

Urban farming takes root at SMU



Central Singapore District mayor Denise Phua and SMU president Arnaud De Meyer planting a nutmeg sapling on SMU grounds. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Public can join staff, students in tending to 270 sq m garden

By OLIVIA HO

IN THE concrete jungle of the city centre, two nutmeg saplings nestle in fresh soil on a slender plot of land along bustling Queen Street.

The saplings hark back to the nutmeg plantations of Bras Basah's history. They are also the first seeds of a new garden that will flourish at Singapore Management University (SMU).

The 270 sq m garden is part of SMU Grow, a new urban farming initiative launched yesterday that encourages gardening and sustainable living in the heart of the city.

Located outside the School of Accountancy and School of Law building, it will be sown with about 50 plant varieties, including basil, spinach, chilli and guava. The garden will be tended to by students and staff, and will be open to the public – who can also join in the gardening, or even help themselves to a few herbs.

The idea for the project came from organiser Bernadette Toh, director of the SMU Office of Global Learning. She was inspired by local food movement Edible Gardens to start her own herb garden nine

months ago. Soon, she was hooked.

“As I spent more time watching the plants, I began to realise the way they were growing was a reflection of the pedagogical style of SMU,” said Ms Toh, who is in her 50s. She decided to get the rest of the university gardening too.

“We want learning to be experiential, self-reflexive and mindful of the larger community,” she said. “This is not just a gardening project, but a way to take learning to a new level and be relevant to the neighbourhood around us.”

Produce from the garden's harvests will be used in community service projects such as the annual SMU Challenge, in which students deliver food and household necessities to the elderly and low-income families living in Queenstown.

Under the project, 30 planter boxes containing plants such as herbs will also be put up for adoption at \$80 a box. Staff and students can adopt and care for the boxes, which will be installed on the library balcony and at the administration building.

Some students welcomed the chance to get their hands dirty in a garden of their own. First-year economics student Mervin Soon, who is president of the university's environmental club, said he hoped the Grow project would be a refreshing experience for his peers. “They can use these areas as unconventional spots to study or hang out, and get to be close to nature,” said the 21-year-old.

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