



CONTRA COSTA HEALTH

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Los Medanos Community Garden

2025 End-of-Year Report

Introduction

The Los Medanos Community Garden continues to thrive as a vibrant, inclusive space where residents grow healthy food, foster community connections, and learn sustainable gardening practices. Located in a USDA-designated food desert, the garden is more than just a green space, it's a vital community resource. In an area where access to fresh, affordable produce is limited, the garden empowers individuals to take control of their food sources, reduce grocery costs, and improve their health outcomes. Beyond nutrition, it fosters resilience and connection, offering a safe, welcoming environment where neighbors can gather, share knowledge, and support one another. In a time of rising food insecurity and social isolation, the garden stands as a powerful model of grassroots sustainability, equity, and community care.

Key Accomplishments at a Glance

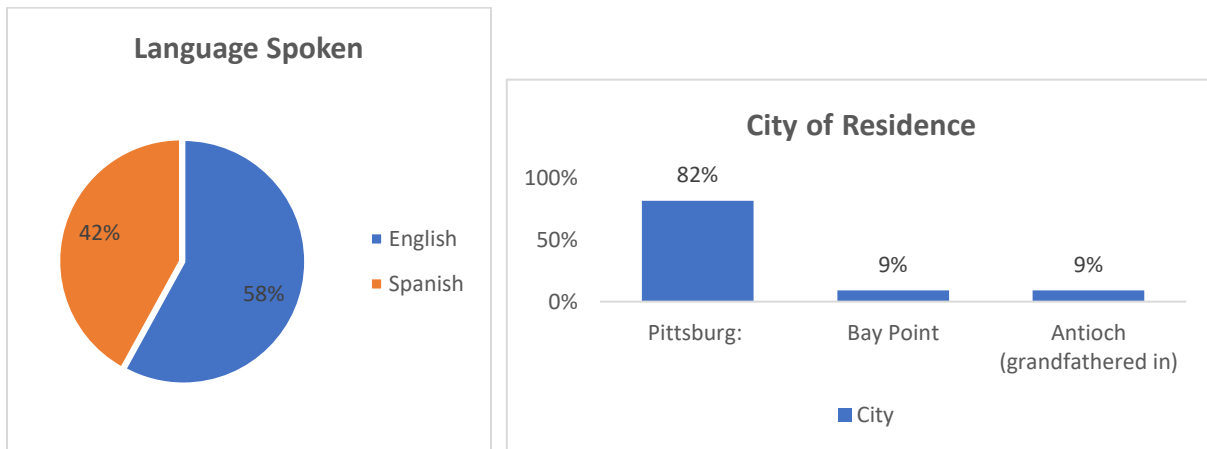
- Hosted 5 educational workshops with strong attendance
- Welcomed 14 new gardeners
- Logged approximately 120 volunteer hours during workdays
- Strengthened community partnerships with UC Master Gardeners and CalFresh Healthy Living

Garden Plot Management

- Total Plots: 57
- 39 ground plots
- 18 raised beds
- Applications received during January registration: 46
- New gardeners this year: 14

This year marked the first formal application cycle since the health department assumed oversight of the garden—an essential step in improving transparency and accountability. The January registration process not only streamlined plot assignments and improved communication but also allowed us to clearly identify active gardeners and monitor their participation throughout the season. This is especially important given the high demand for plots from interested community members. By ensuring that plots are actively used and maintained, we can better support equitable access to this valuable resources.

Demographics Snapshot



Partnership with UC Master Gardeners & CalFresh Healthy Living

We successfully launched a new partnership with the UC Master Gardeners and the CalFresh Healthy Living initiative, significantly expanding educational opportunities for gardeners of all experience levels. This collaboration goes beyond teaching gardening techniques—it also emphasizes the nutritional value of growing and eating fresh, seasonal produce. Through hands-on workshops and expert-led sessions, gardeners learned not only how to cultivate healthy crops, but also how those crops contribute to a balanced diet, chronic disease prevention, and overall well-being. By connecting gardening with nutrition education, we are empowering community members to make informed food choices, improve their health outcomes, and build lasting habits rooted in self-sufficiency and wellness.

Educational Workshops – Fresh from the Garden Series

1. Tomatoes 101: Spring Planting & Growing Basics

Participants learned how to plant and grow tomatoes in California’s spring, including variety selection, plant care, and tips for a flavorful summer harvest.

Attendees: 17



2. Grow Smarter, Eat Healthier!

A hands-on session covering organic pest control, using all edible parts of plants, and preparing nutritious, low-cost meals from the garden.

Attendees: 14



3. Summer Squash: From Garden to Table

Focused on growing summer squash, managing pests organically, and incorporating squash into affordable, healthy meals.

Attendees: 17



4. Garden Health & Harvest Preservation

Covered pest management (ants, aphids), live pruning demonstrations, and simple methods for preserving harvests through cooking, freezing, or drying.

Attendees: 17



5. Winter Cover Crops for Soil Health

Explored the benefits of planting cover crops during winter to improve soil fertility and prepare for a successful summer garden.

Attendees: 8



These sessions were well-received and offered practical guidance on pest management, soil health, crop planning, and seasonal planting. In addition to the formal workshops, UC Master Gardeners remained available afterward to walk through the garden, offering personalized tips and one-on-one plot consultations for gardeners who requested them. The workshop series will resume in the spring, with plans to expand offerings and continue building both knowledge and connections. 📄

Community Workdays

We hosted three of our four community workdays this year, each playing a vital role in maintaining and improving our shared garden spaces. While we offer four events annually, gardeners are required to attend at least two per year to remain in good standing. This ensures that everyone contributes to the care and upkeep of the garden.

To make participation accessible to all, we offer a wide variety of tasks suited to different abilities and comfort levels. These include sweeping and dusting the barn, pulling weeds, shoveling bark, and wheelbarrowing it to cover pathways. Whether light or labor-intensive, every task plays an important role in keeping the garden safe, clean, and welcoming.

Beyond the physical work, clean-up days are also a time for connection. Gardeners work side by side, share stories, and build relationships, strengthening the sense of community that makes the garden so special.

Our fourth and final clean-up day of the year is scheduled for December 13, and we look forward to another successful day of teamwork and community building.

Workday #1

- Attendees: 17
- Cleared vines, cleaned common areas, and prepped paths

Workday #2

- Attendees: 8
- Added bark, cleared abandoned plots, and weeded

Workday #3

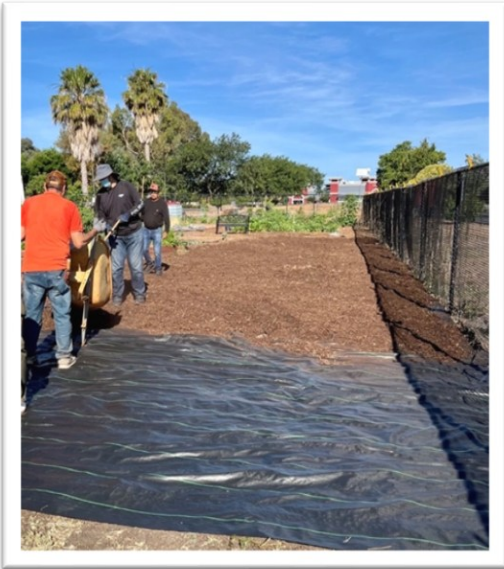
- Attendees: 14
- Re-barked paths, extensive weeding, refreshed shared zones

Workday #4

- Scheduled for December 13

These efforts significantly improved garden accessibility, safety, and overall appearance. They also fostered a strong sense of pride among gardeners, as the work was done together, side by side. The visible transformation of the space has even caught the attention of community members passing by who often comment on how beautiful and well-cared for the garden looks.





Garden Challenges & Solutions

Pest Management Response

Gardeners faced persistent ant and aphid issues throughout the year. To address this organically and sustainably, we implemented a pollinator-friendly strategy and introduced targeted pest control methods recommended by both UC Master Gardeners and Public Works:

- Planted pollinator-attracting flowers in two newly purchased elevated beds to draw beneficial insects and support biodiversity.
- Encouraged natural predators such as ladybugs, lacewings, and bees to help manage pest populations.
- Deployed ant stakes around the garden fence line and outer areas of plots, following expert recommendations, to help control ant populations and reduce aphid farming behavior.

This integrated pest management approach supports long-term pest control and enhances the overall health and biodiversity of the garden.

Overproduction & Crop Planning

A common challenge this year was gardeners planting too much of the same crop, which led to overproduction and wasted harvests. With guidance from the UC Master Gardeners, gardeners were encouraged to:

- Plan their plots more strategically
- Diversify plantings
- Donate surpluses produce to neighbors or local organizations

To support these efforts and encourage greater planting diversity, we integrated our community seed library. Gardeners were invited to:

- Borrow seeds for seasonal planting

- Contribute seeds from their harvests
- Share culturally significant varieties

This combined approach helped gardeners make more intentional planting decisions, reduce waste and increase the variety of crops grown. The seed library also fostered cultural exchange and strengthened community bonds, reinforcing the garden's role as a space for learning, sharing, and sustainability.

Theft & External Security Concerns

Some produce theft occurred this year, primarily involving individuals from outside the garden, including unhoused community members. While we understand the broader issues of food insecurity, it remains important to protect the time, effort, and resources gardeners invest in their plots.

We explored the idea of creating a surplus donation box where gardeners could leave extra produce for those in need. However, due to exposure to weather and the potential to attract rodents, this option was not feasible at this time.

To address these concerns, we are taking steps to:

- Increase gardener presence and communication
- Encourage timely harvesting to reduce temptation
- Maintain dedicated staff members who can regularly oversee the garden and help deter theft. These efforts reflect our commitment to protecting garden resources while approaching challenges with empathy and care.

Goals for the Upcoming Year

- Expand the seed library and increase gardener participation
- Resume the Master Gardener and nutrition workshop series
- Add more pollinator-friendly plants and enhance natural pest control
- Explore compassionate strategies to reduce theft
- Strengthening gardener communication and engagement
- Revisit the idea of a surplus produce donation box with improved weather protection and rodent-proofing
- Reinforce garden plots in need of repair to ensure safety and usability
- Utilize the additional space at the back of the garden for either new plots or orchard trees.

Conclusion

2025 was a productive and transformative year for the Los Medanos Community Garden. Through education, partnerships, and collective effort, we enhanced gardener skills, improved infrastructure, and cultivated a more connected, sustainable, and resilient garden community. In a region where access to fresh food is limited, this garden is not just a solution, it's a symbol of what's possible when communities come together. While we anticipate a few gardeners may transition out during the upcoming application process, we are confident that, with ongoing outreach and engagement, we will continue to fill garden plots and welcome new members into our growing community. With ongoing collaboration and care, we look forward to an even more fruitful year ahead.