Soil, Seeds, and Community

Inside Antioch's EcoFarm & Food Foresting Certificate Program Intensive

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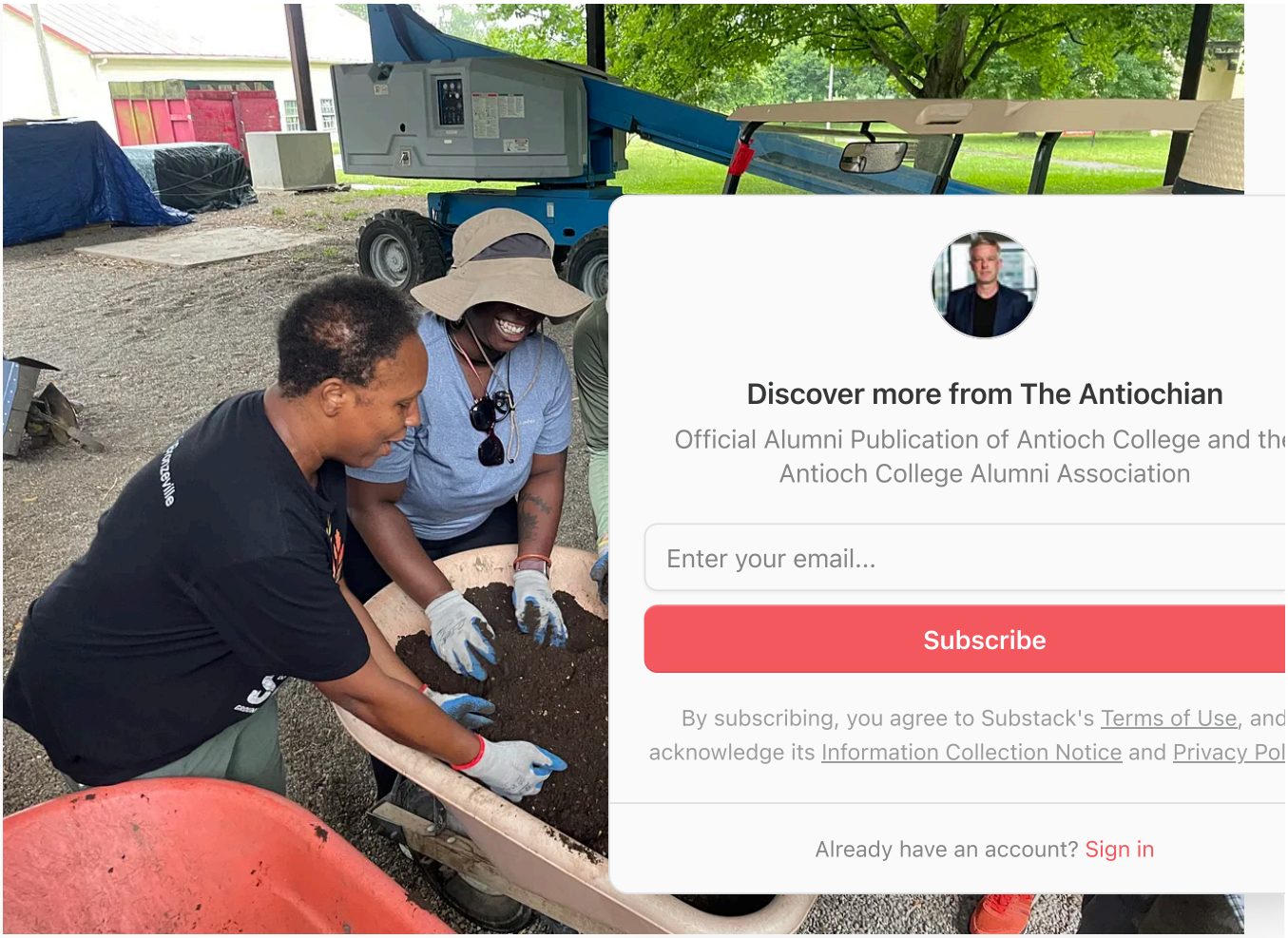
This summer, Antioch College launched its EcoFarm & Food Foresting Certificate Program. This inaugural offering was made possible thanks to the generous support of the Elevar Fund. Twenty-two participants came from across the country and around the world: master gardeners and first-time growers, educators and artists, a nurse, farmers, participants from Ecuador and Brazil, alumni, current students, and community members from Columbus, Yellow Springs, and beyond.

Weekend One: Soil Health & Nutrient Cycling

We started where it all begins, underground. Healthy farms and gardens begin with healthy soils. While much of agriculture focuses on the crops we harvest above ground, regenerative farming starts by understanding the living world beneath our feet. Soil is not simply a medium in which plants grow; it is a dynamic ecosystem composed of minerals, organic matter, water, air, fungi, bacteria, insects, worms, and countless other organisms that sustain life.

Participants started on the Antioch Farm, learning about soil biology, the soil food web, and the importance of nutrient cycling. We sifted compost, planted fall crops like collards, kale, and brassicas, and discussed cover cropping with winter rye and alfalfa. Bruce Linebaugh, our Farm Manager, demonstrated root depth, plant growth, and the critical role of cover crops in building soil health. We also learned how to take soil core samples, discussed soil testing (and toured the on-campus testing facility), and got hands-on experience with farm tools–broad forks, seeders, and the BCS tractor.

By the end of the first weekend, participants had a greater appreciation for soil as a living system and understood that building soil health is one of the most effective long-term investments a farmer or gardener can make.



Weekend Two: Specialty Crops, Plant Guilds, and Community Food Systems

This took place during Reunion, which brought alumni and a powerful panel on Interdisciplinary Approaches to Food Justice, featuring alumni Shannon Edwards ‘78, Tom Boothe ‘91, Brooke Blackmon Bryan ‘03, and Alexandra Klug ‘17. It was facilitated by an EcoFarm practitioner and the myself. We asked big questions: How can we think about food as a site for justice work? How do we honor both the people at the table and the land that sustains them?

After the panel, we explored the concept of plant guilds, intentional combinations of species that support one another. Drawing from the Antioch College Food Forest, we investigated how trees, shrubs, herbs, native flowers, and beneficial insects contribute to healthy, productive landscapes. Participants also learned about specialty crops like native medicinal plants, culinary herbs, and high-value flowers that offer opportunities for small farms to diversify production and stand out in the market.

We planted cover crops together, used a seeder to sow radishes, and learned the art of “chop and drop” with a scythe. We then toured Crosshatch Farm with Brooke Bryan to learn about specialty breeds and herd shares, and learned from staff member and workshop participant, Ash Cummings, of Duskroot Farm, who shared her journey to accessing land as a local farmer who also works full-time. We planted native and dye flowers with Natalie Suzelis, a gardener and assistant professor of literature, the first step toward a vibrant dye garden.



Weekend Three: Pollination Pathways, Native Plants, and Design

The final weekend brought it all together. Regenerative agriculture is founded on the principle that farms and gardens are designed not simply to sustain productivity, but to actively contribute to the restoration of ecological health. Rather than minimizing environmental impacts, regenerative land management seeks to rebuild healthy soils, strengthen biodiversity, support wildlife habitat, and increase resilience.

We weeded and planted the College's Apothecary Garden, learning about medicinal herbs and their uses. We explored native plants on campus and discussed pollination ecology, beneficial insects, and the importance of maintaining diverse habitats. Then came a highlight: a natural dye workshop with Forest Bright, associate professor of visual arts. We harvested marigolds, sumac, and indigo from the farm and used them to dye cotton and natural fiber shirts.



We toured Heartbeat Learning Gardens to see their model of dense horticulture and donation-based food access, and we closed with a design studio led by A Tassy, a staff member who holds a Permaculture Design Certificate. Participants learned how to map their own garden spaces, from apartment balconies to backyard plots, and left with tools and resources to finalize their plan.

By the end, participants understood that regenerative agriculture extends beyond food production to include ecological restoration. Healthy farms are places where

productive agriculture and biodiversity reinforce one another.

After all three weekends, we had learned about soil health, how to test soil and read the results, sifted compost, planted crops, mulched, familiarized ourselves with tools and machinery, learned about food forestry, toured farms, harvested dye plants, and built connections that will last long after the season ends. But more than that, we built a community, a network of growers, learners, and food justice advocates who are ready to tend the land and each other.

The EcoFarm & Food Foresting Certificate is an accredited 15-credit program designed for growers and aspiring agriculturalists seeking hands-on experience in regenerative farming. The certificate requires completion of three 1-credit weekend institutes and a 300-hour Co-op Apprenticeship (the heart of the program) where participants apply their learning in a professional setting while deepening their skills in ecological agriculture, food forestry, and sustainable food systems. A Co-op faculty member works with each participant to formalize an apprenticeship with an organization committed to ecological stewardship. The course fee for the 12-credit apprenticeship is $500 for community participants.

Want to join us?

For more information or to express interest in future offerings, contact A Tassy at atassy@antiochcollege.edu.

Follow us on social media and check our website for updates. Don't miss your chance to get your hands in the soil and be part of this growing community.



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A guest post by

A Tassy

A Tassy (they/them) is the Work Program Manager at Antioch College, a community organizer, grower, and published poet. Their work centers the intersections of BIPOC, queer, and disabled lived experience with connection to land and labor.

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