

WINBURN GARDEN OF EATIN'

Sustainable Communities Network

By Jim Embry

From a longtime vacant lot in the Winburn neighborhood, a Garden of Eatin' is emerging literally out of the ground. Begun last fall and located at 1169 Winburn Drive next to the Community Action Council, the Winburn Community Art Garden is a collaborative effort between the Community Action Council, Russell Cave Elementary School, Sustainable Communities Network, the Northeast Lexington Initiative, neighborhood residents and support from various other groups. Children and adults are working side-by-side to create a beautiful space that nourishes the mind body and spirit, respects diversity, and is fun!

Art pieces can be found throughout the garden on our painted raised beds, garden-sign and numerous recycled objects. All artwork and structures were completed using found objects as we stress the need to recycle and reuse to our youth (and ourselves!). Our beautiful mural is the product of the UNESCO Art Miles Project coordinated locally by Jarah Jones and our native plants were furnished by Shooting Star Nursery. We received pavers from our kindred friends of the Dunbar Memorial Garden and placed these around trees to use as raised beds for spring bulbs.

The Winburn Community Art Garden is very much part of the national urban gardening movement that strives to reclaim empty lots, restore our health, provide a space for intergenerational and multicultural dialogue and appreciation and foster a much needed sense of human sacred connection with Mother Earth.

This spring we have had diverse folks coming to the garden from the Bluegrass Community and Technical College, UK Green Thumb, the Dunbar Memorial Garden, youth with drug offenses assigned by the court to do community service, people from the neighborhood, people originally from Egypt, Mexico, Africa and South America have all blessed our table. Young children are finding red wigglers or huge night crawlers and squealing with delight and discovery. Neighborhood residents who walk by are invited into the space linger, put their hands in the dirt and also find community.

A monoculture of simply green grass is fast becoming a symphony of color and size, a palette of different tastes and smells and a library of nomenclature and cultural expressions. Daffodils, hyacinths, crocuses and tulips planted last December are in bloom and are proclaiming that spring is here. Four weeks ago we planted snow peas and they're jumping like acrobats out of the ground. So far this spring we have also planted fruit trees, blackberry bushes, grapevines, strawberries, lettuce, cabbage, broccoli and different herbs. We are preparing space and for warm weather crops which will include a Three Sisters Garden, a Native American tradition of planting corn, squash and beans together. Of course with our Latino community friends cilantro, tomatillos and hot peppers will soon follow. Okra, collards greens, green beans and squash will soon be ready for the pot. I think Martha and the Vandellas would agree that it will be a joy to see all these plants "dancing in the streets" of Winburn!

The Winburn Art Garden serves as an outdoor classroom



and extension of the school learning environment for students at Russell Cave Elementary School. This past December I visited Alice Waters and the Edible Schoolyard in Berkeley California where the state law requires that every school must have a school garden that is integrated into the entire curriculum. Some states but not yet Kentucky recognize the importance of school gardens and outdoor classrooms to student achievement and mental well-being.

School gardens offer numerous benefits to children

School gardening has been shown to increase self-esteem, help students develop a sense of ownership and responsibility, help foster relationships with family members, and increase parental involvement.

School gardening promotes higher quality learning. Students tend to learn more and better when they are actively involved in the learning process

School gardening promotes higher quality learning. In a project that involved integrating nutrition and gardening among children in grades one through four, the outcomes went well beyond an understanding of good nutrition and the origin of fresh food, to include enhancing the quality and meaningfulness of learning.

School gardening enhances learning for all students. Children with learning disabilities, who participated in gardening activities, had enhanced nonverbal communication skills, developed awareness of the advantages of order, learned how to participate in a cooperative effort, and formed relationships with adults.

School gardening fosters parental involvement. Parents who are highly involved at school are more likely to be involved in educational activities with their children at home.

Diversity and Cultural Appreciation. Gardening can be an ideal vehicle for introducing elements of multicultural education. Gardening helps young people understand the

value of diversity by exploring historical contributions from cultures worldwide to what we eat today.

After gardening, kids possess an appreciation for working with neighborhood adults, and have an increased interest for improvement of neighborhood appearance

"Nature-deficit disorder is not an official diagnosis but a way of viewing the problem, and describes the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses. The disorder can be detected in individuals, families, and communities. The real measure of our success will not be in the number of programs created or bills passed, but in the creation of a new cultural atmosphere, in everyday life, that will make such decisions second nature—in every family, every school and every neighborhood."

—Richard Louv, "Last Child in the Woods"

School/ community gardens should be a no brainer. Our ultimate goal is deep cultural change, connecting children to nature, so that they can be healthier, happier and smarter. I think that the best hope for our species lies in learning new patterns of attention to each other and to the biosphere, patterns that grow out of curiosity and respect and allow for wonder and learning. ■

You can see more pictures of the Winburn Community Art Garden as well as other community garden projects at www.sustainablex.org. We meet every Saturday from 1pm - 3pm. and welcome volunteers. Friends of Winburn Art Garden are encouraged to donate funds, help write grants, bring veggie plants, trees and flowers and much more! For more information, contact: Catrena Lewis 859.294.5249, CLewis@commaction.org, or Jim Embry 859.312.7024, jgembr0@cs.com.