

## L.A. at Home

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### At Project Youth Green, garden fees rise with the corn stalks

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#### Community Garden Dispatch No. 41: Project Youth Green, Pacoima

When Project Youth Green Community Garden broke ground three years ago on a 4-acre parcel within Roger Jessup Park in Pacoima, it was a different world. Founded by the nonprofit Youth Speak Collective after-school program on land owned by the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, the garden paid nothing for rent, water or maintenance.

No longer. Details of a new contract with the city are not expected to be announced until September, but Project Youth Green -- like other community gardens on Recreation and Parks land -- is already feeling the effect of fee hikes. In June the group paid \$500 for an annual lease. Now it's responsible for all trash removal, downed trees and repairs to pipes. Fortunately many of the gardeners are professional handymen, some hard hit by the downturn in construction.



hook," Robledo says.

"When the economy went bad we had a lot of calls for plots," says coordinator Laura Robledo, left, as she opens the door to a recycled shipping container that functions as the office, storage shed and library.

A volleyball court is nearby, as is a mural painted by Youth Speak Collective kids. It's an ongoing project, designed by artist Kristy Salcedo as a way to entice youth into the garden. "It's the bait on the



Corn husks are gathered for use in making *corundas*, which are similar to tamales.

Photos: Ann Summa



PROJECT YOUTH GREEN  
YOUTH SPEAK! COLLECTIVE



More artwork at the garden, which sits within a Pacoima park.

On the path up the hill, a butterfly garden and a bird garden are planted with California natives and shaded by mature eucalyptus and giant California live oak, a reminder of chaparral-covered foothills less than a half-mile away. A medicinal garden contains echinacea, chamomile, aloe and ruda. Robledo uses the ruda, soaked in alcohol, for ear drops. She makes a tea from the chamomile to soothe her eyes.



Pieces of wood bolted to an iron frame form the raised beds pictured above. Elsewhere, 60 plots -- each 10 by 20 feet -- are available to families, but much of the growing here is communal in nature. A core group of five gardeners oversees corn and tomatoes.

When a strong windstorm blew through a few weeks ago it nearly flattened the entire corn crop, largely grown from seed brought from Mexico. Rafael Salcedo and Juan Lopez called other members of the team, and they hurriedly used recycled stakes and string to prop up the plants. Lopez, a mechanic, was just guessing what might work. (That's him at right, using spare wood to make more supports for corn and tomatoes.)

Now the corn is nearly 10 feet high and Rafael Salcedo says it will be ready for harvest soon. He and Lopez have been here since the start, learning how to create a garden that doesn't rely on pesticides or chemical fertilizers.

The garden's communal crops will be on display at a summer harvest festival Aug. 27, and the public is invited to sample the bounty. For those who can't wait, Project Youth Green has a table at the Sylmar Farmers Market, selling produce for donations that might soften the fees expected in September.

Next week: Teodoro Mercado's permaculture experiment at Project Youth Green.

-- Jeff Spurrier



Rafael Salcedo transplants nopal cactuses.



Artwork around Project Youth Green was largely done by students.