

UGA Latin American Ethnobotanical Garden



Opening planting ceremony at Baldwin Hall

12 October 1998

University of Georgia

Beloved Eugene Odum plants first tree

The University of Georgia's Latin American Ethnobotanical Garden was officially opened today in a ceremony marked by the planting of a symbolic tree by UGA's father of ecology, Eugene Odum. The tree, a native alder from the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico (*Alnus acuminata*), represents the first of a large number of ethnobotanically important species from Latin America to be planted over the next several years. The tree was placed on a gentle slope next to the wooden bridge that crosses East Campus Road and will be marked by a small plaque bearing Dr. Odum's name.

The Latin American Ethnobotanical garden is a collaborative project carried out with the financial support of the Katherine John Murphy

Foundation of Atlanta. The award from the Foundation provides funds to cover part of the costs of initial construction as well as a substantial endowment that will allow for the garden's maintenance and future development.

Cheryl Mihalko, of UGA's Business Services, developed the garden's design, based on her own interpretation of Maya temple walled architecture. Much of the construction is recycled building materials that had earlier been disposed of as useless. Ms. Mihalko's classic design was brought to life by the expert and inventive grounds work of the UGA physical plant under the supervision of Dexter Adams.

Sponsoring UGA units involved in the Latin American Ethnobotanical Garden's development include the Laboratories of Ethnobiology of UGA's Department of Anthropology, the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS), the Department of Horticulture, and the State Botanical Garden of Georgia. A significant role in the garden's growth has been played by El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR), a Mexican research institution located in Chiapas with which UGA has a strong academic exchange program. A sister garden at ECOSUR is also under construction.

Among the garden's first species are medicinal plants from the Highland Maya region of Chiapas, Mexico. Many are important in the treatment of gastrointestinal diseases, the number-one health problem affecting the Maya populations of the region. Specifically significant anti-diarrheal species located throughout the garden include *Verbena litoralis* (verbena, see inset and text on

remedy) and *Calliandra grandiflora* (no common English name). Near some of the stone walls one finds the ubiquitous pig weed or goose foot (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*), a powerful remedy widely known and used throughout Latin America to expel intestinal parasites. It is also boiled with beans as a flavorful and pungent pot herb.

Other important species in this Fall's garden plantings include sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) and *Ilex vomitoria*, the "black-tea" widely drunk by Native Americans of the South East as well as in Latin America as a stimulant. Sweet gum is currently used among the Maya as a major treatment of respiratory problems and was employed in a similar fashion by the Southeastern Indians.



Verbena litoralis

A Tzeltal Maya Herbal Remedy
Yakan k'ulub wamal, ya xch'i tal jun metro snatil. Yabenal ts'ujatik sok ch'ixch'ixtik. in te xniche, ch'in. lom sak sok ay yax. Ba'yuk ta tael te wamale o ta sti' be, bayuk ay. Ja' swenta xpoxil k'ux ch'ujtil, k'ux o'tanil, xenel, sok ja' ch'ujt. Yabenal ya yich' payel ta uch'el sok ya stak' uch'el ta sikil ja'.

Verbena is an herb that grows to about 1 meter. Its leaves are lanceolate with strongly serrated margins. Its flowers are small, and there are both white and blue varieties. It can be found almost anywhere, along trailsides and old fields. It is very good for the treatment of abdominal pain, epigastric pain, vomiting, and diarrhea. Its leaves are boiled and drunk (as a tea) and it can sometimes be drunk in cold water.

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