UC Santa Cruz workshop cultivates green thumbs
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Santa Cruz >> About 14 people got back to the roots of farming Saturday during a workshop at UC Santa Cruz focused on sustainability and organic gardening.

Taught once a week over a period of three weeks, the workshop, "Garden Cruz: Organic Matters," at the Alan Chadwick Garden on the west side of the university offers a curriculum that covers basic things including how to dig plots in the dirt and plant things in the soil as well as advance topics such as creating compost to enrich the soil.

Within the expanse of the garden are a hundred types of apples, dozens of garlic species and other plants. The goal of the garden is to show what could be grown in the local land, said Orin Martin, manager for the garden.

UCSC offers a six-month apprenticeship where apprentices are taught every aspect of sustainable, organic gardening in the 3-acre plot of land. But the short workshops run throughout the year, and offer a condensed version of the apprenticeship for people who can't commit the time.

Ideas for the workshop sprouted after many people mentioned they wanted to learn the gardening concepts behind the rich land but didn't have the time to commit to the apprenticeship, Martin said.

"Many people have said, 'Boy I wish I could take that,'" he said. "All the seminars are done in bite-sized pieces but it's the basics."

Skills in the class vary from beginner to advance.

"One woman here has never gardened in her life," said Sky DeMuro, assistant manager for the garden.

Despite skill level, the workshop is beneficial for any attendee.

"I hope that (students), at the very least, understand how important soil is to all aspects of gardening," DeMuro said.

On Saturday, students toured the greenhouse and garden before getting some demonstrations of how to put plants into the ground.

Not only does the class instill tips and concepts for gardening to attendees but it also teaches them about the philosophy behind creating an organic, sustainable garden.

"Our approach is it's a living ecosystem," Martin said. "What is it? How do you treat it in a way
Orin Martin, Alan Chadwick Garden manager, speaks during a gardening workshop on the UC Santa Cruz campus on Saturday. (Jon Weiand -- Santa Cruz Sentinel)

that it helps you to grow plants? That's probably new to them."
The approach can even help gardens become drought resistant.

"If you have a good organic matter content in your soil, good structure in your soil, your soil will hold water better than unimproved soil," Martin said

Chris Edmonds and Alyssa Carlson work at an outdoor wilderness school and run a small garden there. The two heard about the workshop and thought it would help them to cultivate their own garden.

Despite having tried their hand at gardening for years at the school, the two were learning new things rather quickly. There were several times when the two exchanged guilty glances when they realized they had been doing something wrong all along, Edmonds said.

Some of the basics that turned out not to be so basic: watering plants.

"I knew you could overwater something," Carlson said.

But watching the instructors show how little water plants needed, Carlson learn she was doing it more often than she thought.

"I thought 'Oh my God, I'm definitely watering them too much,'" she said.

Or digging. At one point, the two were shown a digging technique that was detrimental to plants.

"I said to myself 'I'm pretty sure I've been doing that for years,'" Edmonds said.

In the end, the two hope to just create a better environment in their own garden.

"For me, we're going to try and apply these things to the raised bed we have and grow more food and get better results," Carlson said.

**What:** A series of workshops focused on sustainable, organic garden