

Growing Gardens

By Arianne Fosdick, Volunteer Management Program Assistant

In April of 2008, I was hired by the Grafton County Cooperative Extension to fill a position whose title—Volunteer Management Program Assistant—I still can't recite off the top of my head. In laymen terms I am an assistant to two Cooperative Extension programs, the 4-H Youth Development and the Master Gardener programs, both of which bring me into contact with a comprehensive range of NH residents. Through this position I have facilitated 4-H after school programs, organized gardening workshops, and provided support from the wings as several gardening projects have unfolded.



One such hatchling from the Master Gardener end of things is the project of Master Gardener interns Marylena Sevigney and Bob Richer, who in collaboration with the Plymouth area non-profit organizations *Communities for Alcohol and Drug-Free Youth* (CADY) and the Whole Village Family Resource Center, began a gardening project last spring. When Marylena and Bob, armed with their initiative, energy, and gardening knowledge, approached CADY with their proposal they found a very receptive host. With the Master Gardener's mission of providing research-based gardening information and grass-roots enthusiasm and CADY's mission of promoting positive, healthy experiences for local youth, this is a glowing example of collaboration. Factor in the raised garden beds at the Whole Village Resource Center just down the road from CADY and you not only have a centralized location and the necessary infrastructure, but also another link to a vital community resource.

Despite the general hurdles of starting any gardening project—the belligerent weeds, the uncooperative weather, the swarming black flies—and the specific hurdles of starting such a multi-faceted project, Marylena and Bob were able to procure seeds, compost, and manpower enough to reclaim and plant two of the four beds, or about 1400 square feet. By dividing and repotting perennials from the other two beds, the group was able to sell plants at the first Plymouth Farmers' Market in the spring. Because CADY is a year-round program, students continue to show up for the weekly workdays, and at last report the gardeners were able to provide the neighboring Pemi Bridge House with salad greens, cucumbers, zucchini, and 5 quarts of snow peas. The garden will continue to provide summer vegetables such as peppers, tomatoes, broccoli, pole beans, and green beans. In addition, fall vegetables such as potatoes and rutabagas are planted.

I see the growth of this project, from vague idea to lush, green reality, as an apt metaphor for the actual planting of a garden: You decide what to grow, you put a tiny speck of seed in the ground despite all the risks, you water and watch, you doubt that anything will really happen, you're sure that nothing will happen, and then one day you look and you see something small and new and important and you know with certainty that you had a hand in its creation. My utmost respect goes to you, Marylena, Bob, the CADY youth, and the adult volunteers who have planted, tended, and believed in this garden from the start.

For more information on this and other Master Gardener or 4-H projects, please contact the UNH Cooperative Extension office at (603) 787-6944 or e-mail your request to arianne.fosdick@unh.edu.

Look for next week's column from Deb Maes, Extension Educator for Family and Consumer Resources.