

**Cultivating Community: Starting a Congregation-Sponsored Community Garden**  
*A Come to the Table Event*  
Saturday, November 3, 2007  
St. Francis UMC, Cary, NC, 1-4pm

**Lucy Bradley, State Extension Office**

*Why Community Gardens?*

- Nutrition
  - If kids grow it, they will eat it
  - Increased consumption of Fruits and Vegetables
- Health
  - Skills in food preservation, eating balanced meals
  - Increased physical activity
- Entrepreneurial skills (if the garden has a stand or sells at a farmers' market)
  - Job application, interviews
  - Following directions
  - Marketing
  - Customer service
- Income
  - Dollars saved
  - Increased income
- Community Development
  - Physical safety
  - Community involvement – building partnerships
  - Working with different organizations
  - Personal connections
  - Personal satisfaction
- Horticulture and knowledge skills
  - Nature, predator/prey, how the world works, nutrition
  - Water conservation
  - Leadership skills, responsibility, planning
- Life skills
  - Self-confidence, nurturing, patience, pride, etc.
  - Observation, curiosity
- Environment
  - Promote earth stewardship
  - Gain knowledge
  - Reduce urban heat
  - Stormwater

*Overall, then, community gardens represent a powerful tool through which we can work together to address critical issues in meaningful, measurable ways.*

## **Chris Burtner, Covenant Community Garden, Fuquay-Varina UMC**

Covenant Community Garden is a startup project. It's about 1 year old and at the end of 1<sup>st</sup> growing season. It is about 1/10 of an acre, which used to be the ballfield. A local farmer plowed the fields. The garden received a layer of leaves that was donated by the city, which was spread in order to make an organic layer for the winter.

Layout: tall deer fence (over 7'), raised beds, Lasagna gardening method for building the raised beds, kids made concrete stepping stones, compost piles, cross-shaped herb garden (built by the youth group). It is an organic garden (though not officially certified).

They practice drip-irrigation and use hand-watering as well. It has been very important to plant a lot of varieties, which not only increases the color and visual appeal of the garden but also allows them to take advantage of the beneficial relationships between some of the different plants. Also, this allows us to harvest for most of the year.

At the beginning, there was a lot of concern by the trustees about what this garden would look like. Now, many people cannot imagine our church property without the garden. It has been important from the start to involve the young people at the church. Preschoolers work in the garden – it's a very educational experience, and gets them to eat a lot of vegetables. It has been a huge success with the kids. They go home and teach their parents.

Members of the garden have compost buckets that they fill at home and bring each week to be used by the garden (from [www.freundcontainer.com](http://www.freundcontainer.com)). Also, the church has begun composting its material from meals, coffee grounds, etc. Members of the garden – volunteers who work on a weekly and/or monthly basis – take home produce weekly. In addition, any leftover food is donated to a local food bank.

The garden is managed by the garden coordinator. We are in the process of assembling a garden advisory panel, made up of people from the church, local business, nearby farms, etc. In our experience, envisioning and implementing a church project of this scale requires someone to “champion” the garden. Part of this process involves clearing up misconceptions about the garden, about church property, etc., as well as learning to negotiate the particular church “politics” of the local congregation.

## **Brenda Brodie & Jessamine Hyatt, SEEDS, Durham**

At the beginning, we set up a Board, made up of people in the community. We had originally wanted to have homeless people work in the garden. However, we were not really equipped to deal the complex needs of this community. So we shifted our focus onto education and youth. Now, we work with an after school program that includes a strong nature component and help with school work. We also have an established high school youth program called DIG (Durham

Inner-city Gardens), which runs its own “mini-farm” and sells produce at the Durham Farmers Market every Saturday.

At Seeds, we began with 2 acres, and also started lots of satellite gardens (churches, schools, etc.). We have found that to be successful, a community garden project needs that “passionate gardener;” otherwise the programs tend to fizzle. Right now, most of our focus is on the downtown site. We have many volunteer groups, from churches and schools especially. There is a lot of interest – now SEEDS is established and known in the volunteer community. This is different from a startup project/garden, which often has the challenge of getting enough volunteers to do the work. We have 2 yearly gatherings – one free, one for fundraising (with speakers).

We sell cut flowers; we’ve tested the soil. Organic, not certified. We follow permaculture policies – integrating landscape and people, sustainability:

- Everything works at least 2 ways
- See solutions, not problems
- Cooperation, not competition, in work, communications, not economics
- Work where it counts

We have a little greenhouse and hoop house. The neighborhood where we are located had lots of crime and thefts. This has been reduced somewhat, and we believe our presence has been a positive factor.

In addition to the market garden, we have community plots that are rented – 1 acre overall; all permanent beds with perennials, herb gardens, cut flowers, outdoor classroom, play area (grassy area), large walkways, places to sit. We want it to be a people-friendly space (wide aisle spaces between the beds, grassy play area, etc.).

The market garden is a mini-farm, used only by the DIG program. Teens take part in the interview process for the next class of the DIG program.

Q: How to get volunteers?

Table at events

List with volunteer placement organizations (in Durham, etc.)

Become a member of Earth-share

Q: How to protect from vandalism?

Don’t want to make it a fortress

Some vandalism may happen...

Motion-lights

Community involvement is key

We also have cooking classes, teach people how to cook things that they are not familiar with...

Q: What about trying to grow grains? Could be good for bringing people together!

## Question and Answer Session Highlights

Q: What is necessary? What must be avoided?

Need: Land, water, fence, electricity

5 year commitment to the piece of land

Someone(s) with serious passion – the “mad farmer”

Soil testing (pH), esp for urban environments

Avoid: Being too big to start with – ok to expand, need cover crops

Q: How does a garden work in different seasons? How does it affect with volunteers?

Enjoy seasonal variation in crops

“Four Season Harvest” is a book that offers good suggestions

In the cold, do construction projects, think like a farmer... Preserving (canning) the harvest

Q: What are some good gardening resources (books or Web sites) for our area?

Debbie Roos’s site [www.growingsmallfarms.org](http://www.growingsmallfarms.org) has a planting calendar and other information

*How to Grow More Vegetables in a Less Space Than You Ever Thought Possible* - is complicated but good

*Gardening Know-How for the 90’s* by Dick Raymond

*Lasagna Gardening*

Immigrants (Latino, Hmong, etc) often come from farming backgrounds and want to grow their own food, but don’t have land. They might trade a chance to work in the garden and grow some special crops in return for sharing some of their expertise.

Q: What is the focus of your garden? How has it changed the church/community? How do we reach needy people in places where the poverty is not very obvious?

Gardens do more than feed the hungry. They foster awareness; centering; connection to creation; remind us what we really need – food, connections to each other; seasons, create a positive environment; let us enter into a new relationship with the land, the earth, Creation; illustrate Biblical language (The Kingdom of God is a garden, Christ is a vine, seeds fall in good soil, etc.)

Using the “Just Eating” curriculum (available for free online) can be a good way to get your Bible Study group talking about these issues

Q: How do you talk with conventional farmers in the community if you are doing an organic garden?

The group can just decide not to allow pesticides if it wants, but should make that clear

Discuss and honor farming heritage, the spirituality of the land, the history of the farmers in the congregations

Find the common ground – which *is* the ground

Common respect for the land, and the appreciation for what you can grow on the land

Get away from a “right vs. wrong” – organic might be better for the garden because it uses more hands, is less expensive, lets kids play in the garden safely, etc.

See:

Camp Chestnut Ridge – a children’s church camp that is starting to adopt these methods  
([www.campchestnutridge.org](http://www.campchestnutridge.org))

Cooperative Extension – help on the technical side, a website that integrates these areas  
([www.ces.ncsu.edu](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu))

Come to the Table – has resources, a link to the Just Eating curriculum, a mailing list  
([www.cometothetablenc.org](http://www.cometothetablenc.org))