

UC SANTA BARBARA

# THE *Current*

October 3, 2007

Gail Gallessich

## **Fiesta Celebrating the Maya Forest as a Garden**

FIESTA EL PILAR, a daylong celebration with presentations about sustainable forest gardening practices (past and present) among the Maya, will be held at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History on Saturday, October 13. The event is open to the public and the suggested contribution is \$25.

The event organizer, archaeologist Anabel Ford of UC Santa Barbara, is responsible for developing an archaeological site and bi-national park in Central America that straddles the borders of Belize and Guatemala. It is a center for the study of Maya practices (past and present) and is open to visitors.

**Topic:** Sustainable gardening models of the Maya people

**What:** FIESTA EL PILAR 2007 - Includes music by El Son del Pueblo, food, displays and discussions

**Who:** Archaeologist Anabel Ford from UC Santa Barbara along with Beatrice Waight and Alfonzo Tzul, Maya forest gardeners from El Pilar, Belize

**When:** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, October 13

**Where:** Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Farrand Hall

**Background information:** Check out <http://www.marc.ucsb.edu/>, <http://www.espmaya.org/>, and <http://www.mayaforestgardeners.org/>

Celebration sponsors include: Casa Magazine, Fusano Specialty Olives, Landscape Art Design, Los

Arroyos, MesoAmerican Research Center UCSB, Our Daily Bread Bakery & Cafe, Pacific Travelers Supply, Santa Barbara Farmers Market, Santa Barbara Independent, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Sojourner, Solvang Pies, Teeccino Café, TintaLatina, and Via Maestra 42.

### **Background on 'The Original PermaCulturists'**

The Maya have long been exalted for their architectural and artistic grandeur. Towering temples dominating grand open plazas remain the enduring evidence of their power. Keen observers of natural phenomena, their priests studied the heavens, making accurate celestial predictions with precise mathematics. The Maya were also superb gardeners. They domesticated their wild jungles and tropical landscape and established their cities based on forest gardens.

This powerfully effective art, architecture, and agriculture were established without the aid of wheels and plows or draft animals, or even heavy metals like iron. The Maya were able to create a productive landscape that provided thousands of years of growth and development. This is supremely evident in the remarkably diverse and sophisticated cultivation of their landscape. Well-known plants that we rely on today were part of the Maya diet: maize, beans, and squash; basic vegetables such as tomato and chile; fibers such as cotton; condiments like allspice tree and achiote bush; and the important shaded delicacies of chocolate and vanilla.

Tailored to the local geography, the Maya cultivated the forest as a garden for thousands of years. Today the Maya forest is dominated by these useful plants, nurtured by traditional farmers of the region who grow a wide array of food, medicine, and spice as well as materials for construction and home utensils. Their forest gardens provide nourishment for their families, maintain the soil fertility, secure water, and clean the air.

### **What is a forest garden?**

A forest garden is an unplowed, tree dominated plot that sustains biodiversity and animal habitat while producing plants for food, shelter, medicine and profit.

Household refuse (compost), organic material (dead weeds), ashes from kitchen fires, and manure can fertilize the forest garden thus enriching the soil productivity without the use of chemically manufactured fertilizer.

Alfonso Tzul, a modern Maya agriculturalist and retired agricultural extension officer, describes how forest gardens came to be. "God created plants and animals and the world around us," he said. "Trees grew in the forest, seeds spread, birds sang, and animals flourished. All was already there. Man came along and preferred this plant, favored that seed, enjoyed those birds, and supported those animals, creating and using the forest as a garden to sustain those plants and animals.

The job of the forest gardener is to manipulate the forest by adding, removing and nurturing plants, to make sure that certain species grow where they will be most economically viable."

The complete schedule is below:

·11:00 a.m.

Fiesta Begins

·11:30 a.m.

Panel of Maya Forest gardeners and landscape designers.

1. Where did the ancient Maya live?
2. What are we doing to protect the Maya heritage?
3. How can we learn from the Maya Forest Garden?

·1:30

- 4:00 p.m.

Fiesta! Engage with the forest gardeners, panel participants, and those interested in gardening, archaeology, conservation, landscape design, the Maya, anthropology, permaculture, and sustainable models.

- Local landscape designer Lori Ann David will moderate a discussion of the tropical Maya forest past and present.
  - Archaeologist Anabel Ford will introduce the Maya world.
  - A panel will explore traditional landscapes.
  - Maya forest gardeners from El Pilar Belize -- Master gardner Alfonso Tzul, master gardner and traditional healer Beatrice Waight, and entrepreneur Lucas Medina discuss how they conserve and prosper in the Maya forest.
  - Explore how traditional knowledge can contribute to modern life and landscapes.
- 

## **About UC Santa Barbara**

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.