

PRESS RELEASE



U.S. EMBASSY MADRID, SPAIN

Summary of Event for Media Outreach

U.S. Embassy Madrid kicked off this year's People's Garden on Saturday, May 5, 2012, with a planting event that educated participants and united the community. Volunteer gardeners planted four plots, while learning useful tips about recycling, composting and smart gardening practices. The Embassy Madrid People's Garden follows the model of the White House "Kitchen Garden" championed by First Lady Michelle Obama. It is also part of the broader People's Garden Initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Mrs. Susan Solomont, wife of Ambassador Alan Solomont explained, "We were first inspired by First Lady Michelle Obama's work in making the White House Garden a showcase for organic, healthy lifestyles. Like the garden at the White House, we worked to make our garden at the U.S. Embassy Madrid a high impact garden in a high profile place as well."

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack began the People's Garden Initiative in 2009 as an effort to challenge employees to create gardens at public facilities in the United States and around the world. Over 700 organizations have since collaborated to expand the program and establish community and school gardens across the country. The USDA People's Garden initiative has three basic objectives. First, the garden should benefit the community -- in the case of Embassy Madrid, by creating a recreational and educational space. Second, it should be a collaborative effort, created and maintained by a partnership of individuals, groups or organizations. And finally, People's Gardens should incorporate practices - accomplished at Embassy Madrid by composting, implementing companion planting and collecting rainwater.

Embassy Madrid Agricultural Attaché Robert Hanson introduced the star of this year's Embassy Madrid Garden: an heirloom tomato plant. According to Hanson, "Our People's Garden planting event coincides with the 150th anniversary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which was founded when Abraham Lincoln was in the White House. In celebration of this milestone, we are planting seeds from the Abraham Lincoln Heirloom Tomato plant, which is one of the great classic tomatoes to survive the shift to hybrids in the 1940s." Hanson, who volunteers as the head of the

Garden Committee for the Embassy Madrid People's Garden, called cultivating the Abraham Lincoln Heirloom Tomato plant "a symbolic way to honor the visionary founder of the USDA and to educate people on the history of the organization."

Mrs. Susan Solomont noted this is only the start of the Embassy initiative. "We're hoping that our garden will set an example for others to plant urban gardens of their own in Madrid and all over Spain." As she worked alongside several children, she added, smiling, "The secret to the perfect garden is remembering to have fun."

Mrs. Solomont and the Embassy's Garden Committee plan to organize future educational activities such as maintenance, harvesting and cooking events that will involve as many members of the community as possible. Embassy Madrid Public Affairs Intern Brittany Miller, one of the volunteer gardeners, notes, "The more we involve the community, the stronger and happier our garden, and the benefits it provides, will be."

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