

Cornell WeedWatch – A new citizen science program on urban weeds.

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Citizen science programs involve volunteers in collecting data, often from a large number of geographically dispersed sites, and in reporting those data to collaborating scientists. Such programs have the potential to provide both benefits for scientists who need data from multiple locations but may not have the resources to collect such information, and for volunteers and youth who learn from the data collection activities and from their association with scientists. WeedWatch is a citizen science effort designed to collect baseline data on the distribution of weeds in urban gardens, and to document weed control practices used by urban gardeners, many of whom are immigrants and ethnic minorities relying largely on non-chemical means of control. Youth, gardeners, and other volunteers can submit data about their garden, weeds, and control practices using online data forms (www.gardenmosaics.org). Instructions for conducting WeedWatch are included in the online Garden Mosaics program manual, and a series of online, illustrated fact sheets on weeds help to support the data collection and educational activities occurring in the garden. We plan to use the data collected through WeedWatch as baseline information to develop an urban weed management program. Knowing where various weed species pose a problem for gardeners and what control measures are being used, as well as having a list of sites where we might conduct further research, are essential in developing such a management program. The use of volunteers to collect baseline data is appropriate because any findings are preliminary and will be followed up on where appropriate, thus alleviating the need for a high degree of data accuracy. WeedWatch is a collaborative effort between weed scientists in the Cornell Department of Crop and Soil Sciences and the NSF-funded Cornell Garden Mosaics education program. Garden Mosaics seeks to connect youth and elders to investigate the mosaics of plants, people, and cultures in urban community gardens across the US and internationally. In addition to contributing to our weed management objectives, Garden Mosaics offers opportunities for weed scientists to promote weed education to teachers and other educators, youth, and gardeners, with an emphasis on underserved urban minority and immigrant audiences.