

# The Miller Herb and Food Garden

By Kaitlyn Riopelle

How would you like to step out of your office or health care facility into the sunshine to find a food forest and herb garden awaiting you? At the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine, that is now a reality. Together with Dr. Christina Pozo-Kaderman, medical students, and dieticians, the Facilities and Operations Department and the Office of Sustainability have helped create an oasis of healing and support for the Cancer Support Services' mission. For many people, being in nature is a great way to distress and can even be part of a healing process. At the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, patients and staff alike now have the opportunity to visit and cultivate a garden created for health, healing, and personal growth.



The Miller Herb and Food Garden is a culmination of years of effort and collaboration between various departments that started with the Miller Butterfly Garden planted behind the PAC building in 2018. The Miller Herb and Food Garden is full of plants with medicinal properties, including familiar plants like turmeric, mint, ginger, and aloe vera. The purpose and function of these plants are widely known—turmeric has anti-inflammatory properties, mint and ginger both have properties that soothe digestion and calm inflammation, and aloe vera is commonly used topically to treat mild burns and abrasions on the skin. But many plants have medicinal properties and health benefits beyond their typical applications. The garden provides an opportunity for these plants to be used to create community and support for cancer patients and their families throughout their treatment and survivorship. Therapy staff and dieticians at Cancer Support Services hope to foster a wide array of uses for the garden, even during our time at home and social distancing. This includes using herbs during cooking demonstrations which patients can incorporate into their daily lives, and even meditation and mindfulness. Dr. Christina Pozo-Kaderman, clinical psychologist and Director of Cancer Support Services says it best: “Gardening lends itself well to mindfulness and meditation. On so many levels the gardening for the patients I think will be

therapeutic. It's the connecting to the place that is healing for them and being able to plant something and so a part of them is there."



The Sylvester Cancer Center's Cancer Support Services offers services like nutrition counseling, exercise physiology and yoga, psychosocial oncology, pastoral care, acupuncture, massage therapy, pet therapy, and Arts in Medicine. Led by Leah Andritsch, Artist in Health and University of Miami alum, Arts in Medicine encourages patients to use creative expression to "help reduce feelings of anxiety, boost morale, and support wellness during their treatment and on through survivorship." "The garden is an opportunity to engage in some of these wellbeing modalities such as gardening, mindfulness in nature, and using the incorporation of plants for creative activities." says Andritsch.

Offering highly nutritious foods and herbs that are free and accessible to all will even help with the success of patients' treatment plans. Lourdes Lopez, first year medical student and one of the several students who helped to plant the garden, discussed the importance of a nutritious diet for the success of treatment. Lopez, who is also first-generation Cuban-American says, "Gardens in healthcare can potentially become a convenient way for patients to access certain foods, all while eliminating financial barriers." Located in front of the Calder Library, the Miller Herb and Food Garden is open to all and easy to visit. In addition, Dr. Pozo-Kaderman says, the garden helps "patients feel they are a part of the medical campus, can bond with each other, and give back."



Planting the Miller Herb and Food Garden has the potential to give so much back to so many—patients, their families and caregivers, and the staff that work every day to keep us in good health. "The Miller School of Medicine places a huge emphasis on student wellness and this project will give yet another opportunity for students (and visitors) to get outside, get some fresh air, and destress," says Adam Levy, president of the Student Green Committee at Miller and first year MD/MBA student. Adam Levy was also one of the several student and staff volunteers who planted the foundations of this herb and food forest, is thrilled to be able to share this space with the rest of the Miller community: "As the project grows, we hope students will use the garden as a space to relax while on campus. The garden is



strategically bordered by beautiful pollinator-friendly plants, attracting a variety of butterflies and even hummingbirds!”

Frances Kaniewski, Director of Facilities and Operations at Miller, and Teddy Lhoutellier, Sustainability Manager for the University helped coordinate the project. “I hope the garden will grow and serve many patients, staff, students and visitors in the future. We gathered the mind power and elbow grease of various departments to create something different. The concept of Food Forest is the same one we applied in the Sustainability Garden on the main campus. In a few months, when seedlings become shrubs and bushes, we hope that the experience of the visitor will be like entering a miniature forest, but with fruits, vegetables and herbs that can be harvested” says Lhoutellier.

The Miller Herb and Food Garden is one of many sustainable gardens and initiatives happening across the University of Miami. To learn more about how to get involved, visit [miami.edu/gardens](https://miami.edu/gardens) or email contact [green@u@u](mailto:green@u@u@u) for more information!

