action plans and help newcomers become involved to also attend

regularly and contribute their own visions. This keeps the garden evolving as a safe and supportive space where ideas are put into practice and become reality.

The roles and responsibilities of each of these people should be considered in a holistic way:

1. What are the long term goals of the current custodians?
    a. How will these be measured?
    b. And how will you (from the perspective of someone holding the role) keep on track?
2. What are your short term goals?
    a. How will these be measured?
    b. And how will you keep on track?

For example a garden facilitator role might involve drafting up the seasons' planting strategy with tree planting or removal and evaluating how this may affect the site in the near and distant future. The treasurer might assist in the research to determine costs for finance of new shading beds to prevent roots beds drying in the summer, major plant purchases or proposed new structures and required fundraising amounts or government grants if needed. The secretary roles then might be to communicate with LEXSA, SCU and local council to ensure appropriate permissions are given for major changes and general admin or identifying and applying for new government grants or funding from the university.

Each year the garden receives $1000 from Lexsa. The garden facilitator uses this to spend on seeds, mulch, compost, tools, soil, events (such as food for garden parties), fuel for mower, and some waste disposal. Sometimes students will want to undertake a project, such as building a retaining wall or tree planting. Money should also be allocated each year for experimental project work and then if more funds are required a long-term process of fundraising or searching for government grants is considered.

Another future aim is creation of a dedicated website for the community garden to showcase its work within the Southern Cross University community and other university communities. For example Western Sydney University.

Building connections with other university-based community clubs, both regional and metropolitan offers varied opportunities for growth. These partnerships can provide valuable experience in experimental design and introduce new techniques for planting resilient trees, maintaining garden beds, preserving organic food standards, improving soil carbon, and reducing pest damage, designing and establishing garden monitoring networks etc.

Collaborations may also lead to excursions to other market gardens, inspiring fresh ideas for our own space. For instance, there could be interest in experimenting with syntropic forestry, a method that emphasizes the processes of ecosystems which regenerate land through "soil formation, regulation of microclimate and the favoring of water cycles." (Andrade, 2019). A pilot project in our garden could explore its benefits, such as increased food production, reduced time spent weeding, and enhanced biodiversity.

Both online and in-person engagements with other university clubs and gardens can help us learn technical skills that assess the feasibility and design experiments of syntropic and regenerative methods in pilot projects. Such technical skills which improve the chance of success can help us demonstrate our claims of a promise. For lower long-term material inputs, improved ecological sustainability and better food security through regenerative and syntropic techniques. Success in growing a diverse, nutritious and local food ecosystem would help the community garden continue to share food with others and flourish as a community which helps the fruits and vegetables flourish.

Resources

People:

LEXSA (student association) - office located in the plaza at SCU Lismore

Ely Summerfield (previous garden manager) - contactable via whatsapp garden group

Philip (previous garden manager, has managed the SCU garden for many years and has indepth knowledge of successful garden management) - contactable via whatsapp garden group

Simon Hartley (current lecturer at SCU, set up aquaponics in community garden and S block garden) - contactable via whatsapp garden group. Also a current science lecturer at SCU with office in S block.

Aquaponics videos created by Simon Hartley:

https://youtu.be/5Nc-wtKYpLw?si=rpyCMKZiei06Uldr

https://youtu.be/FREnhhoTdik?si=v7GkItIIUZMDDC-f

https://youtu.be/LNderKn0Zzw?si=0CEvWCdDNoxiQvL_

Planting Guide for Lismore Community Garden:

http://www.rrcf.org.au/planting-calendar/autumn-planting-calendar/

https://www.diggers.com.au/pages/seeds-to-sow-subtropical-region

Community Gardens Australia Starting a Community Garden:

https://communitygarden.org.au/category/ideas/start-a-garden/

Seeds and Plants:

Lismore Garden Centre in South Lismore has healthy stock, and plants that are specific to this region. Aldi (grocery store) has a sale on seeds some time during the year, these have proven to be reliable and cheap. At the Saturday farmers market at the showground there is usually a man who sells seedlings in bulk, and a few tree nurseries for native plants (e.g MystTree).

Soil Data:

https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/eSpade2Webapp/

Weather and Climate:

http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/averages/tables/cw_058214.shtml

Climate Risk Map:

https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/resources/climate-risk-map/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=DIG-TOF-NSP-AG-CPC-Locations-ClimateChange&utm_content=RiskMap&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwqcO_BhDaARIsACz62vNb0aYikfQNssCH_SLILAgiu2PBj7JDa_TcKzIMTUpum_EHoqZx-HQaAkCREALw_wcB

Bush Fire Prone Map:

https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare/building-on-bush-fire-prone-land/bush-fire-prone-land/check-bfpl

References

Andrande, D. (2019, August, 3). What is Syntropic Farming?. Retrieved on the 9th of November, 2025 from https://agendagotsch.com/en/what-is-syntropic-farming/

Revision Register

Date	Authors and Reviewers	Version	Update
22th November 2025	Authors: Ely Summerfield, Abrisham (David) Vincent and Shannon Smith. Reviewer: Dan Fitzpatrick	1	Document created and reviewed.