

# **Policy Recommendations for the Thomas Jefferson Demonstration Garden at the University of Virginia**

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## I. History

### A. Thomas Jefferson & The History of the Botanical Garden on Grounds

In his original vision for the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson detailed plans for a Botanical Garden on Grounds. These plans can be found in an original letter from April 27<sup>th</sup> 1826 by Mr. Jefferson to John Patton Emmet, Professor of Natural History at the University. Since Jefferson was nearing the end of his life, he entrusted Professor Emmet with the task of establishing a Botanical Garden on Grounds. In these last few months of his life Mr. Jefferson began making preparations for a Botany school at the University (Fox- Bruguere).

His first goal was to find a suitable plot of land, preferably 6 acres with optimal soil in a central location of the University. The location he described is the area behind Alderman Library and Clemons Library and has a gradual slope down on Nameless Field to what is University Avenue today. Because the ground is a gradual hill, Mr. Jefferson envisioned leveled terraces curving down the hill and leveled beds that would be suitable for planting. Mr. Jefferson also visualized a serpentine brick wall similar to what is seen for the Pavilion gardens. His final task was to organize what types of plants and trees that should be grown in the Botanical Garden. In this section he focused on finding plants that are from 'gardeners of our own country' and stressed 'containing nothing indigenous to our country'. (Fox-Bruguere 2009).

Mr. Jefferson's interest in Botany had been cultivated throughout his lifetime. In a letter to Dr. Thomas Cooper from 1814 he stated:

Botany I rank with the most valuable sciences, whether we consider it's subjects as furnishing the principal subsistence of life to man & beast, delicious varieties for our tables, refreshments from our orchards, the adornments of our flower-borders, shade and perfume of our groves, materials for our buildings, or medicaments for our bodies... no country gentleman should be without what amuses every step he takes into his fields.

Throughout his lifetime he collected, studied, and exchanged plants with friends from throughout the world and attempted to grow them in America and specifically the climate in Central Virginia. He saw advancing agricultural in America as a patriotic and necessary goal in order to sustain independence from England and help America prosper. Growing useful plants would help the United States' agriculture as well as economic viability, both of which are crucial to strengthen the new nation. Mr. Jefferson often tied plants to patriotism, stating "The greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add an useful plant to its culture" (Fox- Bruguere).

The Botanical Garden was seen as crucial to the advancement of knowledge and a necessary addition to the Academical Village. While the Pavilion gardens were meant for the personal use of the professors living in the pavilions who wanted to grow specific species, a Botanical garden would be more like an outside classroom. The Botanical Garden would be mainly educational, and would be available for students to observe various plant species. In this space they could compare differences in characteristics among plants and learn their structures and common uses during that time period. While learning in a classroom is necessary in the educational system, Mr. Jefferson believed in giving students a space to enhance their academic learning with first-hand observations outside (Fox- Bruguere).

The end of Mr. Jefferson's dream of a Botanical Garden is apparent in a letter by Professor Emmet to Mr. Jefferson on May 2<sup>nd</sup> in which Emmet shows some hesitation about his skills in teaching Botany effectively. Additional complications with the laborers needed for leveling the ground and concerns for the viability of the seeds were also voiced by Professor Emmet in this letter. However, Mr. Jefferson continued to urgently stress the importance of beginning this project immediately. In a final list of instructions for the future of the University by Mr. Jefferson, he listed the establishment of the Botanical Garden as number eleven.

Following Mr. Jefferson's death on July 4<sup>th</sup>, the Botanical Garden is only mentioned once in a letter that seems to hint that work began on the garden. In October 1826 Professor Emmet requested to the Board of Visitors that he be relieved of his commitment to Mr. Jefferson and officially ended any work on bringing Mr. Jefferson's dream of a Botanical Garden a reality (Fox- Bruguere).

## B. The History and Values of Hereford Residential College

Hereford Residential College's history begins with the goal to 'enrich the educational experience through faculty-student interactions beyond the classroom' and to 'promote a sense of community' for the residents. Its goals and image were designed to mirror as well as reinterpret Mr. Jefferson's Academical Village through its values, architectural design, and community set-up (Hereford Residential College 2012).

Hereford Residential College's commitment to the idea of the Academical Village and learning is apparent through its various opportunities and events. The design of Hereford was meant to mirror the Academical Village, with students in dormitories attached to small apartments for faculty fellows. Additionally, the Principal lives in a

home on top of the hill. Faculty fellows come to banquets to eat and talk with residents, teach short courses for more intimate learning, and meet in the Hereford Mini-Farm to work alongside students and help grow crops. Workdays every weekend give students an opportunity to expand their food knowledge while meeting faculty outside of the classroom. Many students are not familiar with basic gardening skills, and hands-on learning similar to what Mr. Jefferson envisioned for his Botanical Garden quickly appears at these workdays. Hands-on learning and connecting continues in the kitchens of Hereford. The crops grown are often used for small cooking get-togethers with students and faculty. The beauty of not only working to grow the vegetables but also prepare and eat them together helps strengthen the sense of community at Hereford. Residents who had previously not met are able to work together in the kitchen to create a beautiful dish. The ability of gardening and food to bring strangers together is a promising way to strengthen the UVA community in a way that Mr. Jefferson envisioned, and should be valued and preserved.

### C. Mr. Jefferson's Botanical Garden Dream Realized: The Beginnings of the Thomas Jefferson Demonstration Garden

The subset of the Thomas Jefferson Demonstration Garden (TJ Demo Garden) within the Hereford Mini-Farm garden began in 2011 with the work of Rachael Salisbury and Lily Fox-Bruguire. Their goal to create a historically accurate and community involved space has blossomed into a successful project in one of the four plots in Hereford. While the Mini-Farm plants anything from basic broccoli to spinach from Bangladesh, the TJ Demo Garden strives to keep to Mr. Jefferson's view of planting 'objects of use' and only grows heritage varieties of plants that were mentioned in Mr.

Jefferson's writings. Most of their seeds and plants are bought through the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants (TJCHP). The TJCHP strives to preserve and make available historic plants that were cultivated by Thomas Jefferson or other gardeners in nineteenth century America (Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants).

Chelsea DeWitt and Erica Thatcher, two graduate students in the landscape architecture department at the University of Virginia designed the TJ Demo Garden. The garden's layout is inspired by traditional 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century gardens and also took ideas from current Botanical Gardens. In their plans they took into account its two primary uses. First, it is an educational garden for students and community groups to come in and learn. The design makes it easy for visitors to wander through the space and observe what is being grown around them and enjoy its beauty. Secondly it is a space for gathering and interaction. Different sized 'rooms' were created for groups to congregate and talk within the garden about its heritage foods, and the main entrance has a larger opening for people to congregate and interact together before delving deeper into the intricacies of the garden. A line of cotton plants encircles the outside edge of the garden, giving it the feeling of a distinct and separate space from the outside world. This design mirrors yet re-interprets Mr. Jefferson's plan of having a serpentine wall around the Botanical garden. Finally, in keeping with Mr. Jefferson's values the garden must value 'beauty and form' and be an orderly yet visually appealing and natural space for people to enjoy. These values can also be seen in Mr. Jefferson's personal gardens at Monticello, as well as his plans for the Academical Village and the Rotunda (DeWitt 2011).

## II. Reasons to Support the TJ Demo Garden & Heritage Foods

## A. Importance of Past

Heritage Foods should value the past. Even though the Botanical Garden was not created following Mr. Jefferson's death, these past plans should be valued and cherished by the University community. A main aspect of Heritage Food is incorporating these past memories of the food and plants of a community back into the present community's knowledge and consciousness. For the University community our founder's dreams and visions for the University are often what dictate our future plans for its growth. The original vision Mr. Jefferson had for his University included a space for students to explore plant species, and this goal should be incorporated into the heritage knowledge as well as future goals of the University. Whether it is the addition of a new building or the renovations of the original Academical Village, the University's planners are careful to research and adhere to Mr. Jefferson's original plans. His past views are incredibly important to the University community, and his wish to have a Botanical Garden on Grounds should be honored.

## B. Creating Relationships with Food Production, Gardening, and Plants

A certain sense of value comes with heritage foods because of the strong relationship people have with the foods and plants. There is a sense of ownership and connectivity with heritage foods that cannot be found with ordinary, typical foods found in every grocery store across the nation. With heritage foods a person can build a relationship with the unique growth and production of that product, and this relationship is easily found in the people who garden or visit the TJ Demo

Garden. Those who experience this space are connected to it because they see the work and the history that brought it to where it is today. This is especially apparent in the people who tirelessly work to maintain the garden. They are incredibly connected to the earth like most gardeners, but there is additional pride and history to what they are doing, because it is what Thomas Jefferson valued and envisioned for his University. They are able to revive this part of the University's heritage that has been lost for years and reinterpreted his dream in a beautiful and powerful way. Those who work in the garden have also been able to give visitors a chance to create a relationship with plants that would have otherwise not happened. They are able to experience heritage foods and plants that are new to them and find a new appreciation for the distinct species of plants that grow in the TJ Demo Garden.

### C. Create Relationships with Community Members

The TJ Demo Garden creates a perfect space and opportunity to create relationships among people from the U. Va community. The value of programs that bring together individuals from many different backgrounds at the University of Virginia should not be underestimated. Easily seen in the design of his Academical Village, Mr. Jefferson saw the importance of bringing together faculty and students outside the classroom and building a community that was more than simply academic. The TJ Demo Garden can serve this purpose whether community members become engaged in its work through volunteering, visiting, or touring the garden. The Garden gives them an opportunity to meet new people and create relationships with others who value heritage food and stories of our past use of



plants. Creating these relationships with other community members will bring about a strong and engaged community and coming together in a beautiful, common meeting area is the key to making this happen.

#### D. Opportunities for Heritage Food Education

The central goal of a demonstration garden is to demonstrate how plants are grown and to educate those who peruse the space. In the TJ Demo Garden visitors are free to explore heritage foods and see first-hand how they are grown. Various plants like the Marshmallow, Jerusalem Artichoke, Onions, Cotton, and Hops are grown for visitors to experience. Many of these plants are new to the visitors so having a space for people to see how they grow and what their various structures look like is important for heritage plant education. Some of the plants also have interesting usages that are lost given our current society and needs. For example, the Marshmallow plant's roots used to be used to make marshmallow because of its gelatinous structure. Similarly, while cotton is still a common product in our society today few children have seen the delicate cotton flowers that change color as they grow or the bulbous cotton bolls that pop open with a tuft of cotton inside. These small joys that can be discovered in the garden are incredibly fulfilling and important for heritage food education and appreciation.

### III. Planning Ideas

In order for the TJ Demo Garden to thrive, it must be appreciated and supported financially by the University community. Currently the TJ Demo Garden is financed through grants, but a consistent fund should be created in order to

ensure its survival for years to come. There is a high cost associated with buying heritage varieties of plants, paying for gardening supplies and tools, and employing student interns to work throughout the year to upkeep the garden. A possible idea could be to create a funding pool similar to the Green Initiatives Funding Tomorrow (GIFT). This grant allocation program was created to support sustainable initiatives at the University. Anyone can donate to this fund, including alumni of the University. Making a similar fund system for the TJ Demo Garden is a promising way to pay for the garden. One possible challenge will be making the case for why money should go to this particular project. But the obvious value Mr. Jefferson put on a botanical garden on Grounds, the connection it has to the existing Academical Village and its intentions for learning and community make a strong case for its support. Additionally, if the University wants to continue to revive its past history it must incorporate the heritage foods and plants that would have sustained the original occupants of the University. The food the students ate and the plants they used for certain tasks or health issues are fascinating and unique, and can be preserved and highlighted in the TJ Demo Garden (G.I.F.T).

The TJ Demo Garden may also be used as a tourist attraction for the University similar to the botanical gardens seen at Michigan State University. At their Horticultural Demonstration Gardens visitors to the University can retreat to this quiet space and visit attractions like the 4-H Children's Garden, a Vegetable Demonstration Garden, or the Judith A. DeLapa Perennial Garden complete with a pond. Visitors to Michigan State University make a point to come visit these visually appealing gardens because of they are incredibly well known. With enough funding,

publicity and support from the University community the TJ Demo Garden can also become a tourist destination for those who are visiting and want to learn more about Thomas Jefferson and his vision for the University (The MSU Horticulture Gardens).

Promising ways to incorporate the TJ Demo Garden into the University's history and interest for visitors could be to highlight it on the University Homepage. Having pictures, stories and a link to the TJ Demo Blog on the homepage is an excellent way for visitors to see the Garden. The current TJ Demo Garden blog is excellently organized and updated regularly. But traffic to the site could be greatly increased through publicity of the site. Finding other popular local sites to link the blog to would also be beneficial for the TJ Demo Garden. Having the Garden highlighted on the Historic Garden Week website for the Garden Club of Virginia is one opportunity that could increase interest in the Garden as well as let interested people track the garden's progress through the blog. Looking into other local publications like 'The Hook' or NBC 29 is another way to get information about the Garden to community members.

Adding information about Mr. Jefferson's Botanical Garden vision to the University Guides tours of the Academical Village can also give visitors an opportunity to learn about the TJ Demo Garden. University Guides could add this piece of our heritage to their tours, and point interested visitors in the direction of the TJ Demo Garden for more information. One possible obstacle to adding the story of the Botanical Garden to the University Guide tour may be time, since there are endless stories to tell about the University's founding but a limited amount of time.

One possible idea may be to highlight this story on Historical Tours or during specific times when the Charlottesville community is focused on gardening and heritage foods, like during the Heritage Food Festival at Monticello. Visitors to our community who would be going on these tours during this time would likely be heritage-minded as well, and would likely be interested in visiting the TJ Demo Garden.

Partnering with other gardening and heritage food organizations around Charlottesville can create opportunities for the TJ Demo Garden to grow its community and thrive. Being visible and involved in events like the Garden Club of Virginia's Historic Garden Week as well as Monticello's Heritage Festival is important in order to create these initial bonds. Meeting other groups that are dedicated to historic gardening and plants will help the TJ Demo Garden become established in our community as a space for heritage food and community gatherings.

Other possible partnerships could be with the UVA Community Garden or other local community gardens. Having events like tours through gardens is a great idea for a way to bring visitors into many gardens in one day, and would also help with increasing attendance rate since many gardens would be publicizing through their various outlets. In previous years the Hereford Mini-Farm has played host to Biking Garden Tours in which people bike around Charlottesville and explore the various gardens. The TJ Demo Garden could host a similar event for the community. One possible option is to hold a touring event which takes the visitors through the food history of U.Va, starting with the original dining hall in Garrett Hall, moving to

the desired location for the TJ Demo Garden near Alderman, continuing through Grounds to the U.Va Community Garden and ending at the TJ Demo Garden. This event would be especially interesting if it is designed as a biking event, which would attract a specific group of people and help with publicity. Hosting events like a touring day would be a positive and engaging opportunity for the TJ Demo Garden to become a visible part of the Charlottesville community and increase visibility for gardening and heritage food.

Finally, the TJ Demo Garden should continue to serve the U.Va community and specifically the Hereford Residential College community. The proximity of the garden to over 500 undergraduate students makes it a perfect opportunity for them to learn more about heritage food plants. In order to get students interested in the garden Residential Advisors in the Hereford community could have programming events in which their residents come into the garden for a workday. The workday could be lead by one of the interns of the garden (which are normally Herefordians themselves) who would show their fellow hallmates what types of plants are grown in the garden and what their heritage uses were in Mr. Jefferson's time. This peer-to-peer education would be incredibly valuable, and would give the Hereford community a sense of pride in the TJ Demo Garden. With an abundance of heritage foods available, students can also learn how to cook heritage recipes through the TJ Demo Garden. Looking into interesting recipes that include heritage ingredients grown in the garden can become part of Hereford's programming and events. Additionally, faculty fellows could be invited to work in the garden with residents. Learning and interaction outside the classroom was crucial in Mr. Jefferson's design

of the Academical Village, and bringing faculty into the garden to work with students would facilitate this community building. Faculty fellows could be persuaded to come help in the garden once students are invested in the garden, and students could be encouraged to invite their favorite professors to come join them in learning about heritage plants in the garden.

#### IV. Conclusion

The Thomas Jefferson Demonstration Garden is a valuable and important part of the University's heritage and past history. Its tie to Mr. Jefferson's original plans for the University and the Academical Village make it a part of the University that should be cherished and supported. Additionally, the value it brings to heritage foods because of its celebration of heritage plant species and traditional uses of varieties from Mr. Jefferson's era should not be overlooked. The space is a great opportunity for education as well as community building among people from the University community and Charlottesville community.

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