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PLANT SCIENCE GARDEN
Saint Louis Zoo's Orthwein Animal Nutrition Center

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President & CEO

Five experimental garden plots help the Zoo in its research on healthy animal diets:

Wild produce garden

We compare the nutrients of cultivated fruits and vegetables with the nutrients of wild varieties.

We've found that wild figs have more fiber and minerals and less sugar than domestic figs, so they're better for orangutans and other fruit eaters.

Comparative garden

We're studying which grain varieties are the best for our Zoo herbivores (plant eaters). Zoo researchers will compare the nutrients in various wild grasses (like corn, sorghum and wheat) with the nutrients in domestic varieties.

Native prairie garden

We compare the nutrients in plants from native prairies with those in common types of hay.

Environmental garden

We study how various plant growth conditions like soil type, fertilizer, sunlight or rainfall affect plants' nutrient levels.

We even look at how different types of "zoo poo" fertilizers affect plant growth rates and nutritional values.

Adaptation garden

We grow plants with toxic properties so we can study how some animals can tolerate toxins from tannins and other chemicals. Tannins can be harmful because they interfere with the absorption of iron in many animal species.

Lemurs may actually benefit from the tannins in grapes, because they often get too much iron in their diet.

Browse grove

We study the nutrient benefits of various types of "browse" (leaves, bark, other tree parts). We want to know the best parts of trees to feed our many browsing animals, like the giraffe.