

“TEACHING GARDEN”

SPROUTS AT SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY'S MISSION BRANCH

By Carol Crawford, Crawford Communications

When San Francisco's Mayor Gavin Newsom issued a directive for unused City property to be evaluated for the purpose of growing food, no one expected the San Francisco Public Library to be one of the city's first organizations to respond to his appeal. But thanks to a partnership with Janet Moyer Landscaping (JML) and Garden for the Environment, a sustainable “teaching garden” was designed, constructed and planted at the Mission Branch.

Lia Hillman, the library's interim manager of the Children's Room, put together a proposal that was quickly approved to convert the underutilized concrete patio into a teaching garden featuring edible plants. This new resource offers the community an opportunity to learn about growing food sustainably in an urban environment and provides local schools with a resource for hands-on science lessons.

Janet Moyer Landscaping provided the design and construction for the space that included a state-of-the-art “smart” drip irrigation system. Contributions of materials came from supplier partners including Ewing Irrigation, Toro Irrigation Products, Broadmoor Landscape Supply and Sierra Point Lumber.



Above: Planting Day. Students from nearby Marshall Elementary School are intent to begin planting lettuce, peas, collards, spinach and strawberries.

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Inset: Smart Irrigation. Janet Moyer Landscaping installed a “smart” drip irrigation system to ensure just the right amount of watering will take place for each and every plant, rain or shine.



Below: A work in Progress. Janet Moyer (center) and landscaping crew takes a break in building the redwood planter as the “teaching garden” begins to take shape.



Several Challenges To Be Solved

The all-concrete patio area presented several challenges. One was the visual distraction of the adjacent alley, and the open metal fence surrounding the patio that allowed debris and litter to be deposited. To solve these problems, the library's facilities department installed attractive, translucent panels of tempered glass.

Another issue was drainage. The JML crew and volunteers built a 3- by 35-foot planting bed using 4X6 redwood timbers. Rocks were placed in the bottom and covered with landscape cloth so the soil wouldn't wash out or get waterlogged. A general landscape soil was shoveled into place. With the smart Toro water controller using satellite data at work and the drip system providing an extension to each plant, the area will be watered “just right.”

To make the planting bed accessible for children, the 15-inch high planter provides a bench for kids to sit on, and its 3-foot width allows an easy reach into the bed.

Planting, Mulching, Learning and Fun

Early this October, children from nearby Marshall Elementary School planted a variety of edible plants including lettuce, onions, garlic, chard, beets, strawberries, cilantro, and peas and learned about the importance of mulching and other gardening techniques.

“It's so much fun to educate children about something we love so much,” says Janet Moyer, president of JML. “We couldn't have done this without the library's creative vision. **LC/DBM**”