

Master Gardener Collaborates with Enfield Shaker Museum

By Arianne Fosdick, UNH Cooperative Extension Program Assistant

Long time Grafton County resident and recent graduate of the UNH Cooperative Extension's Master Gardener program, Betsy Drinkwater, volunteered her time and green thumb this past season at the Shaker Museum in Enfield, NH.

The general idea of the Master Gardener program is to offer dedicated gardeners a comprehensive course taught by UNH specialists and professors, County educators, and other NH experts, so that they in turn can help disperse this information into their communities. After attending 15 weeks of classes covering a wide assortment of gardening topics, Master Gardener interns are required to donate 45 hours of their time towards a gardening project of their choice.

Under the guidance of herbalist and Shaker Village volunteer Happy Griffiths, Betsy focused on the production bed, a section of the garden that had lain fallow for the past several years. Though only a small plot in the 3,000 acres that the villagers once farmed (the bed is 30 by 50 ft), the production garden played an important role in both the Shaker communal kitchens and the village coffers. Vegetables and herbs were used for cooking and medicine, as well as traded and sold to contribute to the collective village income. Honoring this dual purpose, the current garden produces herbs and vegetables to sell at the Enfield Farmers' Market, and to use in food preparation for special events.

Betsy implemented a wide row, no till approach to the garden. Current research suggests that frequent tilling can compact the soil, bring dormant weed seeds to the sunny, warm surface, and disturb the micro-organisms and earthworms that are vital to soil health. Perhaps more representative of what growing food may have looked like before mechanized rototilling was possible, Betsy's garden had wide production rows with seeds spread out over 16-18 inch rows rather than the more common, single-file planting scheme. The thinking behind wide row gardening is that thicker plantings help shade out competing weeds, help retain soil moisture, and are easier to harvest and maintain. Betsy found this method to be very effective, and though she may revise what types of vegetables and herbs she plants next year, she will stick with this technique.

All the gardens at the Shaker Village Museum are labeled with plant types and varieties and are open to the public. The museum is open year round, with guided garden tours throughout the growing season, and festive events held throughout the year. Visit <http://www.shakermuseum.org/> for more information and a calendar of events.

For more information about the Master Gardener program and other UNH Cooperative Extension Programs, call the office at (603) 787-6944 or visit us on the web at <http://extension.unh.edu/Counties/Grafton/Grafton.htm>.