



OAEC'S NURSERY A UNIQUE HAVEN FOR BIODIVERSITY

The [OAEC Nursery](#) expresses and embodies the importance of biodiversity, offering an invaluable resource to the public for securing future abundance in an era of dramatic climate chaos. The Nursery researches, hand-tends and provides a remarkable selection of perennial food crops and multi-purpose plants, including many rare and unusual medicinal and culinary herbs, habitat plants for pollinators, and ornamentals for drought-tolerant landscapes. Perennial plants give us food, fiber, dye, medicine, building materials and beauty, along with providing an array of ecological benefits for the health of holistic garden systems. OAEC's Nursery offers one of the most diverse collections of certified organic perennial plants to be found anywhere in California.



The Nursery's biodiversity traces its roots to OAEC's Mother Garden. In the late 1980s, the gardeners here affectionately started referring to our garden as the "Mother Garden" because of her abundant fertility and the fact that she was providing a wealth of seeds, plants, and wisdom to other gardens and gardeners - quite literally, giving birth to many daughter gardens. The Nursery is an expression of this legacy, offering our favorite varieties from the Mother Garden to other farmers and gardeners in our bioregion. Bi-monthly garden [tours](#) offer people a chance to see the plants in-situ, and our Nursery staff are experts on everything from plant propagation and selection to composting and water conversation in gardens. The Nursery is open to the public April through October on weekends.

OAEC & SOWING CIRCLE CELEBRATE 25TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY!



25 years ago in August 1994, seven people with a common vision collectively purchased the 80-acre land that OAEC calls home, founding the Sowing Circle, LLC as an intentional community, and setting-up the non-profit OAEC to conduct diverse programs around ecological literacy, social justice and the arts. Since then, Sowing Circle members have stewarded the land in partnership with OAEC, raising their families, and building their lives together. Despite many challenges, both the intentional community and the OAEC non-profit are thriving! In spring 2020, OAEC will fully celebrate our 25th year anniversary with a retrospective publication and a legacy giving campaign! *photo: 2019 OAEC Staff*

MOVEMENT BUILDING RETREAT FUND LAUNCHED

This year, OAEC began raising funds to subsidize key social movement networks and organizations to come to OAEC to do the transformative work of re-imagining and clarifying their mission, goals, narratives, and strategies to address this singular time in human history. OAEC has long been a place for retreat, deep reflection, integrated learning and strategic planning in the context of revealed nature and inspiring practices for how to live and labor in a more regenerative manner. With greatly enhanced facilities, deep and well-practiced participatory training pedagogy, and long-built relations with diverse movements, we are significantly expanding this work.

Yet many of our partner groups are grassroots, community-based organizations and networks with quite modest budgets who cannot afford our baseline rates, but who are doing some of the most impactful work we know of. We are committed to ensuring that our center be primarily available to these groups with whom we share values and strategies for achieving rapid social change. To make OAEC accessible to these groups, while remaining financially sound ourselves, we are raising money for an annual fund to enable us to offer subsidized rates to partner and allied groups. Below, you'll see



photo by Paige Green

just some of the incredible groups who came to OAEC this past year, most of whom OAEC subsidized out of our operating budget because we believe so strongly in the work they do in the world. We look forward to growing this fund and continuing to support social movement building for many years to come!

MOVEMENT BUILDING AT OAEC IN 2019

Below are just some of the remarkable groups OAEC hosted and collaborated with this year.

Climate Justice Alliance - [CJA](#) unites communities most impacted by climate change to articulate, organize, and realize a transition towards an ecologically, economically and socially just future. CJA convened a Just Transition Finance retreat at OAEC with their member groups to explore decolonizing relationships to capital, debt, and money, to orient members to non-extractive finance, and to provide concrete financial skills and innovative funding practices to establish and support self-sustaining Just Transition projects.

Break Free From Plastic - [#Breakfreefromplastic](#) is a global movement envisioning a future free from plastic pollution by bringing systemic change to the entire plastics value chain, focusing on prevention and effective solutions. A group of US [#BFFP](#) campaigners, including OAEC staff, convened for a Culture Hack workshop to articulate an environmental justice-centered, integrative narrative strategy to continue winning against plastic production and pollution.

Daily Acts - OAEC again hosted and led a Resilient Community Design tour and workshop for the initial gathering of this year's cohort of the [Daily Acts Leadership Institute for Just and Resilient Communities](#). The Leadership Institute is an experiential learning program that inspires, empowers, and connects leaders across Sonoma County to create equitable, thriving, and climate-resilient communities.

Causa Justa :: Just Cause - [CJJC](#) is a multi-racial, grassroots organization that builds community leadership to achieve justice for low-income San Francisco and Oakland residents, provides tenant rights advocacy and information, and fights campaigns to win immigrant rights and housing rights, as well as builds a larger movement for societal transformation. CJJC held their end of year retreat at OAEC.

CA Water Solutions Network - The [Water Solutions Network](#) supports leaders committed to solving California's most pressing water management challenges. OAEC hosted the first network cohort and gave an extended tour of our on-site Conservation Hydrology demonstration projects.

MOVEMENT BUILDING CONTINUED

FracTracker Alliance - Providing timely and provocative data, ground-breaking analyses, maps, and other visual tools to help advocates, researchers, and the concerned public better understand the harms posed by hydrocarbon extraction on communities across the US. [FracTracker Alliance](#) held a strategic planning meeting at OAEC with their staff. The meeting agenda was co-designed and facilitated by OAEC staff.

ETC Group - [ETC Group](#) monitors the impact of emerging technologies and corporate strategies on biodiversity, agriculture, and human rights. OAEC hosted and participated in a narrative strategy workshop facilitated by the Center for Story-based Strategy with activists from around the globe on how to creatively and effectively push back against the emerging and problematic gene drive technology for pest control.

Zero Waste Communities - Convened by the [Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives \(GAIA\)](#), this strategy meeting, facilitated by OAEC staff, brought together a group of leading non-profit recycling centers, local government representatives, and NGO advocates to share and collaborate on innovative strategies towards moving their communities towards Zero Waste goals.

Ceres Trust - [Ceres Trust](#) provides grants that support healthy and resilient farms, forests, and communities, and the ecosystems upon which we all depend. OAEC hosted the Ceres Trust team, along with some of their core grant partners, for a planning retreat.

Eco-Ministry Intensive - Religious leaders, chaplains, and spiritually-grounded professionals from across the US gathered at OAEC to explore embodying a faith-based activism rooted in a commitment to protect the sacredness of the Earth in a time when the call to ministry is being challenged by the anxiety and unrest of disruption, injustice, and uncertainty. The Eco-Ministry Intensive was a collaboration between [Ecology of Awakening](#), [The Chaplaincy Institute](#), and the [Riverstyx Foundation](#).

Health Care Without Harm - [HCWH](#) is an international organization that works to transform health care worldwide so that it reduces its environmental footprint, becomes a community anchor for sustainability, and a leader in the global movement for environmental health and justice. OAEC hosted the Global HCWH staff, based all over the world, as they strategized to lead the global sustainable health care movement.

Bay Area Land Justice Convening - A group of Bay Area organizations - [Sogorea Te' Land Trust](#), [The Cultural Conservancy](#), [People of Color Sustainable Housing Network](#), [Movement Generation](#), [Sustainable Economies Law Center](#), and others - asked the question "what if we organized a multi-day strategic convening to seed a collective 100-year vision for land justice in the Bay Area?" That question led to a powerful gathering at OAEC to deepen relationships and create long-arc visions.



photo by Paige Green

LISTENING TO THE LAND WITH THE CULTURAL CONSERVANCY

[The Cultural Conservancy \(TCC\)](#) is a native-led non-profit that works to protect and restore indigenous cultures, empowering Native peoples and tribes across Turtle Island (North America) and around the world in the direct application of traditional knowledge and practices on their ancestral lands. OAEC has been fortunate to host and collaborate on many TCC programs held at OAEC over the last 20 years, including TCC's Native Youth Guardians of the Waters Program, Native Foodways Program, and other Traditional Ecological Knowledge gatherings and workshops. TCC's President Melissa Nelson is also the Chair of OAEC's Board of Directors. After 33-years of TCC implementing their mission and growing their organization, TCC recently purchased a 7.6 acre farm right here in Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok territory of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria just outside of the town of Graton, quite near to OAEC.

TCC has a big vision for their land: to "create an Indigenous biocultural heritage oasis focused on the conservation and regeneration of Indigenous agriculture, Native science, and health lifeways." TCC reached out to OAEC early-on to draw on our deep bioregional knowledge and experience in facilitating the design of community-based land projects through our [Resilient Community Design](#) process. OAEC staff supported TCC in "reading the landscape" with many site visits as well as map and data gathering. Two TCC staff took our [Permaculture Design Course](#) and the TCC land was this year's course design project site, with over 60 OAEC students visiting the site to interview the TCC staff and create example permaculture designs in support of TCC goals. In mid-August, OAEC staff were invited to participate in the initial week of learning exchange and planning on the land with

TCC's staff, board, and extended community of indigenous cultural bearers. Participants stayed overnight at OAEC during the gathering as accommodations at the TCC site are very limited. Over the years ahead, OAEC will continue to support TCC's remarkable vision by sharing our Resilient Community Design methodology along with opening the doors of our site and other resources at their request.



ACCELERATING WOMEN'S CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

In recognition of the central role that women play in environmental and climate movements and the resources they acutely need to grow their impact, OAEC is proud to have partnered with the [Women's Earth Alliance](#) and [Sierra Club](#) to help develop the first ever [US Grassroots Accelerator for Women Environmental Leaders](#). The Accelerator supports 20 women leaders from the US and US Territories with skills, tools, and networks critical to transforming pressing environmental and climate challenges into scalable solutions for all. During the 4-month incubator, participants furthered their work on a community-based environmental project for which they are in a leadership position. OAEC staff were part of the design and facilitation team of the Accelerator. This mostly online program culminated in a six-day in-person retreat at OAEC, where participants shared knowledge and best practices on everything from leadership development, communications, and fundraising, to political campaigning, project evaluation, and hands-on experiential learning in water conservation and soil building. Above all, the most valuable outcome was the opportunity for deep networking, mutual support, and heart connection as the participants lead their communities towards a more just and sustainable future. The next accelerator will start in early 2020 and OAEC will continue to serve on the design team as well as host in-person gatherings.

BEAVER CAMPAIGN INCREASING PACE AND SCALE OF RESTORATION IN CALIFORNIA

As California's leading organization in the effort to rewild beaver and promote non-lethal beaver management solutions, the [Bring Back the Beaver Campaign](#) of OAEC's [WATER Institute](#) continues to successfully change perceptions and practices in watersheds and agencies across the state. Through tireless outreach, education, planning, implementation and policy change efforts, beaver co-existence and restoration is becoming an accessible, achievable, and climate-beneficial practice for landowners, agencies, conservationists, rangeland managers, and native California tribes alike. To continue to support beaver restoration planning at a scale hereto unforeseen in the state of California, the Beaver Campaign accomplished the following in 2019:

- Worked with partners at the [Environmental Protection Information Center](#) and the [Center for Biological Diversity](#) to draft a rule change petition to the California Fish and Game Commission that would mandate that California Department of Fish and Wildlife wardens across the state explore all possible non-lethal beaver coexistence practices first, before issuing a depredation permit when conflict with beaver arises. We will submit and advocate for this rule change petition in early 2020.



- At the request of the [Maidu Summit Consortium](#), worked with tribal citizens to integrate beaver stewardship into the restoration of Tásmam Kojóm (Humbug Valley), with the valley returned to native title this year through a historic reparations process after being owned by PG&E for decades. The Campaign made extensive site visits and used the Beaver Restoration Assessment Tool (BRAT) to provide observations and data to augment the Consortium's restoration planning process. We will continue to support the Mountain Maidu people repatriating beaver, a cultural keystone, to Tásmam Kojóm.
- Worked with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, [Point Blue Conservation Science](#), and local ranchers to integrate beaver restoration planning and implementation into rangeland management at [Divide Ranch](#) on the east side of the California coast range in Glenn County. The co-benefits of beaver to healthy rangelands and grass-fed grazing operations is heavily documented outside of California and the Campaign will use the positive outcomes of this case-study to expand beaver support within the ranching community here in the state.
- As a lead California partner, completed modeling for the California Sierra Nevada and Northern Coastal Range through the brand new California-specific version of the [Beaver Restoration Assessment Tool \(BRAT\)](#) model in partnership with Utah State University and the Nature Conservancy. Using BRAT, the Campaign piloted a study in the Desert Terminal Lakes region of California that utilized the model and bird surveys to identify high priority meadows where beaver-based restoration would restore meadows and recover willow flycatcher, a threatened bird species. With that model and study completed, the Campaign can now replicate this process towards recovering many other focal species such as Coho salmon and Steelhead trout.

WEEKLY GARDEN VOLUNTEER DAY TRADITION THRIVING



Every Wednesday, we connect people with soil and seed in our 45-year old organic gardens through our weekly Wednesday [Garden Volunteer Day](#). The gardens have hosted a weekly volunteer day open to the public for nearly 40 years, with the tradition preceding OAEC by the Farallones Institute, the previous organization on the land here. Hundreds of people each year from the Bay Area, Northern California, and around the world come to Volunteer Day to put their hands into our ‘chocolate cake’ soil, connect to humans’ ancestral relationship with our plant relatives, and learn from our garden staff about our holistic, bio-intensive gardening practices. Volunteers also work in the Nursery and support our seed exchanges by harvesting and processing seed each year in the fall. To nourish the volunteers, OAEC provides a delicious lunch using seasonal and unique ingredients from the garden. Many volunteers come back week after week, becoming expert gardeners in their own right. We welcome any and all to join us for our Volunteer Day, no sign up needed, from 10am-5pm every Wednesday!

COMPOST TOILET RESEARCH PROJECT WORKING TOWARD LEGALIZATION

All three different models of commercial-scale [compost toilets](#) are now installed into OAEC’s new guest housing and meeting hall. These include the American-made Phoenix and Clivus Multrum systems, as well as the Norwegian EcoTech Carousel system. The mantra of our project is to “satisfy both government and grandma.” In other words, compost toilet systems must be safe and manageable from public health and land use perspectives, and they must also provide a pleasant user experience so that wide-scale adoption is possible across all backgrounds. Towards these goals, we are learning a lot about effective maintenance routines, troubleshooting system malfunctions, and creating best practices for social acceptance by our visitors. With every flush, we collect more “research material” from participants of OAEC courses and group retreats, yet we can only move as fast as the composters do their job, so we think we are approximately a year or two away from having publishable research data on the efficacy of the systems. In the meantime, we are working to complete model ordinance and regulatory language to pair with our research findings to present to counties and other jurisdictions in California for adoption, ideally to avoid more lengthy and expensive pilot research. We are also working with emerging compost toilet pilot projects at the [Pogonip Homeless Garden Project](#) in Santa Cruz and at [Urban Tilth](#) in Richmond.



OAEC staff showing the Clivus Multrum composting unit to the Urban Tilth community underneath the new meeting hall.