

THE GREEN GARDENER WORKFORCE

CONCEPT OUTLINE

There is a need for a skilled gardening workforce to maintain drought tolerant landscapes and low impact development designs that are being promoted throughout the State of California and are required for new and redevelopment projects in an increasing number of Southern California municipalities.

There are a handful of training courses in Southern California designed for educating the property owner or landscape professional on the creation and/or maintenance of a garden adapted to our regional climate; however, there are no courses currently in existence which comprehensively address the range of emerging low impact development practices. More important, there are no such courses directed specifically to the gardener workforce.

According to research by the Economic Roundtable, there are about 31,000 residents of Los Angeles that work as gardeners. As of December 2008, an estimated 29% of these workers were under-employed. Under-employed workers include those who are: 1) involuntarily working fewer hours than they would like; 2) unemployed and looking for work; 3) discouraged workers who have stopped looking for a job.

The Green Gardener

Low impact development (LID) is an emerging and important international stormwater management trend that weaves the textures of nature into the urban hardscape to create an earth friendly fabric. It is a twenty-first century way to design our streets, sidewalks, and landscaping to soak up and clean runoff through more natural processes. These new methods help manage stormwater, reduce water demand, and recharge the groundwater.

Some common LID practices are shown in the table below.



Climate Adapted Landscapes and Common LID Best Management Practices



			
Vegetated Swales / Bioswales	Rain Gardens	Rain Cisterns	Green Roofs

			
Permeable Pavers	Porous Pavement	Curb Bump-Outs	Curb Cuts

The following are Drought Tolerant/Water Efficient Landscape Techniques

			
Drip Irrigation	Rotator Heads	Satellite Controllers	Mulching

The design, installation and management of these practices will require a skilled workforce. A term for that skilled labor is: the Green Gardener.

The Green Gardener Task Force

The City of Los Angeles Green Gardener task force, made up of a steering and a technical advisor committee, is leading the design and creation of a green job ladder for low wage and incumbent workers in the field of sustainable, low impact development and sustainable, earth friendly and water efficient landscaping techniques. The Green Gardener task force is coordinating the development of training and certification programs as well as pilot programs for the employment

of the qualified Green Gardeners at both the governmental and private sector level.

The job availability and demand will be driven by the anticipated implementation of green infrastructure (drought tolerant and low impact development landscape) designs and technologies. The County of Los Angeles passed two ordinances last fall to implement drought tolerant Low Impact Development landscapes in new and redevelopment projects; the City of Los Angeles is considering similar measures; and other municipalities in the region have implemented similar programs, including the cities of Pasadena, Santa Monica and Ventura.

Drought tolerant, or “climate adapted” landscaping is being endorsed throughout California to reduce irrigation demand and promote “natural” processes. These natural processes can include native species diversity and reestablishment of the hydrologic cycle.

Notably, it will be required by the Water Conservation Landscaping Act (AB 1881) that local agencies must adopt the updated model ordinance or equivalent not later than January 1, 2010 or it will be automatically adopted by statute. Key provisions of the model ordinance require the landscapes be designed and maintained to:

- minimize landscape irrigation overspray and runoff
- meet an established landscape water budget
- include appropriate use and groupings of plants
- include automatic irrigation systems and irrigation schedules based on climatic conditions
- include the implementation soil management plans
- encourage the capture and retention of storm water onsite
- encourage the use of recycled water
- address regional differences, including fire prevention needs
- include provisions for landscape maintenance practices that foster long-term landscape water conservation

In short, drought tolerant landscape ordinances will be implemented here and throughout the region, and there will be a growing demand for landscape maintenance providers who are skilled in the design and management of water efficient, sustainable landscapes.

The Green Gardener task force is developing a training and certification program for a landscape maintenance work force that will be able to offer their specialized services to this emerging market.

Task force members include representatives from the following organizations and City of Los Angeles departments:

Board of Public Works
Bureau of Street Services
Community Redevelopment Agency
Department of Water and Power
IDEPSCA (Instituto de Educacion Popular del Sur de California)
Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles
Los Angeles Conservation Corps
Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council
Los Angeles Trade Technical College
Neighborhood Councils (Venice, Mar Vista, SoRo)
SEIU (Service Employees International Union)
SCOPE (Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education)
UCLA Labor Center
UCLA School of Landscape Architecture

Additional consultation assistance has and will be from:

Arroyo Seco Neighborhood Council
The Green Gardens Group, Los Angeles (G3-LA)
LA County Department of Regional Planning
Surfrider Foundation
TreePeople
Water Replenishment District
University of California Cooperative Extension

The task force is also recruiting the involvement of other educational institutions, nurseries and landscape design and maintenance businesses and trade associations.

Training Curriculum Objectives

No current gardening training program in Los Angeles offers a drought tolerant and LID landscape maintenance curriculum. The task force has identified the following objectives for a training program:

1. Learn to design, source, install and maintain Southern California native and other climate-appropriate plants.
2. Learn techniques, and gain skills for water-efficient irrigation and on-site rain-water collection, infiltration and reuse.
3. Teach and promote environmental/ecological awareness and literacy.

4. Provide landscaping business skills such as implementation of design and maintenance plans, creating water budget, cost estimation, project planning, marketing and scheduling.
5. Provide training in business management skills

In order to design a suitable training curriculum that incorporates all the components we listed above, there is a need to coordinate, research, and develop the substantive materials of currently existing programs and to refine and develop an appropriate curriculum.

Technical training materials will be converted into more accessible, popular education formats that are targeted to the current gardening workforce, which is largely low-income and, in many cases, monolingual Spanish speaking and/or not literate.

A training coordinator will be hired who has a background in popular education and has the ability to work in a culturally relevant context with English speakers and monolingual Spanish speakers, as well as being able to work well with a population with varying degrees of literacy. The coordinator's duties will include: manage pilot trainings; evaluate program success; research existing LID and sustainable development materials; collate materials and information to create curriculum; communicate with different training partners in developing the curriculum; prepare draft guidelines for green gardener/LID program; organize, schedule, and facilitate logistics for trainings; oversee selection of instructors and other necessary staff for instruction; locate and seek in-kind contributions from relevant commercial and non-profit entities.

The program will also contract with an evaluator who will create, develop, and administer an evaluation of the pilot training program's success and performance. Also, the evaluator will recommend certification metrics after observing the training program's process and outcomes. Finally, the pilot program will create a certification program so that gardeners who have participated in the program would have a tool with which to market their new skills.

Partners in developing the curriculum include the above as well as: the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council; TreePeople; The Water Replenishment District; The Metropolitan Water District; Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Garden; UC Cooperative Extension's Master Gardener Programs; G3.

Expert instructors will be retained to teach modules of the training program from the following industries: (1) Horticulture (2) Irrigation (3) Soil Science (4) Landscape Design (5) Turf Management and (6) Low Impact Development.

Through this task force, we have identified the need for the following components for the training classes:

- Soil types, analysis and management
- Native, climate-appropriate plant selection, sourcing, design and maintenance
- Irrigation, including the design and maintenance of smart irrigation (satellite sensor technology); drip irrigation, rain barrels and cisterns.
- Harvesting rainwater and reducing stormwater
- Rain garden and bioswale design, construction and maintenance
- Tree selection, installation and pruning
- Mulching, composting, weed abatement, appropriate disposal, uses for green waste, alternatives to chemicals in the landscape (Integrated Pest Management) and alternatives to leaf blowers (this is also part of the Environmental Awareness, carbon footprint, and particulate matter air issue)
- Environmental Awareness/Environmental literacy
- Basics of other low-impact stormwater practices (such as cisterns and infiltration basins)
 - Installation and Maintenance of low impact development features
 - Hydrozoning (grouping plants with similar water needs together)
 - Value-added design (food gardens)
 - Plan reading, including basics of designed water use and whether required water falls below allotted water budget
 - Cost Estimation
 - Project Planning and scheduling
 - Adaptive Management (Do's & Dont's)

Certification

Course completion and certification will be phased in as follows:

Tier One: a certificate of course completion, by module, indicating completion of a city approved curriculum; available September of 2009

Tier Two: a certification of the Green Gardener Program as a green business, through the Certified Green Business program. This program is currently in development through Environment LA and is expected to be available in the summer of 2010.

Tier Three: an academic certification as a Green Gardener. This is in development through the task force and is expected to be available in the fall of 2010.

Program Implementation

The program will be implemented in two tracks: (1) through the City workforce, working in cooperation with the relevant labor organizations; (2) the private contracting workforce, working with IDEPSCA (The Institute of Popular Education of Southern California), the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, and at three neighborhood councils to develop a pilot program for implementation. The partner neighborhood councils for the pilot phase are: Venice, Mar Vista, and SoRo (south of Robertson).

Track Two: Green Gardeners Cooperative Pilot Project

The current gardening workforce in Los Angeles, outside of city and county employment, is comprised of a substantial number of low income gardeners who perform their duties as day laborers and short-term employees. In order to successfully develop this potential workforce, the task force has identified a need to pilot: (1) a market referral system; and (2) sustainable employment structures that develop family-supporting pay scales.

(1) **Market Referral.** This is being developed as a pilot in consultation with the leadership of three Neighborhood Councils: Venice, Mar Vista, and SoRo. We are working with the Neighborhood Councils as a key resource in disseminating information to the residents in their districts, about the availability of the certified Green Gardeners, and other ways in which to cultivate the employment of this workforce.

(2) **The Co-op.** The task force identified the need for a legal entity to be created to enable this low income workforce to take advantage of both adequate training in Low Impact Development and the green collar jobs and careers that would arise from a shift toward LID techniques in gardening and landscaping. The proposal is to create a Southern California sustainable gardener's cooperative in order to provide specialized services in maintenance of low impact designs, to private parties, and to cultivate business skills in the trainees.

Oversight

The steering committee is developing a formal technical advisory committee to provide continued oversight and recommendations regarding refinement of the curriculum, certification of training programs (including curriculum approval), market development and outreach, geographic expansion of the pilot program, and technical gardening issues.