

DIGGING IN

At Troy Community Gardens
Madison, WI

GARDENING IN THE PRAIRIE

By Rex A. Owens

Sun Prairie is located ten miles northeast of Madison and was settled by Charles Bird in 1839 then incorporated as a city in 1958. The folks of Sun Prairie have been progressive for years pioneering traditional neighborhood development rather than suburban sprawl. The Sun Prairie Community Organic Garden is celebrating its tenth year. The garden started in 1999 with 48 plots has grown to 140 plots today. It is centrally located on Linnerud Street across from Sheehan Park in a bright sunny area.

The garden is sponsored by the Sun Prairie Youth and Families Commission and the Sun Prairie Garden Club. The garden has two plot sizes 18' x 24' and 9' x 12'. The annual rental fee is \$25 for the large plot and \$12.50 for the half plot. The City Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department handles both the administrative duties and care of the garden. Applications are taken in March each year and the garden opens between April 15 and May 15 depending on our Wisconsin spring. Gardeners must apply for a plot, which is assigned on a first come first serve basis, each year. The bylaws of the garden require 'responsible gardening' meaning respecting the gardener next to you, planting tall plants in the center of the plot to prevent shading and allowing room for spreading plants. Gardeners are also encouraged to "Plant a Row for the Hungry"; donations are accepted by the Sunshine Place (local food pantry).

Organic is defined as not using pesticides and herbicides which is strictly enforced. If gardeners need assistance, staff from the UW Extension are available to give advice on how to organic garden. Leaf compost is delivered to the site and both water and electricity are available for gardeners. Biodegradable mulch such as compost, leaves and straw are acceptable while carpet mulch is not allowed. The city supplies leaf mulch for gardeners to use. Fall clean up must be completed by October each year then the entire garden is plowed by local farmers.

WORK DAY

SATURDAY
August 15
9 AM -12 NOON

If it is raining on Aug. 15, the work day will be changed to Aug. 16, at the same time.

Hnub ua haujlwm pab dawb yog 8/15/09, 9 a.m. txog 12 teev tavs, yog los nag muab pauv rau 8/16/09 tib lub si-jhawm.

Día de Trabajo

El Sábado 15 de agosto
9 am -12 medio día
Si llegara a llover el 15 de agosto, el día de trabajo será cambiado para el día 16 de agosto a la misma hora.



— continued on page 2

DONATE YOUR EXTRA VEGGIES TO A GOOD CAUSE

Dear Troy Community Gardens,

What would we do without fresh vegetables?

We are fifth and sixth graders from Falk Elementary School Safe Haven Summer program. We are hoping to collect fresh vegetables to donate to Madison food pantries. We are doing this because we want to give back to our community. We understand the importance and necessity of eating fresh, local vegetables. All families deserve to eat fresh vegetables and should have access to them. People don't just want canned food they want all kinds of food. We are asking for Troy Community Gardeners to donate any extra vegetables they may have. Please help us accomplish our goal of serving and providing for families who receive food from our local food pantries.

The dates that we will be collecting the vegetables are Monday, August 10th, and Tuesday, August 11th. On Monday we will have a cooler next to the shed for vegetable drop off from 2:00 pm until 7:30 pm. On Tuesday we will be at Troy Gardens from 1:15 until 2:45 so we can take donations at that time as well. If you have questions or would like more information please e-mail our service learning coordinator, Jenny Smith, at jsmith2@madison.k12.wi.us

Thank you very much.



Do not leave hoses in paths after you use them. Coil them up below faucets.



Tsis txhob cia txoj hlua yas dej nyob ntawm tej kev lossis ntawm yus thajteb thaum siv ywg dej tag. Thov muab kauv tso cia rau ntawm tus kaisdej.



PRODUCE THEFT REPORTED AT TROY

Several gardeners have reported theft of produce from their garden plots. This was a significant problem in 2008, and it appears it continues to be a problem. Items reported taken include onions from more than one plot and up to two dozen garlic plants from one plot. Eight signs have been posted throughout the garden in English, Spanish and Hmong that state "We work very hard on our gardens, please don't take our food, violators will be prosecuted."

Please take a moment to get to know your garden neighbors. In the past, we have found the best way to deal with theft is to know who gardens around you. When you see someone who doesn't look familiar, ask him or her if they garden in the area. Many people will leave when confronted with a simple question such as this. Unfortunately, contacting the police isn't effective unless the person is caught in the act. Therefore, we encourage you to look out for each other, and hopefully we'll reduce the problem through a community effort.

Gardening in the Prairie *continued from page 1*

All gardens have their stories and the Sun Prairie Organic Garden is no exception. One person has planted flowers in the shape of a star to honor her son serving in Iraq. Young adults performing community service installed mulch pathways in the garden. Each year the local elementary schools rent plots to teach children where food comes from and introduce them to gardening early in life.

There is a waiting list of more than ten gardeners so they are considering expansion next year. The new plots will be for gardeners who want to have perennial crops such as strawberries. Organic gardening has a strong foundation in Sun Prairie with a plan for growth in the future.

Rex Owens and his wife, Lynette, are regular volunteers for and supporters of Community GroundWorks.

AREA COMMUNITY GARDEN LEADERS MEET

On Saturday, August 1, garden leaders from 19 different community gardens throughout the area gathered at Sheboygan Community Gardens to share their experiences running community gardens. Chris Brockel, Manager of the Food and Gardens Division at Community Action Coalition, kicked off the meeting by giving an overview of area community gardens. The Madison area now has 42 community gardens, up from just 23 gardens in 2002. There are now 25 acres of garden plots as compared to 17 in 2002. Over 1700 households now have plots, up 70% from around 1000 households with plots in 2002. Troy represents 195 of the households gardening in 329 plots on approximately 3.5 acres.

Participants were asked to share with the group a “burning” question they had about running a community garden. Responses included how to enforce volunteer hour commitments, how to handle theft of garden produce, how to effectively communicate with gardeners who speak many different languages with many different cultural backgrounds, how to deal with abandoned plots and plot monitoring in general, as well as issues related to starting a new community garden. Oh yes, and what to do about potato beetles!

A panel of four experienced garden leaders answered these burning questions with input from other leaders in attendance. As you can imagine, many community gardens share similar challenges, with some impacted more than others depending on size and gardener demographics. For example, Eagle Heights has a tremendous amount of turnover due to the fact they rent many of their garden plots to University student families. The 84 garden families at Sheboygan Community Gardens speak 14 different languages with 29 of the 84 families stating English is not their primary language. Some gardens struggle with issues such as whether they will be able to continue to garden on their existing land. Can you imagine if all of sudden Troy Gardens was told they could no longer use the land to garden because the land is being redeveloped. Fortunately, we don't ever have to worry about.

One result of the meeting was the group recommended Community Action Coalition set up a community gardener listserv that would be open to any area community gardener to join. This listserv would be for gardeners to ask questions to other area gardeners regarding topics ranging from how to start seeds to how to handle potato beetles to when to plant a second crop of beans. Information on how to join the list will be made available in the near future.

Overall, the meeting was very useful to those who attended. We learned of an interesting way to monitor plots from the Eagle Heights leaders. They assign a “jury” of gardeners at each work day to monitor plots and report those that need attention. One person contacts the gardeners and reports that a “jury of their peers” identified their plot as needing attention. The Eagle Heights leaders reported it's been very successful for them. These are the types of issues all gardens deal with and the leaders meeting is a great forum for sharing the success stories. Thanks to Sheboygan Community Gardens for hosting the event and thanks to the Community Action Coalition staff and others who helped put together another great event.



**Emma Gavin,
Reindahl Community Gardens**



**Pictured left
to right:**

**Garden
Leaders
gather**

**Panel dis-
cussions**

**Sheboygan
Community
Gardens**



Upcoming Events

Community Gardens Work Day*

Sat., Aug. 15, 9 am - 12 noon

CAC Community Gardens Bike Tour with the Mayor

Sat., Aug. 29, **9 am** - Meet at Hammersley Community Garden, next to Falk Elementary School at 6120 Hammersley Road. For more information, contact Nicole Craig at 246-4730 ext. 208.

Composting Workshop at Troy Community Gardens*

Sat., Sept. 19, 9 am - 11 am

Community Gardens Work Day*

Sat., Sept. 19, after Composting Workshop

Community Gardens Harvest Festival*

Sat., Sept. 19, 12 noon - 3 pm

*For details about these events, please call the Community GroundWorks office at 240-0409.

BOOK DISCUSSION AND POTLUCK AT TROY GARDENS

As part of **Go Big Read**, the University's very first community-wide common book program, Community GroundWorks and Lakeview Branch Library will host a potluck and discussion of Michael Pollan's **In Defense of Food** on Wednesday, September 23, from 6-7 pm at Troy Gardens. Discussion co-leaders will be Katie Scharf, neighborhood librarian, and Claire Strader, farmer for Troy Community Farm (and White House Farmer!), who brings her personal perspective as an urban organic farmer. Copies may be reserved by contacting any Madison Public Library or stop in at Lakeview Library and tell them you are a part of the Troy Gardens' discussion group. Frugal Muse bookstore will also stock copies. Join us at beautiful Troy Gardens with a dish to pass, a place setting and your opinions of the book. In case of rain, we will meet at the Lakeview Library in the Northside TownCenter. Call Katie at the Library, 246-4547, with any questions.

DON'T FORGET TO FILL OUT SURVEYS

The Equipment Subcommittee has placed several of the new Fiskars tools in the garden shed along with the surveys we'd like you to fill out after using the new tools. Please look for the new tools in the shed and give them a spin. We've had several surveys completed, but we'd like to provide Fiskars with as much feedback as possible, Look for the blank surveys just to the right as you walk in the shed door.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR SEPTEMBER 19

Composting Work Shop, Gardens Work Day and Community Gardens Harvest Festival

Oh please don't let it rain on September 19! This is a common refrain running through the heads of the planners for September 19 at Troy Community Gardens. Not only had this date been set aside for our annual Harvest Festival and regular September work day, it has also become the date for our Composting Work Shop. The details for all three events are listed below. If you can assist with the planning of the Work Shop or Harvest Festival event, please contact Jill Schneider at 241-1821 or schneiderjill@charter.net.

Composting Work Shop 9 am

Taught by Joan Laurion & Pahoua and Mai Thao. Gather near yellow shed.

All Troy Gardeners can earn volunteer time by attending the Composting Work Shop

Regular Work Day after Work Shop

Tasks to include picking Mendota Orchard apples for Harvest Festival.

We'll try to squeeze in other work day tasks between events

Harvest Festival 12 noon

Cider pressing with antique cider press, potluck and door prizes! Gather near yellow shed and bring a dish to pass.

Family and friends welcome