



Seeds of Resilience Courtyard - Progress Report

Email

marneshaj@arizona.edu

Project Manager Name

Marnesha Jones

Requested Metrics

The Seeds of Resilience Courtyard project has made steady and meaningful progress toward establishing a culturally grounded outdoor garden space designed to support student wellness, environmental learning, and engagement with African and African Diaspora foodways. Although construction progress has been slower than originally anticipated due to Facilities Management scheduling constraints, the project continues to advance in both site preparation and planning. The cumulative metrics below reflect what has been accomplished to date.

Project Planning and Team Coordination

Total project team members involved: 6

Project manager: 1

Project advisor: 1

Project facilitators: 3

Facilities Management construction project manager: 1

Biweekly planning meetings held this semester: 7 to 8

Construction and Site Preparation Metrics

Arc wall footing exposed: Completed

Structural leak repaired: Completed

Dirt work and site preparation: Completed

Removal of old railroad ties and shrubs by Southwest: Completed

Plumbing lines exposed for water service adjustments: Completed

Backflow preventer relocation and water line rerouting: Scheduled for early January

Seating materials (cinder block and stucco): Pending ordering

Paver selection: In progress

Landscaping and Cultural Plant Selection

Total landscape plant species selected: 26

Total individual plants selected for in-ground installation: 26

Total plants selected for raised beds and terracotta pots: 10 to 12

Total plants selected across the full courtyard: Approximately 36 to 38

Culturally significant herbs and root crops selected: 5

Pollinator friendly and native desert plant species selected: More than 20

Center tree selected: 1 Chinese pistache

Breakdown of Planting Metrics

In ground landscape plants, 26 total

Desert Milkweed: 3

Pineleaf Milkweed: 1

Chocolate Flower: 3

Brittlebush: 3

Chuparosa: 3

Salvia species: 3

Evening Primrose: 2

Yucca: 1

Night blooming Cereus: 1

Herbs planted beneath the pistache tree including lavender, rosemary, sage, oregano, thyme, and mint: 6

Raised garden beds, 5 to 6 plants total

Okra: 2

Sweet potato vine: 2

Basil: 2

Terracotta pots, 5 to 6 plants total

Lantana: 1 to 2

Chiltepin: 1

Honeysuckle: 1

Yarrow: 1

Gregg's Mistflower: 2

Project Accomplishments

This semester, steady progress has been made on the early construction and planning components of the courtyard revitalization project, even though the pace has been slower than originally anticipated due to Facilities Management scheduling constraints and staffing changes. On the physical development side, several foundational site preparation steps have been completed. The arc wall footing was fully exposed and an existing leak was successfully repaired, improving structural conditions for the next phase of work. Dirt work and general site clearing have been completed, creating a clean and workable foundation. Southwest crews removed old railroad ties and unwanted shrubs, which opened up the layout and improved safety and visibility. Plumbing lines have also been exposed in preparation for upcoming water service adjustments, and the relocation of the backflow preventers and the rerouting of the building's water line is already scheduled for early January. Materials for seating, including cinder blocks and stucco, are in the process of being ordered, and paver selection is underway with several potential options identified. Coordination with Parking and Transportation Services regarding construction access and temporary parking accommodations remains in progress as we await a final response.

Beyond construction, meaningful steps have been taken to ensure the project remains aligned with

its cultural purpose and long-term vision. Following the unexpected loss of Jamaica DelMar, whose leadership and cultural vision shaped the original concept, the team adjusted responsibilities and reaffirmed project goals to keep her intentions centered. Regular biweekly meetings have supported continuity, clarified roles, and updated timelines.

We have also begun conceptual planning for the programming phase. After construction is complete, the team plans to host a courtyard reveal event to introduce the space to students, staff, and community members. This event will highlight the purpose of the courtyard, its cultural significance, and the broader vision of connecting Black students with land, food, and healing through plants rooted in African and African Diaspora traditions. During the reveal, we will gather input for future programming such as gardening days, herb and root harvesting workshops, educational sessions, cultural food demonstrations, and outreach opportunities for local schools. These early plans will help ensure that the courtyard becomes an active, culturally grounded, and community centered learning environment.

Next Steps

Currently, we have a projected completion date of mid- to late February for the construction phase of the courtyard, although this timeline may shift due to Facilities Management's workload and the number of concurrent campus projects they are responsible for. While the original plan was to relocate the backflow preventers and re-route the building's water service between December 17 and 19, this work has now been postponed to early January. The FM Construction Project Manager is actively coordinating with staff in plumbing, excavation, and masonry to determine an exact date for plumbing exposure and relocation. Once this date is finalized, we will have a clearer sense of when fencing can be installed around the courtyard, which will officially mark the start of the main construction period.

The next major steps after plumbing relocation include preparing the ground for paver installation, finalizing the paver selection, and ordering all necessary materials such as cinder blocks and stucco for the seating structures. This will be followed by the installation of new irrigation lines, planting of the landscape plants and raised bed crops, and construction of the seating areas. During this period, we will also work with FM to confirm equipment access, construction parking coordination with PTS, and any temporary building water shutoffs needed to complete the work safely.

Once construction is mostly complete, the project will transition into the programming and activation phase. This includes preparing signage, developing educational materials on culturally significant plants, and planning a courtyard reveal event to introduce the space to students, staff, and community members. Because the grant period extends into the summer, and because FM may experience delays, our team is committed to ensuring that all construction, planting, and programming preparations are fully completed by June. This extended deadline will provide adequate flexibility while still keeping us on track to deliver a high-quality, meaningful courtyard that aligns with the original vision and purpose of the project.

Challenges Faced

This project has experienced several significant challenges during its development. The most impactful has been the loss of a vital team member, Jamaica DelMar, whose vision and dedication laid the foundation for the Seeds of Resilience Courtyard. This project was her passion, and she imagined a space where Black students could reconnect with African roots through culturally significant plants, foods, and herbs. She invited me to support this work because of my background in environmental and insect science, and I am committed to carrying her vision forward with the support of the remaining grant team.

We also began the semester with a second project manager; however, it became clear that his priorities did not align with the current needs of the project, and he will now contribute in a different capacity. Additionally, we will be moving forward with two fewer project facilitators next semester as they transition into new professional opportunities. While these staffing changes have presented challenges, the core project team remains dedicated to the successful completion of the courtyard.

Media/Links