In the presence of sunlight, some of the trace gases emitted by the combustion of fossil fuels react to form ozone (O₃), the primary component of photochemical smog. Thus, it is not surprising that levels of O₃ in the troposphere have more than doubled since the onset of the industrial revolution. The oxidant properties of O₃ make it toxic for most living things. Humans are susceptible to respiratory effects at today’s ambient concentrations, and some common plants (including crops and trees) exhibit physiological damage and yield reductions at concentrations as low as 40 ppb. Today, background concentrations of O₃ continue to rise and are now above the threshold at which toxic effects can be observed in many plant species.

To educate the public on O₃ air pollution, we established the first St. Louis “Ozone Garden” near the Saint Louis Science Center (SLSC)’s James S. McDonnell Planetarium. The garden provides real-time measurements of O₃ concentrations as well as firsthand observations of the detrimental effects of this pollutant. Meteorological data, as well as the O₃ concentrations from the monitor, are recorded and publicly disseminated in near-real time via the Internet. Here we describe the project, its operations, and our goal to establish a network of these educational exhibits.

**DAMAGE TO PLANTS.** The most extensive research on crop loss due to O₃ was performed from 1980 to 1987 by the National Crop Loss Assessment Network (NCLAN). A. S. Heagle’s 1989 paper summarizes these studies, showing some plants (e.g., soybean, cotton, and peanut, which are dicotyledons, or plants with broad leaves) are more sensitive to yield loss caused by O₃ than other species (e.g., sorghum, field corn, and winter wheat, which are monocotyledons, or plants with narrow leaves, such as grasses). The impact of higher levels of O₃ on soybean yield is shown in Fig. 1 (findings from NCLAN and two subsequent studies). Furthermore, the observed O₃ trend in background concentrations (Fig. 2) in metropolitan St. Louis shows an increase of 7 ppb over the past 32 years. Such a trend is indicative of how O₃ has increased in nearby rural areas, where sensitive plants such as soybeans are grown. Thus, damage to sensitive plants should be observable over a typical growing season, either visually, or with respect to yield, or both.¹

¹ The value of the American soybean crop in 2012 was more than $40 billion, so even if yield is lowered by a few percent, the cost exceeds a few billion dollars annually, just for soybeans.
conceivable that no impact on crop yield would have been quantifiable until late in the twentieth century.

How ozone damages plants. Ozone is the most phytotoxic of all common air pollutants, and plant sensitivity and response to $O_3$ varies by species and plant population. After entering leaves through microscopic pores called stomata (singular: stoma), $O_3$ reacts with other molecules to form reactive oxygen species (ROS) and other toxic compounds. These compounds damage plants in a number of ways, including interfering with a plant’s ability to produce and store food; making plants more susceptible to diseases and insect infestations; and reducing reproductive capabilities, which translates into yield decreases. Some plants are more sensitive to $O_3$ than others, and those that exhibit specific and unique $O_3$-induced symptoms, which allow visual detection and measurement of $O_3$ damage on leaves, are considered $O_3$ bio-indicator species.

THE OZONE GARDEN EXHIBITS. The St. Louis Ozone Garden concept is a featured activity within Saint Louis University (SLU)’s Center for Environmental Sciences (CES). Other such gardens have been planted elsewhere (e.g., Great Smoky Mountains National Park; www.nps.gov/grsm/naturescience/pk-homepage.htm), and we designed our garden using plants and techniques they have found successful. The layout for our garden was based upon Ladd et al.’s Ozone-Induced Foliar Injury Field Guide, which provides detailed instructions for planting an $O_3$ bio-indicator garden. This guide, readily available to the public (from NASA, online at http://science-edu.larc.nasa.gov/ozonegarden/materials-guide.php), introduces the concept of the Ozone Garden to groups interested in environmental education. Our first garden was officially opened to the public on 5 May 2012 at the SLSC in St. Louis’s Forest Park. SLSC’s Youth Exploring Science (YES) program, a science enrichment program for historically disadvantaged high school students, was incorporated into the educational aspect of this Ozone Garden. The YES students learned about ozone air pollution and its effects on plants, and gained experience conducting plant science research.

Maintaining the garden in 2012 was challenging because it was one of the hottest summers in St. Louis history. Despite the near-record heat and drought-like conditions, the perennial $O_3$-sensitive plants established their root systems in this irrigated garden. In 2013, in addition to the SLSC site, we started two other garden exhibits in the St. Louis...

Fig. 2. Ozone trends between 1980 and 2012 in St. Louis for “dirty air” (red, influenced by local emissions) and “clean air” (green, representative of air entering the metropolitan area).
The perennial plants for the St. Louis gardens were started at the Missouri Botanical Garden greenhouses. Pennsylvania State University Emeritus Professor John Skelly provided seeds for the natural perennials common milkweed (Asclepias syriaca) and cutleaf coneflower (Rudbeckia laciniata). These seeds were originally collected by Skelly in Shenandoah National Park in Virginia from plants displaying symptoms of O3 damage. Kent Burkey, USDA-ARS/North Carolina State University, provided snap bean (Phaseolus vulgaris) seeds of two cultivars: one O3-sensitive and one O3-tolerant. In addition, in 2013, Skelly provided us with O3-sensitive potatoes (Solanum tuberosum), and Lisa Ainsworth of the USDA-ARS/University of Illinois donated O3-sensitive and O3-tolerant varieties of soybeans (Glycine max).

Ozone monitor and weather station. In 2012, O3 and meteorological data were collected from the flagship garden at the SLSC from 21 May to 14 November. In 2013, data collection began on 24 April at the SLSC, and on 10 July at the second Ozone Garden at Grant’s Farm; data from both sites are available through October 2013. A Davis Vantage Vue weather station (www.vantagevue.com/products/product.asp?pnum=06250) transmits temperature, humidity, pressure, rainfall, wind speed, and wind direction data with professional-level accuracy to an indoor receiver. The O3 monitor, Model 202 from 2B Technologies (www.twobtech.com/model_202.htm), enables accurate and precise (±1.5 ppb) measurements of O3 ranging from a few ppb to 100,000 ppb using UV absorbance at 254 nm. These data are also transmitted to a receiver and laptop computer indoors. Visitors to the garden can readily compare the current O3 concentration displayed on the monitor in the garden to the forecasted range, posted on a sign.

As part of the GO3 Network (www.go3project.com), the O3 and weather data are continuously uploaded to a website where they are available in real time and can be compared with other GO3 locations around the world. These measurements, with 15-min resolution, are available at http://go3project.com/network2/index.php/pages/ozone-data. During June, July, and August 2012, daytime O3 levels recorded at the SLSC garden were consistently well above 40 ppb, the threshold for visible leaf damage in many O3-sensitive plant species. For the summer of 2012, average daily maxima were generally between 70 and 80 ppb; on 7 days, peak 15-min values were more than 100 ppb. The highest concentration...
of 146 ppb was measured during the middle of the prolonged record-setting 2012 heat wave in late June and early July (Fig. 3). This uniquely high concentration of O₃ over such a short time was also captured by three of the 11 O₃ monitoring sites in the St. Louis metropolitan area.

However, to answer this question, we explain the most typical symptoms of O₃-damaged leaves, which are seen most often and across many species, including crops, trees, and native plants.

According to Innes et al.’s Guide to Ozone Induced Foliar Injury, the most common symptoms of O₃-induced leaf injury, and those that appear on many of the plants in our gardens, are dark red, brown, or black flecking or “stippling,” which is a result of plant cells producing anthocyanin pigments as an injury-defense mechanism. Stippling begins with a few small, angular shapes on leaves and can gradually progress, depending on the plant species and the amount of O₃ exposure, to prominent dark areas. Ozone injury symptoms do not appear on the veins of a leaf, and usually only occur on the upper leaf surface, leaving the lower leaf surface symptom-free. The symptoms are also usually more prominent on sun-exposed leaves.

Longer exposure to O₃ will cause increased damage so that older leaves of sensitive plants exhibit more advanced symptoms than younger leaves. As symptoms progress, leaves become increasingly chlorotic (yellow due to insufficient chlorophyll production) and necrotic (as cells die), and affected leaves often drop early from the plant. In a typical O₃-symptomatic plant, the stippling, chlorosis, and necrosis will progress from more severe in the older leaves near the bottom of the plant to less severe in the younger leaves near the top.

Ozone damage to milkweed (see Fig. SBI) can be readily identified because of the lack of damage present on the leaf veins and on the underside of the leaf. The top sides of the leaves display the characteristic dark stippling, while the leaf in the back is chlorotic and may soon drop. Ladd et al.’s field guide provides detailed explanations describing how O₃ damage can be distinguished from other types of damage on three different bio-indicator plants: common milkweed, cutleaf coneflower, and snap beans. As part of our education/outreach project, students monitor damage weekly on selected leaves and keep a record as the damage progresses.

The extreme heat in 2012 likely caused slower than normal plant growth throughout the garden. In September, after the heat wave broke, mild foliar O₃ damage was observed in the common milkweed in
the form of black stippling. According to Skelly, the provider of these seeds, the perennial species—common milkweed and cutleaf coneflower—often do not exhibit O₃ injury symptoms during the first year of planting. Indeed, in 2013, the first-year plantings of these perennials in the two new gardens did not display O₃ damage. During summer 2013, on the other hand, O₃ foliar damage on both the common milkweed and the cutleaf coneflower in their second season at the SLSC garden was widespread, despite much lower O₃ concentrations than those measured the previous year (see Figs. 4c, d). Both of these species provided an excellent educational exhibit at the SLSC in 2013.

OUTREACH VALUE AND FUTURE PLANS.
The Ozone Garden at the SLSC is highly visible near the entrance of the James S. McDonnell Planetarium. About 900,000 visitors attend the SLSC annually, and ~40% of them enter and leave through the planetarium. The garden itself is adjacent to a walking, running, and biking path in Forest Park, a 1,371-acre city park. Thus, casual visitors happen upon this Ozone Garden with no initial intent of learning more about science.

According to Susannah Fuchs, senior director of Environmental Health for the American Lung Association, Plains-Gulf region,

The Ozone Garden is a great part of the toolkit that we use for ground-level O₃ outreach and education through the St. Louis Regional Clean Air Partnership, and also for our own independent air pollution and lung health outreach. It’s very helpful to have something so totally visible and three-dimensional to which we can refer people. The plants and simple signs speak to people at least as clearly and much more succinctly than a brochure about air pollution and human health does.

The observations gathered informally over the first two growing seasons at the Ozone Garden will aid in the formulation of a new, much more expansive, SLSC exhibit. The new Ozone Garden will be included in a larger, permanent exhibition at the SLSC’s main building. This new exhibition, currently in development, focuses on agriculture and how science, technology, and global change influence the efficiency of food production. Being a more integral part of the SLSC—a popular destination for school field trips—we envisage establishing an educational and interactive exhibit modeled after the class trips to the ozone garden at the Appalachian Highlands Science Learning Center (www.nps.gov/grsm/naturescience/environmentalfactors.htm). Students would learn about O₃ air pollution in more depth and, in the summer and fall, help collect the O₃-induced leaf damage data.

Fig. 4. Differences between the (a) O₃-tolerant snap beans and (b) the sensitive snap beans are readily seen in these two photographs taken in Sep 2012. Foliar damage (black spots) on (c) common milkweed and (d) cutleaf coneflower observed in Aug 2013.

Fig. 5. Graph illustrating the difference between the percentage of leaves with O₃ damage and the bean pod dry weight from O₃-sensitive and tolerant snap beans grown in Aug–Oct 2012 at the SLSC St. Louis Ozone Garden.
This exhibition is anticipated to open in 2016. The SLSC and SLU will continue to collaborate to develop school programs and teacher workshops for the Ozone Garden in its new location. In addition, the SLSC will conduct structured evaluations of visitor engagement and interaction with the exhibit, and measure learning outcomes and their alignment with STEM education standards.

The Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, plans to replicate the St. Louis Ozone Garden model in its outdoor Science Park. The Franklin Institute Ozone Garden will open in 2014 and will primarily engage high school students. A project-based curriculum involving the garden will focus on global change, plant biology, atmospheric science, and experimental research methods. The Franklin Institute will also partner with scientists from Drexel University to expose students to research and analysis. The Institute also plans to install another Ozone Garden on the roof of the new Nicholas and Athena Karabots Pavilion, a 53,000-square-foot building addition.

In summary, the Ozone Gardens are being adopted by science museum venues around the country. The goal is to establish a network of these exhibits to help explain global change to the public in a tangible manner.

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FOR FURTHER READING


