

Growing a Healthy Community Through Gardening

Food insecurity and food deserts are a common problem plaguing most urban areas. Topeka is not exempt. But through Snap-ed (food stamps) and Shawnee County Extension resources, Topeka is fighting back.

In February, 2016, K-State Research and Extension in Shawnee County, began the Shawnee County Community Garden Network. There are numerous community gardens in the county all acting independently and many struggling to stay on top of the numerous challenges faced by all. By networking, Shawnee County Extension

serves as a clearinghouse to field questions, give advice and connect individuals with gardens meeting their needs.

Most community gardens wither on the vine for lack of volunteers dedicated to the cause. It takes a minimum of 10 very active, committed volunteers and a strong leader for a community garden to flourish. Most community gardens are affiliated with faith-based organizations. Some donate produce to food banks or pantries. Others are solely for personal consumption. All require a lot of work.

Shawnee County Extension provides informa-



The Netreach Community Garden at 455 SE Golf Park Blvd.

tional workshops on Community Gardening, as well as a wealth of information on gardening issues. Through the Extension Master Gardener program and Parks and Rec., Shawnee County, working hand-in-glove with Topeka Common Ground, has grown and distributed dozens of plants to area community gardens.

There is also a hope of establishing a Master Gardener Demonstration Community Garden in one of Topeka's food deserts where produce will be grown and distributed to local food pantries while helping educate the public on the how-to of community gardening. Nutrition education and cooking classes are also planned at the demonstration garden, because growing one's own food is known to encourage healthier eating habits.

Persons interested in more information on community gardening should contact Brenda Jarboe, Community Garden Networking Coordinator at Shawnee County Extension, 785-232-0062 ext. 113 or brendajarboe@ksu.edu.

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