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“Native Plant Garden Cultivates Fort Defiance, Arizona”

FORT DEFIANCE, ARIZ – Navajo Forestry Department nurtures one of the most beautiful gardens near the capital of Navajo Nation, for nearly 30 years the ‘Native Plant Garden’ has flourished in Fort Defiance adjacent to the Forestry Administration Building.

In 1986, Amanullah K. Arbab, manager of Navajo Forestry Reforestation & Disease Control transported the first pine tree from the Chuska Mountains to the ‘Native Plant Garden’ in Fort Defiance, Arizona. Arbab arrived to Navajo Nation in 1979 with only \$0.10, with an educational background in Plant Pathology and Botanical studies from Purdue University, he gravitated to Navajo Forestry Department and began his adventure as a botanist among the Navajo people.



(One of the many greenhouses at the Native Plant Garden in Fort Defiance, Arizona, July 30, 2013. Photo by Geri Hongeva)

The greenhouses at the Native Plant Garden maintained by Navajo Forestry Department, provides one of the best botanical environments to grow healthy seedlings year round. Currently, Navajo Forestry

Department already has a commitment from U.S. Forest Service to grow over 31,000 seedlings to help with replenishing the Coconino National Forest.

Northern Arizona University also utilizes the greenhouses in Fort Defiance for seed processing and transported for planting. Arbab works with many organizations to encourage native plant growth across the southwest region, he is a firm believer in having a healthy garden to keep the mind, spirit and body healthy.



(Arbab shows off the beautiful Cliffrose growing near one of the first greenhouses, July 30, 2013. Photo by Geri Hongeva)

Arbab welcomes the community to visit the Native Plant Garden and thankful for all the Navajo elders who have guided him thus far. “I envisioned a garden for young people to come and think, to find peace. This garden is unique because it holds a Native American ambience as you walk around here,” said Arbab. Each plant is useful to Navajo, either for medicinal use, to eat, basketry, making weapons or ceremonial use.

“This is a Native Plant Garden built by Navajo people and Navajo companies, I simply wanted to put my knowledge about plants to use by establishing a garden for the Navajo People,” explained Arbab. I am originally from Pakistan, living here among the Navajos is quite rewarding and I enjoy my work everyday, this is my office, added Arbab.

With over 110 plants at the Navajo Forestry’s Native Plant Garden, visitors will be amazed to see the years of dedication and planning sculpted by the Reforestation & Disease Control for future generations to enjoy. Species include; Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir, Alligator Juniper, Apache Plume, Curleaf Mountain Mahogany, Russian Sage, Wolfberry, Santa Rosa Plum, Fendler Bush, Utah Service Berry, Aspen Tree, Wax Currant, Sumac, Sagebrush, Joint Fir, Yucca, Cinque Foil, Creeping Mahonia, Cliff Rose and Peteria Scoparia known as the “Potato Medicine.”



(A.K. Arbab talks about the stonework and masonry near courtyard, July 30, 2013 at the Native Plant Garden. Photo by Geri Hongeva)

Future plans include adding sculptures and gardening workshops for those seeking landscaping skills. Arbab envisions a small play area for school-age children near the courtyard, as he looks forward to the new school year and the many young people who will be visiting the Native Plant Garden, either for educational reasons or to simply find a quiet place to think, and meditate.

“The Native Plant Garden is a place where people, of all ages, can go and gain an understanding of all the native plant species that can be found on the Navajo Nation. Our main focus is educating our young people and anyone interested in learning more about each plant,” stated Alexious Becent Sr., Navajo Forestry Department Manager.

Currently, the Navajo Forestry greenhouses have grown over 4 million seedlings, which have been replanted to rejuvenate the forest around Navajo Nation and over 1 million native plants seedlings for coalmine reclamation. For more information about the Native Plant Garden, visit www.dnrnavajo/forestry or call 928-729-4007.

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