



Back 2 Nature



Community Garden Project 2009



Northeast Lexington Initiative



Sustainable Communities Network



Back 2 Nature Project at Winburn Community Art Garden 2009 Report

Northeast Lexington Initiative(NELI), Sustainable Communities Network

Back 2 Nature is a collaborative community program that involved Northeast Lexington Initiative(NELI), Community Action Council, Winburn Neighborhood Association, Russell Cave Elementary School, Sustainable Communities Network, LFUCG and many other individuals and community groups. The Back 2 Nature community garden project designed to give youth and the residents in the Winburn neighborhood a meaningful garden experience was begun April '09 and will conclude April 2010.(The Winburn Community Art Garden Project began November 2007). The Back 2 Nature project site was originally set for Wesley United Methodist Church on Russell Cave Rd. The Board of Trustees at Wesley UMC had initially given approval to use land behind the church parking lot as the site of Back to Nature project. However for various reasons that approval was rescinded by the Wesley UMC board.

Nevertheless Back 2 Nature found a new home and subsequently was re-located to the Winburn Community Art Garden at 1169 Winburn Drive home of Northside Community Action Council. While the Wesley site provided ample



land, it did pose problems with various aspects of accessibility. The Winburn Community Art Garden site however provides several benefits such as: 1) available water, 2) close proximity to neighborhood residents, 3) easy access by delivery trucks, 4) quick access to a meeting room, 5) quick access to storage for tools and supplies, 6) a community atmosphere rather than at a church, 7) steadfast

agency support and 8) a location that is centered directly in the heart of the community. This location provides an ideal environment for the overall success and operation of this project without taking away from any of the project objectives and outcomes. Back 2 Nature at the Winburn Community Art Garden has been an exceptional educational and collaborative experience for many residents, volunteers, organizations and especially youth. This location has provided gardening experiences for many residents, youth groups and organizations. Neighborhood residents have come into the garden on a daily basis to gather very local, fresh and nutritious food while also just sitting in the garden to enjoy the company of family and friends. Back 2 Nature has also been an inspiration to other neighborhoods, the topic of a short film documentary and has been discussed at national conferences.

Ella Wilson and Jim Embry served as the primary adult mentors for our Back 2 Nature Project along with support from Cathy Sutphen (Family Resource Coordinator at Russell Cave Elementary School), Miranda Hileman (Compton Foundation Fellow), Sherrie Muhammad(Malboro Park Community Garden, Roy Woods(Community Action Council), Cynthia Bryant(filmmaker w/LFUCG) and Carolyn Benford (Winburn neighborhood resident).

Back 2 Nature & School Garden Workshop



Adult and youth volunteers in the Back to Nature project were involved in the School Gardening training workshops held April 18 and June 12 that included classroom sessions and hands on demonstrations at the Arboretum. Back 2 Nature adult volunteers, Jim Embry, Miranda Hileman and Obiora Embry were the lead organizers and speakers for each School Garden Workshop. Back 2 Nature adult volunteers, Ella Wilson,

Cynthia Bryant, Karen Napier, August Mapp, Sherrie Muhammad, Eudocia Jones and her daughter, Genae Jones, all attended these workshops and were able to get information on all aspects of gardening, hot composting, worm composting, rain gardens and community involvement and resources. Eight (8) Back 2 Nature volunteers- adults and youth- participated in these two School Garden workshops and were better equipped to serve as adult mentors and leaders at our Winburn site.

Back 2 Nature & Leadership Lexington

The Leadership Lexington Youth Division chose to spend their day of service at the Winburn Community Art Garden and participated in the **Back 2 Nature experience**. On May 4 from 11 am to 4pm, 45 youth, 5 adult mentors, 6-8 neighborhood residents and Back 2 Nature adult volunteers interacted together. Some of the projects that day included:



1) **Mosaic Tile** - Using recycled ceramic tile pieces gleaned from the “garbage” headed to the landfill to make a beautiful mosaic tile board. These young folks demonstrated that what we call trash can become art. Using the theme of environmental connection the mosaic tile captured the image of flowers, the ground and the Sun. Many of these youth had never created a mosaic tile piece, but they caught on to the process very quickly.

2) **Rain Garden**. The youth worked to add plants, mulch and rocks to the existing rain garden. All of the youth were given an explanation of the use, the benefits of rain gardens, the EPA Consent Decree imposed on LFUCG, the Bluegrass Rain Garden Alliance and the encouragement to establish rain gardens at their schools, houses of worship and homes.



- 3) **Fruit Trees**. The youth planted vegetables, fruit trees, grape vines, raspberries, and flowers in the orchard and garden space.
- 4) **Murals**. Another group painted 3 murals that now hang on the Winburn Community Art Garden gallery wooden fence
- 5) **Painted self**. Some youth got carried away and coated their hands in paint to make hand prints and one student had the back of his hair painted to look like a ladybug.



- 6) **Rain barrels** were also painted along with explanations to the entire group about the use of rain barrels in water conservation



- 7) **Community involvement.** Neighborhood residents, Community Action staff, Back 2 Nature adult volunteers and fellow gardeners from Malboro Park and Green Acres Community Gardens also participated in this day long experience.
- 8) This Leadership Lexington Youth Division day of service with Back 2 Nature at Winburn Art Garden was filmed by Cynthia Bryant of LFUCG who is preparing a documentary on the community gardening movement in Lexington.

During our wrap-up discussion at the end of the day, the Leadership Lexington youth proclaimed that this

last session of their year- long study was “the best session of all”. They recognized that getting Back 2 Nature was important for our future efforts toward a sustainable community.

This hands-on session for the Leadership Lexington class of 2009 with Back 2 Nature was a continuation of an on-going partnership.

Particularly noteworthy, in 2008 we were invited to speak to the Leadership Lexington-Youth class, but without any hands-on experience. One of the students who participated in 2008, was very inspired by our presentation and used the inspiration as the impetus for further research and study. This student, Lucy Hartley- a student at Bryan Station High School, recently entered and won an essay contest sponsored by the Kentucky Council of Churches. Her winning essay described the framework for establishing a green school at Bryan Station High School. The insightful and comprehensive nature of this essay by Lucy reaffirms the understanding that these experiences can have a profound impact on our youth. Thus we are confident that the 2009 class of Leadership Lexington who participated in Back 2 Nature will also be inspired to become advocates for sustainability!



Compost Delivery

On May 12 our compost was delivered in 3 truck loads and this was also a time for kids to learn and PLAY. This mountain of compost was a perfect play area for the



neighborhood kids...and adults! We found large grub worms in the compost and this was a treat for all! 6-8 adults and 4-6 children worked over the next several days working to spread this mountain of compost around the garden area

Terrapin Hill Farmer

On May 19 farmer Pete Cashel of Terrapin Hill Farms and his helper came to plow the Winburn Community Art Garden and turn the delivered compost into the ground. Pete and his helper were able to plow the ground and compost quite well and prepared a very fertile garden to plant in. This was the first year that we had plowed the field, but we knew that the garden size needed to be expanded to provide even greater quantities of food for the Winburn community.



Shopping week

Cathy Sutphen of Russell Cave Elementary School, Nancy Peacock of Community Action Council and Jim Embry spent hours at Home Depot, Fayette Seed and Lowes during the 1st weeks of May shopping for the Back 2 Nature garden project. More than 200 plants, 6 fruit trees, several grape vines, blueberry bushes, packages of seeds, garden carts and tools were purchased for the expanded garden area for 2009.

Planting weekend

Saturday May 23 was designated as the first big planting day for the Back 2 Nature garden project. Organized by Cathy Sutphen, this planting day involved neighborhood residents, students from Russell Cave Elementary School, Winburn Middle School, Community Action Council staff and other volunteers. It was a fun and productive day for everyone involved. The weather was perfect. Water and snacks were provided. The dormant garden space was filled with the seeds and plants of new life and a bountiful summer experience!

Youth Green Corps & the Mayor's Summer Youth Program

In the spring of 2007 we organized the Youth Green Corps to provide a summer experience for youth to "green-ify" Lexington by planting trees, supporting community gardens, creating community art installations, painting rain barrels, painting and placing



garbage cans in the community and learning about the importance of sustainability. During the summer we were able to extend YGC by connecting with the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment. Six (6) young people were employed in this program, assigned to NELI to work 20 hours a week in the Youth



GreenCorps and were featured in the Lexington Herald-Leader a total of 3 times during the summer of 2007. These young people were able to touch the lives of many other youth and adults all around Lexington, worked in gardens, created art installations and recognized their role in changing their community. Through this 2007 YGC summer program we were far better able to envision the 2009 Back 2 Nature project and its connection to the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program.

Following this 2007 model of the Youth Green Corps we applied for this LFUCG Sustainability Grant and the Mayor’s Summer Youth Employment Program. We received the grant and were also assigned 5 young men who became the back bone of the Back 2 Nature project this summer. Ella Wilson was the primary adult mentor for these young men (Shaquille Williams, LeDarius Jackson, Joshua Holland, RaKing Young, Jonathan Gerton, Juantez Craig) who began their summer of work on June 22. The daily log report prepared by Ella Wilson on the summer experience of these young men has been previously filed with LFUCG and is included again directly below.

BACK-2-NATURE GARDEN TEAM ACTIVITY LOG (2009)

Report by Ella Wilson

June 14-16, 2009– Conducted job interviews for selection six young men from the Summer Youth Employment participants to make up the Back-2-Nature Gardening Team.

June 22, 2009– First work day: Orientation; reviewed tool usage; work rules and how to identify the different plants from the many weeds growing in the Winburn Community Art Garden; shown techniques of building and planting in raised bed garden beds.



June 23– Built and planted raised garden bed as part of the Senior Citizen Victory Garden Project. included cutting and trimmed over



grown bushes along Work fence line to assure garden would get enough sunlight.

June 24- North Branch Library – Research detailed forecast from weather.com and other forecast locations on the internet to find local weather conditions which would help TEAM plan weekly gardening chores.

June 24- Visited LFUCG Recycling Center on Thompson Road where citizens can get free mulch for their gardening projects. The tour of the facility was an important learning opportunity that showed TEAM that recycling of glass, cardboard and old Christmas trees helps our environment.

June 25- Visited God’s Garden so TEAM could see a large successfully managed community gardening project. The TEAM assisted in the weeding and composting task while visiting the Catholic Action’s section of God’s Garden.

June 26- Assigned areas of responsibility and instructed Team on how they are to care for the different variety of vegetable, plants and fruit trees planted within their assigned areas of the Winburn’s garden.



June 29– Reorganized/Changed weekly work schedule to 5 hours a day, 4 days a week (Mon., Tue., Wed., Thursday).



Trimmed over grown bushes along fence line and built raised bed garden boxes at Green Acres Park.

June 30 – July 1, North Branch Library, workers assigned research project to learn how to enhance growing potential of vegetables growing within their assigned garden sections. Shaquille Williams- watermelons, berries, herbs, squash, fruit trees and peppers; LeDarius Jackson- green beans, corn, herbs, fruit trees and eggplants; Joshua Holland- tomatoes, melons, fruit trees and corn; RaKing Young- cucumbers, corn, melons and okra; Jonathan Gerton- Tomatoes, cabbage and grapes; Juantez Craig- squash, tomatoes, greens, strawberries.

July 2- Weeded raised bed garden boxes at Marlboro community Garden. Filled raised bed garden boxes at Green Acres Park with compost and mulch then transplanted tomatoes and squash plants.

July 3- No work Friday due to Fourth of July Holiday.

July 6-7- Cleaned debris and trash from a vacant lot, on Pine Street, which is the future site of the Isaac Scott Hathaway Memorial Art Garden. Team spent the day working with Ms. Yvonne Giles an African-American historian, who shared with them many facts about famous Blacks that lived and worked in Lexington.

July 8- Garden Maintenance and Vegetable Harvesting at Winburn Community Garden and Marlboro Garden-In-The-Park (squash, bell peppers, greens).

July 9- Visited the newly established Worm Farm Composting Project which is housed at the Catholic Action Center's 7th Street location.



July 9- North Branch Library – Did research to find out more about vermiculture and vermicomposting techniques.

Vermicomposting is a technique of composting that utilizes various species of worms, specifically red wigglers, white worms, and earthworms creating the heterogeneous mixture of decomposing vegetable or food waste, bedding material to help produce worm casting which is a rich byproduct the worms produce. The castings are used and sold as a natural fertilizer.

July 13- North Branch Library – Research detailed forecast from weather.com and other forecast locations on the internet to find local weather forecast to help plan weekly gardening

work.

July 14- Visited London Ferrell Community Garden on East 3 rd. Street.

July 15- Planted, mulched, weeded and watered Winburn, Marlboro and Green Acres Gardens

July 16- Field Trip to Kentucky State University Agricultural Research Farm and Aquaculture Fish Farm.

July 20- Harvested squash and green beans at God's Garden.

July 21-22 Built raised garden beds and planted seedlings at Green Acres Garden-In-The Park Community Garden.



July 23- July 27-30 The TEAM spent the whole week performing a new weed control technique that uses newspaper as a weed barrier. Paper is placed around the base of the plant which is then covered with mulch. This is a much cheaper weed control process that works.

July 30- Last Work Day: On July 30, buses for the 2009 Lexington Community Garden Tour arrived at the Winburn Community Art Garden at about 5:45 PM. There was

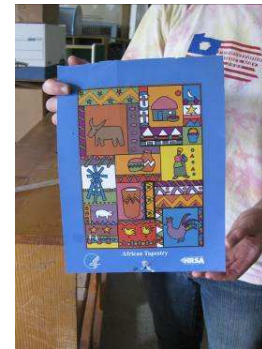


about 150 people trampling, touching and picking throughout our neat, clean, weed-free garden. The TEAM's hard work paid off! Everyone seemed to be very impressed with the hard work the young men of our BACK-TO-NATURE GARDENING TEAM put forward to help the garden grow and survive throughout the summer.

Besides their gardening skills the visitors were impressed with all of the colorful abstract sculptures and creative art work scattered throughout and around the garden. The tradition of the Art Garden is that each community group that contributes work is asked to leave a signature piece of art work to prove that they had a hand in helping to create the garden that will serve the community.



The BACK-2-NATURE TEAM is especially proud of their art contribution to the garden. Their contribution is an African Tapestry motif which adorns the top of the garden's picnic table. The table top mural depicts African farm life



and highlights some of the TEAM'S favorite vegetables they grew this summer in the Winburn Community Art Garden.

As another artistic gesture the TEAM placed police barricades around what was left the squash plants. The barricades got some inquisitive and puzzled looks. But, everyone understood and laughed when it was explained that what happened to the squash plants was a crime. The plot where flourishing, bountiful plants once grew is now a "crime scene" because of the damage the squash boring beetles do causing the plants to wither and die.



Back 2 Nature and Knowledge is Power

Knowledge is Power(KIP) is the summer enrichment program founded by Bettye Simpson and supported by Drs. Scott and Larkin as well as Calvary Baptist Church. KIP was featured in the Herald-



Leader this summer in an article written by Merlene Davis. Bettye Simpson, a longtime friend, heard about our efforts to expand community gardening around Lexington and wanted her 15 youth to also have an experience to garden this summer. After an initial meeting Bettye wanted her KIP youth to work in the Back 2 Nature project once a week. KIP began their experience on June 22 and worked in the garden every week..sometimes twice a week..until the week of July 27. Very much like the TEAM Youth Green Corps young men mentored by Ella Wilson, KIP also had 4 young women from the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program working with them for the summer. These young women, along with the 15 younger children and Bettye Simpson had a wonderful, nutritious and fun summer experience in the Back2 Nature program. Some of their experiences included:

- 1) constructing raised beds using hammers, nails, 2x6 wood
- 2) painting all the raised beds constructed



- 3) preparing the raised beds with cardboard and mulch
- 4) filling the raised with compost and dirt and getting to use shovels, rakes and wheel barrows.
- 5) Planting vegetable and flower seeds, grape vines, trees



- 6) Working on murals, painting tomato sticks and other art projects
- 7) Working with the young men working with Ella Wilson
- 8) Being able over the summer to harvest and eat directly out of the garden many vegetables that they

had actually planted. The KIP youth and adults tasted and took home: peas, tomatoes, greens, lettuce, peppers, squash and flowers.



- 9) One day we made flower jewelry from many of the flowers growing in the garden. These flowers some



that they had actually planted several weeks before, became necklaces, ear rings and bracelets that gave the youth a new understanding of how to connect and go Back 2 Nature.

- 10) Cynthia Bryant of LFUCG filmed the KIP youth during their summer days spent in the Winburn Community Art Garden.

The young men under Ella Wilson's mentorship(TEAM) interacted often with the youth from KIP and served as mentors for the younger children. This experience of older teens working with and teaching the younger children was a reaffirming sight to the important role that gardening can have in teaching leadership, citizenship and creating community.





Many of the youth in KIP had never used shovels or garden tools, had never planted a garden and had never eaten vegetables directly from a garden. This was an unforgettable experience for the entire KIP family and provided an opportunity to truly get youth Back 2 Nature!

Back 2 Nature and KET film documentary

The University of Kentucky Agriculture



Communication department and KET approached us about filming a short documentary about community gardening at the Winburn Community Art



Garden. We of course said YES! On July 22 the film crew arrived at the garden with camera and equipment to get us on film. Our young men(TEAM) as well as other children and adults in the Back 2 Nature project were present in the garden that day. Some of the youth were interviewed and all of them were filmed working in the garden. In August the edited segment, Grown in Kentucky, was shown on KET for several weeks. We were given a DVD copy of the interview for our use.

Cynthia Bryant Documentary



Cynthia Bryant videographer for LFUCG also came to the Back 2 Nature project at the Winburn Community Art Garden numerous times during the summer to film a documentary about community gardens in the Lexington neighborhoods. Her documentary has not been completed.

Back 2 Nature and Art in the Garden

Sometimes when working in the garden in middle of summer when the plants are all growing quite well, there just isn't much to do. Back 2 Nature faced this question this summer...and our answer was: "kids can always do ART!" Planting, harvesting, cooking and preparing food are definitely all art forms, but we also included other forms of creative expressions. We included several art projects this summer designed to give the youth a fun and educational experience. Our art projects in Back 2 Nature included the following:



- 1) African Tapestry picnic table
- 2) Colorful ceiling fan
- 3) Wooden faces
- 4) Tree of Life
- 5) Mosaic Tile
- 6) Painted tomato sticks
- 7) Murals
- 8) Painted Rain barrels



Many of our art installations were made from wood, tile or other materials that were “gleaned” out of construction dumpsters and trash piles from city sidewalks. The youth learned how to turn “trash” that was destined for our landfill into art, useful garden containers and compost bins. Back 2 Nature encouraged the use of art as an important experience to teach, inspire and fun-ify ecological literacy. These young people in the production of art installations also learned how to use power tools, hand tools, how to mix concrete, apply construction methodology and creative expressions.

Back 2 Nature and Garden Tour

On July 30 the 3rd Annual Lexington Community Garden Tour involving 150 people and 6 gardens sites was held. Jim Embry and Miranda Hileman, Back 2 Nature adult mentors, were the primary organizers of the Garden Tour and selected the Winburn Back 2 Nature project as the first site on the tour. Neighborhood children and parents came out during the week before the Garden Tour to enhance the look of the Winburn Art Garden grounds.



Plants were mulched to cover weeds; wood sculpture pieces were constructed; benches were painted, trash was picked up and the grounds looked vibrant for the Garden Tour.

The Winburn Community Art Garden, site of Back 2 Nature, was a BIG HIT! with all the tour participants. Many people left very inspired to begin their own art garden. The speakers at the Winburn Art Garden included: 1) the Back 2 Nature TEAM members & Ella Wilson, Winburn resident Carolyn Benford, Roy Woods(Community Action Council) and Jim Embry.

Back 2 Nature and Compton Fellow Miranda Hileman

Miranda Hileman a recent graduate of Berea College and a 2009 Compton Mentor Fellowship recipient decided to spend her year working in Lexington with Jim Embry as her mentor. She moved to Lexington in June and joined the existing Back 2 Nature project. She has spent more than 100 hours working, planning, harvesting and teaching in the Back 2 Nature project.



Back 2 Nature and Family Court

The Winburn Community Art Garden and Back 2 Nature project has been a place where youth going through Drug Court are assigned by Judge Lucinda Masterton to do community service with Jim Embry. This gardening experience has been so positive for the youth and parents that the Family Court has now set up a garden on Nelson Ave just for youth from Drug Court. So Back 2 Nature has inspired other agencies to include urban gardening in their programming where previously it did not exist.

Community Action Council Advisory Committee

Roy Woods, director of the Winburn Community Action Council has the Winburn Community Art Garden project on the agenda at each monthly meeting of his advisory committee. In these meetings we have evaluated the summer Back 2 Nature garden experience, shared favorite stories and have made plans for next spring. Members of this advisory committee include: Roy Woods & Felisha Stone of Community Action, Vanessa Sanford of Winburn Neighborhood Association, Isabel Taylor of LFUCG, Cathy Sutphen of Russell Cave Elementary School, Ledetta Grimes; Diana Acevedo; T.C. Johnson of Winburn Middle School, Tom Blues of LFUCG City Council, LFUCG Police officers and others.

The Learning Center is the new alternative school in Fayette County that provides educational environment for youth at risk. Ron Chi, the new Learning Center principal had previously served as principal at Winburn Middle School for the past few years and this summer observed the youth working in the Winburn Community Art Garden and Back 2 Nature. He said his observations of this garden further inspired him to include a garden and outdoor classroom at The Learning Center. One student who worked in the Winburn Art Garden this summer is also a student at The Learning Center and helps provide leadership around gardening at his school.

Back 2 Nature and national conferences

The experiences of the Back 2 Nature project located at the Winburn Community Art Garden was the primary content of conference workshops on *Art Gardens* given August-American Community Garden Association and October-Growing Food and Justice by Jim Embry that inspired conference participants.



Back 2 Nature and a westend garden

Officer Michelle Bean of the LFUCG Division of Police contacted us to discuss a community garden in a vacant lot on the corner of Georgetown St and Roosevelt Blvd. Officer Bean said she was driving in Winburn with her husband (also a police officer) and noticed the Winburn Community Art Gardens and Back 2 Nature youth working in the garden. She thought a similar project across from Douglass Park would be good for the neighborhood. After our conversation she planned to present the idea of a garden to the neighborhood association in October. So Back 2 Nature continues to inspire other neighborhoods to create garden.

Back 2 Nature In Summary During the late summer, Winburn residents enjoyed a bumper crop of tomatoes, lots of corn and okra, different kinds of peppers, green and yellow squash, cabbage and broccoli, watermelon and cantaloupe, greens and herbs, and green beans. People who did not know each other worked in the garden, became friends and enjoyed the edible bounty. Agencies worked together to provide food, environmental education and lasting friendships. Young people stepped into garden for the very first time, ate veggies right off the vine, learned about environmental stewardship, created art and had lots of FUN! Our experience with Back 2 Nature has exceeded our expectations.



The project objectives are:

- Cooperation and collaboration between community organizations which enhances our sense of community
- Outdoor physical exercise will provide improved health and well being
- Connections with nature through gardening improves our knowledge of and sense of responsibility to the environment
- Eating Fresh vegetables and fruit will improve health and nutrition
- Intergenerational communication and shared work will build stronger nurturing relationships
- Youth involvement and leadership will build greater confidence, self-esteem and work ethic
- Multicultural interactions which will improve cross-cultural understanding, communication and connections
- Access to fresh food from the garden will reduce the family food budget and allow people to stretch their shrinking dollars
- Creative use of green space can serve as a catalyst for future neighborhood and community development
- Youth participation through creative use of leisure time can reduce crime

All of our objectives have been realized as we continue our work over the winter.

Back 2 Nature over the fall and winter. Back 2 Nature will extend over the fall, winter and early spring. This fall we will continue with our garden cleanup and putting the garden to rest. In January we will begin seedlings inside in preparation for spring planting. By February we will begin spring planting of peas, greens and other cool weather crops

This report Submitted by Jim Embry, Northeast Lexington Initiative, Sustainable Communities Network November 10, 2009

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