



Reviving the SMCM Healing Garden

An Independent Sustainability Initiative by Joseph Piegols

ENST450 – Applied Sustainability Practicum

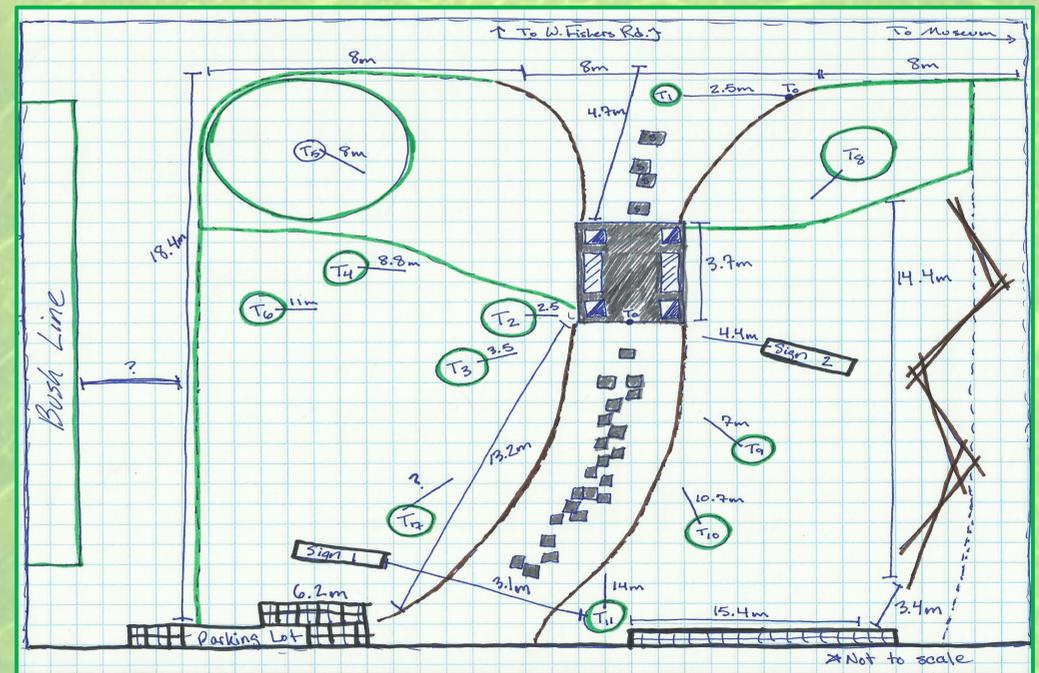


Background

Landscaping plays a crucial role in how humans interact with their environment. Humans are considered environmental engineers: those capable of manipulating their environment and altering natural systems. By designing private spaces in accordance with the concept of integrated landscaping, whereby the natural systems of a space are maintained, we can reduce human impact in these environments and harness the energy of these ecosystems.

Exposure to natural, environmental stimuli improves mental health and reduces stress and anxiety. Healing gardens are landscaped spaces that offer a healing or restorative effect to their users and are designed with this effect in mind. Recent work suggests that healing gardens can be as effective at universities as they can be at hospitals, which is where they have traditionally been utilized. The SMCM healing garden began as a senior project by Jessica Ditillo and was commissioned by the St. Mary's Arboretum Association in 2011.

The objective of this project is to restore the function of the current healing garden using sustainable methods and integrated landscaping techniques.



Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*)
- Native boundary species



Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)
- Native stimulant and carminative



Red Lobelia (*Lobelia cardinalis*)
- Native anti-asthmatic



Birthroot (*Trillium grandiflorum*)
- Native emmenagogue

Project Scope

Recent interest in the redesign of the SMCM healing garden has been expressed by college administration and Physical Plant management. I collaborated with Justin Mattingly, Assistant Supervisor of Grounds, to:

- assess the overall specifications of the current healing garden,
- compile a list of native species that would be best suited for planting, and
- organize a site clean-up operation that will clear all leaf litter and non-plant material from the site.

Some suggested plant species include:

- **False Blue Indigo:** antiseptic and stimulant qualities
- **Joe Pye Weed:** bee, bird, rabbit, and deer food source; relaxant
- **Three-lobed coneflower:** bee and butterfly friendly, seeds for songbirds
- **Beautyberry:** edible berries; anti-malarial and fever reducer
- **Black Huckleberry:** edible berries; carminative, anti-inflammatory

Conclusions and Recommendations

The redesign of this space should:

- incorporate native plants that are tolerant of the location,
- solicit to wildlife (pollinators, insects, and larger animals),
- create an encapsulated escape from the stresses of college life,
- be mindful of soil acidity and other natural properties, and
- require minimal human maintenance.

Students should take an active role in the planning, maintenance, and planting of the garden to instill a sense of connectedness and responsibility. The garden should also be fitted with signs to inform users of the resident plant species and their benefits. This may be done in union with the St. Mary's Arboretum Association. The addition of water pieces or student artwork may be added in the future to increase stimulation.

Upon completion of this garden, students, staff, and community members will be able to experience the benefits of a healing garden and develop an appreciation for the biotic community at SMCM.

The Process of Restoration

Clean

- Remove leaf litter
- Remove weeds/spray
- Coordinate with Physical Plant staff

Survey

- Species identification
- Compile list of resident species
- Blueprint the new design of the space

Plant

- Select plants
- Order from The Greenery
- Volunteer day to plant

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