



Traditional Ecological Knowledge EECO - spring 2024

A focus on African Heritage Crops

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At the Central State University's *Seed to Bloom Botanical and Community Garden*, visitors have been able to observe trial crops thriving from germination to production to seed-saving efforts for testing sustainability and viability in Ohio.

The project began from an inspirational look bringing recognition of African American scientists, horticulturalists, botanists, inventors, and others who had an influential impact on agricultural practices still relevant today. From celebrating Black History month, the idea of growing culturally specific crops blossomed to make a real connection with the students on campus and our visitors.

Research into where to find heritage seeds quickly revealed a limited number of seed-saving organizations trying to maintain a diversity of heritage crops /seeds and making them available to others interested in the same goal. The seed companies which were selected also give back to Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) with providing education, support, and land acquisition.

Once the seeding, planting and caretaking began, it furthered the desire to create a focused-themed Black Heritage designation within the botanical garden. At this point, a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Partnership grant was suggested to work with urban African American farmers to help develop both the production success and the development of the Black Heritage area.

You may be asking why a Black Heritage focus? Central State University is an HBCU- Historically Black College / University, and with the influential African Americans in agriculture, it made sense to recognize contributions which have been made, from the past to the present.

The "Ohio African Heritage Crops Project" is one of 23 out of 39 proposed projects selected by Sustainable Agriculture and Research Education (SARE) North Central Region.

This project is a partnership between Central State University Extension and four African American urban farmers on three sites; two in Cincinnati, OH and one in Columbus, OH.

Beginning in late-April or May, the farming partners will start seeds, determine when to plant their transplants, learn to identify weeds, pests and diseases for a successful growing season.

Some expected outcomes and impacts of this grant are; short term are partners successfully propagate African Heritage crops at their location. Medium term are partners successfully save seeds to trial for the following growing season, and partners will determine which crops will do well in the Ohio climate. Long Term are that this partnership grant will help provide a diversity of culturally specific crops marketable for local people, immigrants and refugees. Provide data on germination rate, viability and productivity of African heritage crop grown in Ohio climate, and development of a Black Heritage-focused educational garden at the CSU Seed to Bloom Botanical and Community Garden.



Texicoa Sorghum



Green Glaze Collards (foreground)

Whippoorwill Southern Pea
(trellised in background)



Red Burgundy Okra