

Improving Our Community Through Horticulture

By Brenda Jarboe

We all became Extension Master Gardeners for different reasons, but common to us all is our thirst for knowledge. Another commonality is our dedication to community volunteerism. Our mission statement: “Improving Our Community Through Horticulture” binds us as one group striving to improve Topeka and Shawnee County in numerous ways but always grounded in horticulture.



Final distribution: Nearly 90 pounds of produce delivered to I-Care Food Pantry on Oct. 19.

If you are looking for a committee that makes an undeniable impact on our community, please consider helping the Community Gardening Committee feed Shawnee County’s hungry. This year, our small but mighty group grew and harvested more than 325 pounds of produce donated to eight different organizations: **Blessing Boxes, Catholic Charities of Northeast Kansas, East Topeka Senior Center, I-Care Food Pantry, Topeka Rescue Mission CaRE Program, Topeka North Outreach, Valeo, and Westside Baptist Church Fresh Food Pantry.**

We gave away 218 pounds of tomatoes, 52 pounds of peppers, 36 pounds of sweet potatoes, 20 pounds of miscellaneous vegetables and numerous quarts of Farmers Market Salsa and other prepared recipes used in SNAP-Ed and EFNEP nutrition classes. These numbers do not reflect the quantities of vegetables spontaneously “donated” to hungry walkers along the Shunga Trail.

Twenty-eight was the inaugural year for our Demonstration Community Garden. I want to thank everyone on the Community Gardening Committee and a few who aren’t. Gary Sims and Wayne Stander were always there with both brawn and brains. This garden would have failed the first time the tomato stake and string section collapsed without the brute strength those two used to set it to rights. I don’t remember a time Gary was unavailable to help and Wayne was almost always right there alongside him. And it was Wayne who fought the winds, rain and sleet covering our sweet potato vines, so they wouldn’t freeze, and eking out the last of our tomatoes and peppers for donation.

Pat Wilson was always armed with the proper garden tools and energy to get the job done. Diana Hershberger was an invaluable resource for both knowledge and old carpet to line our paths. She often worked alone because she couldn’t join the group due to conflicts with her teaching schedule.

Clardy Vinson worked hard whenever he was available and brought years of insight to the garden. Lisa Martin got down and dirty more than once helping mulch or maintain the garden. Sherry Holmes and her truck ruled the day we put the garden to bed. She hauled and unloaded two and a half pickup loads of pulled pepper plants and tomato and sweet potato vines to the Shawnee County compost dumpster. We would have been buried without her.

And I must mention Ed Dillingham and Leroy Russell again, without whom we would not have had a garden. True to his word, Ed showed up in May with his tiller to break sod and churn two 60-foot by 4-foot beds in the earth and then stayed around to help unload three pickup loads of 30-year-old composted cow manure hauled in from Leroy’s pasture.

We learned a lot (what to do and what not to do), grew a lot and donated a lot. It was a very successful first year.