

# THE GARDEN CLUB

## Black History Month Edition



## RECENT NEWS

### Our first Community Day of the year was a massive success!

Thank you to everyone who attended our first monthly community day of 2026! It was a beautiful day full of community, recognition, perseverance, and joy. This event set a precedent for all future community days, and it is all because of YOU; our Garden 31 family. When you show up for each other, magic happens. We can't wait to see how these community gatherings grow throughout the year





# **BLACK HISTORY AND FARMING IN AMERICA**

African American contributions to farming and agriculture are foundational to the food systems we rely on today. Long before modern terms like sustainable or regenerative agriculture existed, Black farmers, scientists, and communities were practicing land stewardship rooted in resilience, innovation, and deep ecological knowledge.

Many of these contributions trace back to West and Central African agricultural traditions, brought to the Americas through forced enslavement. Enslaved Africans carried sophisticated knowledge of rice cultivation, irrigation, seed saving, soil building, and polyculture systems. In the coastal South, the expertise of the Gullah Geechee people made rice one of the most profitable crops in early America—yet their knowledge went largely uncredited.

After emancipation, African Americans continued to shape agriculture despite facing systemic barriers to land ownership, capital, and education. One of the most influential figures was George Washington Carver, whose work at the Tuskegee Institute helped transform Southern farming. Carver promoted crop rotation, composting, and nitrogen-fixing plants like peanuts and cowpeas to restore soil depleted by cotton monoculture. His approach centered soil health, biodiversity, and practical education for farmers—principles that align closely with today's regenerative agriculture movement.

African American farmers also played a crucial role in community-based agriculture and mutual aid. Black land stewards established cooperative farms, shared tools and seeds, and passed down generational knowledge in the face of discriminatory policies and land loss. Even today, Black farmers continue to lead movements focused on food justice, land sovereignty, and environmental healing.

At Garden 31, we recognize that caring for the land has always been intertwined with caring for people. Honoring African American agricultural contributions means acknowledging both the innovation and the injustice—while uplifting the legacy of stewardship, resilience, and hope that continues to inspire sustainable growing practices today.

This Black History Month, we celebrate the past and recommit to a future where land, food, and opportunity are accessible, regenerative, and rooted in equity.



# OKRA



Brought to the U.S. from West Africa in the hands of slaves, okra is one of many crops directly tied to black history. Whether fried, grilled, pickled, or added to a hearty gumbo, okra is a versatile and delicious savory fruit.

Just like tomatoes or cucumbers, many consider okra to be a vegetable due to its flavor and uses in stews, soups, and side dishes. However, okra is a fruit as it contains seeds and is developed from a flower.

In Southern California, the best time to plant okra is from April to June, when the weather begins to warm up for this heat-loving crop.

Soak your seeds overnight to improve germination and ensure they are planted somewhere that will receive full sunlight 12-18 inches apart and in rows 2-3 feet apart.

GROWING THE CROPS OF OUR ANCESTORS IS ONE OF MANY WAYS WE CAN HONOR THEM AND ALL THEY SACRIFICED FOR US TO BE WHERE WE ARE TODAY.



# HONORING MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY

## **2025 Supporter of the year: Bob and Anne Atkins**

The most important people in our organization are the people we serve -the youth, the interns, the apprentices, formerly incarcerated, anyone who wants to learn how to farm and grow their own food and build community- that's our mission and the reason we exist. However, for us to be able to serve our community, we rely on the graciousness and generosity of those who believe in us, and Anne and Bob Atkins have been there, uplifting and supporting us every step of the way. They have been consistently contributing to Garden 31 every month for over a year now, and we are so incredibly grateful for the opportunities their contributions have helped to create for the people we serve.

Thank you, Bob and Anne; we could not do what we do without your support.

## **2025 Volunteer of the year: Grace Oliva**

Grace was introduced to Garden 31 by her husband, Henry Oliva, who witnessed the development of the business plan for Garden 31 while he and Chris were still incarcerated. Once Henry was released in May of 2024, he was brought onto the G31 staff, and Grace immediately began volunteering her time with us at nearly every event we were part of. Grace has been a fierce advocate for Garden 31, our mission, and what we do, and we are so grateful to her for all of the hours she has dedicated to helping us grow. When asked what volunteering with Garden 31 means to her, Grace said, "With every event, there's always something meaningful that I walk away with. My heart just feels full—it's a really good feeling." Grace describes volunteering with G31 as educational, fun, and inspiring, and encourages anyone thinking about volunteering to "do it. Even if you're unsure, just do it. It's fun, it's beautiful out here, and it feels good to be part of something meaningful. You might not fully realize the impact you're having on others, but it's amazing what you walk away with. That's powerful. I leave these events and talk about Garden 31 with coworkers, friends, and people in the community, and a lot of them have never even heard of it. It's been fun and definitely impactful. Come meet people, get your hands dirty, learn something new—because there's a lot of learning out here. It's amazing, and it's always fun."

Thank you, Grace. You are an integral part of this community, and we are so grateful to have you.

## **2025 Grower of the year: Garden 31 COO, Samuel Rabichow**

It is with our heartfelt honor, thanks, humility, and gratitude that we want to recognize our COO, Sam Rabichow as our 2025 Employee/Grower of the year. Sam takes the cake in every single way. He is truly the best in the business and we are so lucky to have him as a major part of our organization. From his first time working with Garden 31 as a Grant writer, Sam has believed in our mission and he continues to show up every day as a leader and example of passion, dedication, and hard work. Thank you so much Sam, for everything you have done and continue to do on the daily. You are a crucial piece of our puzzle and we would not be where we are today nor would we have the path laid out in front of us to get to where we want to go without you.





Grace Oliva: 2025 Volunteer of the Year



New garden beds installed at Alta Vista HS

One of the finger limes shared with our community by the Atkins



COO & 2025 GROWER of the year; Sam Rabichow getting his hands dirty



Chris Burroughs expressing our gratitude to our 2025 Donors of the year, Bob and Anne Atkins

Alta Vista Learning Garden in progress...





# A CONVERSATION WITH OUR 2025 GROWER OF THE YEAR: garden 31 coo, sam rabichow



After Sam was honored with his award, we sat down and had a great conversation about his story, how he came to be the COO of Garden 31, and his gratitude for our community recognizing his hard work. This is a small portion of that conversation (Be on the lookout for the full piece on our YouTube channel soon!)

**Jasmine:** Like you mentioned, sometimes it's your environment that limits your growth. Showing people that there's another option—that you don't have to stay where you are—that's really at the core of what Garden 31 is about. What's a moment you've experienced, or something you've been part of, that you can look back on and feel really proud of?

**Sam:** You know, this is funny. I won't go into too much detail, but this is something recent, and it's been on my mind. I went through some things in my relationship and reached a point where I was able to step back and really separate myself from the situation. I've talked to friends about this before—especially at our age, when relationships feel really important. Who you're with matters. And I realized that a relationship isn't really about either individual—it's about the dynamic between two people. I think a lot of times, when we're in relationships, emotions are involved and we make it about ourselves or the other person. We blame ourselves or blame them. But the truth is, it's about how two people come together to create something unique. When I had that realization, it changed a lot for me. It changed how I show up for people and how I take accountability for myself. I've realized that I'm not responsible for another person—I'm responsible for myself. My life has led me to this point; their life has led them to theirs. The question becomes: what can I do to impact the dynamic without trying to fundamentally change either person?

That was a big turning point for me, and I'm really proud of that growth.

I'm also proud of the work I'm doing now—the role I'm in. This year has been a lot. A lot of growth, a lot of personal work. My father passed away in April of last year, and that was huge. He was one of my best friends. So between losing my father, evolving in my understanding of relationships, and then stepping into more responsibility in my role—it's been transformative. I joke about this a lot, but as a kid no one says, "I want to be the CEO of a nonprofit." I wanted to be an astronaut. This isn't something I planned for, but I've grown into it. And feeling ownership of this role—I'm really proud of that. Chris calls me "Mr. Fit"—as in "figure it out." And that's what I do. I figure it out. I'm proud of that. I'm proud of my relationship with my brother. I'm proud of a lot of things. Mostly, I'm grateful. Gratitude and living from your heart—that's the key to staying proud, I think. It doesn't mean life gets easier. There will always be difficulties. But when you live from your heart space, even when things fall apart, it's not because you weren't being yourself. You were living in your truth. And everything that leaves you brings you closer to what's meant for you.

**Jasmine:** I'm so sorry for your loss. I know this year must have been incredibly difficult, and now you're stepping into this new role and being recognized for it. What does that mean to you?

**Sam:** It means everything. I actually got a little emotional when I got out of the car earlier. I work very hard—it's kind of my default. I was just talking to Mikiel about that. I've always worked hard. I wasn't naturally gifted at basketball, but I worked harder than anyone else, and that made the difference. I could play defense because that's about effort. I brought that same energy to every job I've had—dishwasher, server, whatever it was. And now, to be in a place where that hard work actually makes a tangible difference and is recognized the way it was today—it truly means everything.





# Community Day

Wear  
Closed-toe shoes, and  
bring water, sun  
protection, & gloves if  
you have them.



**SATURDAY  
2.28.26**

**8:00A-12:00P**

**MAJOR GENERAL MURRAY HS  
215 N MELROSE DR  
VISTA, CA 92083**



**REGISTER AT  
[GARDEN31.ORG/EVENTS](https://GARDEN31.ORG/EVENTS)**





# THANK YOU FOR JOINING THE GARDEN CLUB!

Please check out our website, follow us on all of our social media platforms, and reach out to us with any questions you may have at [community@garden31.org](mailto:community@garden31.org)!



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