

Community gardeners persevere, donate hundreds of pounds of vegetables

By Rachel Stamieszkin

Despite rain, cold temperatures, mud, blight, huge numbers of snails and slugs, the community gardeners of Cape Elizabeth persisted and grew!

Most notable was the establishment of a new community garden on Spurwink Avenue developed on land generously donated by the Maxwell family. Master gardener and dedicated volunteer, Nancy Miles, led the effort with the help of the Maxwell Garden Committee: Marybeth Richardson, Wendy Garland, Melissa Kelly, Deb Cavanaugh, Alice Grant, and Lynne Holland. Once the 54 new plots were mapped out last spring, they were quickly reserved by interested gardeners who all pitched in to get the plots ready for planting.

In the meantime, the existing Cape Community Garden at Gull Crest continued to provide 38 plots to Cape residents, accommodating seven new gardeners this season.

Plots in both the Gull Crest and Maxwell gardens were dedicated to growing food for the Plant-a-Row-for-the-Hungry program. Food produced in these plots was donated to food pantries in Portland, South Portland, and Scarborough. In two plots at Maxwell's, coordinated by Marybeth Richardson and Wendy Garland, 89 pounds of fresh

vegetables were produced and donated, including 56 pounds of tomatoes alone! At the Gull Crest garden, Judy Simonds and Rachel Stamieszkin coordinated four plots, with the help of many volunteers, which produced 175 pounds of vegetables which were donated to the Scarborough Food Pantry.

The Plant-a-Row-for-the-Hungry project, active at the Gull Crest Community Garden since 2003, and at Maxwell's beginning just this year, is a nationwide effort, developed by the Garden Writers Association to encourage gardeners to grow a little extra food and donate it to local food banks that serve the homeless and the hungry in local communities. Since 2003, the Cape Community Gardens have donated over 2,000 pounds of fresh vegetables to local food pantries.

Participating in the Plant-a-Row-for-the-Hungry program is a very rewarding experience and gives the community gardeners another opportunity to commiserate about garden problems such as blight, squash beetles, snails and slugs. They enjoy the camaraderie and make new friends while watching the progress of new families of killdeer nesting in the garden, and blue birds in nearby boxes each year.



Harvesting tomatoes for canning

From field to table: Cape Farm Alliance teams up with Community Services

By Louise Sullivan

For many, the thought of "putting up a can of tomatoes" is a daunting prospect. Master preserver Beth Richardson and master farmer Penny Jordan from the Cape Farm Alliance are not daunted. The pair teamed up with Community Services After School Adventures to offer a three-week class for 7- to 12-year olds, teaching some basics about harvesting produce and the home-canning method. Ten enthusiastic girls signed up for the adventure.

Some, like Rosie Stevens, already have an interest in cooking and are baking at home with help. Rosie was very glad to have the chance to expand her skills. "I wanted to take this class when I was in fifth grade, so I was excited that I could sign up now that I'm in sixth."

In September, on successive Wednesday afternoons, the girls met at Jordan's Farm after school to harvest fresh vegetables. Jasmine Haines, who comes from a farming family in the County, walked the girls out into the field with their "chopping lists." They learned how to spot and pick ripe tomatoes, the difference between parsley and basil, and how to harvest beets, carrots, onions, and eggplant. They also picked flowers and spotted butterflies.

Meanwhile, Beth Richardson picked up a canner donated to the project by the Maine Cooperative Extension Master Preservers and readied the Community Services kitchen to accommodate the 10 chefs who would meet on Friday after school to chop, mix, cook and can their harvest. Beth says it was great to watch the girls sample unfamiliar vegetables, like beets, and discover that they loved them.

On the last Friday, Rosie and her sister Anna had just finished canning pizza topping, while Brittney Newman and Lily Mackenzie were sampling tangy salsa. They said they chopped and squished "tons of tomatoes" as the main ingredient and were happy that "it actually tastes good!" Taylor Young and Midori Kwan had used the extra tomatoes to make tomato juice.

The class was a big hit! Parents have been asking Beth for the recipes, which will be posted on the Cape Farm Alliance Web site. Penny and Beth are both happy that young Cape residents have had an opportunity to explore one of our oldest farms and to experience the thrill of bringing the fruits of the field directly to their dinner tables. Beth will teach one more class in December to learn about making jams and jellies from blueberries, strawberries and other fruits.



Photo by Steve Simonds

From left, Steve Parkhurst, Judy Simonds, Tina Harnden and Rachel Stamieszkin pose together by the Brussels sprouts about to be harvested for a local food pantry, just before putting the gardens to bed for the season.



Participants in the canning class show obvious pride in their product.



Kathleen O. Pierce, ABR
Associate Broker
Relocation Specialist
(207) 799-5000 ext.116 BUSINESS
(207) 232-4030 CELL, (207) 799-9226 FAX
kathleen.pierce@nemooves.com



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