

Growing and Learning in the Worland Community Garden

Situation:

Several years ago a group of Worland residents established a community garden at one of the city parks. Initially it was a success and participants paid a small fee to rent individual plots for the season. However, after the second season people lost interest and the garden sat empty. A former Master Gardener brought it to the attention of the new Washakie County Extension Educator, Caitlin Youngquist, during her first week in the office and shared his vision of a research garden that could be used for local variety trials and demonstrations. The Worland City Council had already decided to remove the fence and plant the garden back to grass but with a promise to keep the weeds under control, Caitlin was able to reclaim the garden and establish it as a teaching and demonstration garden. Two thousand and sixteen was the second season of the Worland Community Garden under the management of Washakie County Extension.

Inputs:

There was some money left over from the previous community garden efforts that allowed for the purchase of seeds and supplies the first year. The project now relies heavily on donations of time and resources to continue. In 2015, the Big Horn Co-op donated a few dozen vegetable starts that they could not sell. In 2016, Enchanted Gardens donated over 100 vegetable and herb starts. This year the garden also received a new sign from the office of the UW Vice President for Governmental and Community Affairs. Other donations have included used hand tools, dripline, and a flowering crabapple tree and new wheelbarrow from the Worland Garden Club.

In 2015, labor was primarily provided by Caitlin, with some help from volunteers. Only a small portion of the garden was used the first year, but the seeds were planted and by the following spring several local community groups had expressed interest in participating. The staff and participants at The Lighthouse (local crisis prevention and stabilization center) were very involved in the garden this year, including planting, watering, weeding, and harvesting. Other groups who participated in garden activities included Big Horn Enterprises and OWL Unlimited (services for adults with disabilities), Washakie County 4-H, and Worland Middle School summer school students. Youth participating in the Youth Alternatives program (court mandated community service) also helped with garden tasks throughout the summer. Students from the Wyoming Boys School were a tremendous help with the larger projects.

Outputs:

This year the Worland Community Garden produced almost 3,000 pounds of vegetables that were donated to local community groups. Beneficiaries included the Washakie Ministerial Council food pantry, the Worland Senior Center, OWL Unlimited, Big Horn Enterprises, The Lighthouse, The Worland Youth Learning Center, the local nursing home, the library, and the UW Cent\$ible Nutrition Program (CNP).

Beyond food, the garden also produced many opportunities for youth and adults to learn about gardening, benefit from getting their hands in the dirt, and enjoy the satisfaction of contributing to their community in a meaningful way. The garden is a great classroom for youth and adults to learn both formally and informally. Formal educational programs included a hands-on raised bed construction workshop, filming several episodes for the From the Ground Up video series, 4H day camp, gardening programs for summer school classes, and field trips for the Worland Youth Learning Center.

Impact:

The food and lessons from the Worland Community Garden directly impacted hundreds of people in Worland and surrounding communities this year but there is only room to highlight a few of them here.

The staff and residents of The Lighthouse were very involved with planting, maintaining, and harvesting. Their Director incorporated garden activities into the regular program for residents and duties for staff. She also enrolled the staff in CNP classes and encouraged them to use garden produce in the meals they prepared for residents. The time spent in the garden has benefited both staff and clients and will continue to be a regular a part of their program in coming years.

The Lighthouse is an Adult Mental Health Crisis Stabilization Program. The benefits of participating in the Community garden were far reaching. We connected back with our community and other community resources that we initially were not aware of! We saved at least \$1200 in groceries and learned new ways of cooking and enjoying fresh produce!

- Sabrina Ochoa, Program Coordinator, The Lighthouse

The staff and volunteers at Big Horn Enterprises, which provides services for adults with disabilities, built and installed a wheelchair accessible garden bed this year. They regularly brought their clients to garden, and supplemented their meals with the vegetables they received throughout the summer.

“The [garden] had a big impact on Big Horn Enterprises this year. The participants and BHE staff planted and watered but the most exciting part of the experience for them was the harvesting. Volunteers brought produce to BHE all summer for the participants to enjoy for their lunch and flowers to make our facility festive. Participants entered vegetables and flowers in the Washakie County Fair, receiving a variety of ribbons, and cash prizes. Our most recent use of the garden harvest was painting pumpkins for our upcoming Halloween Party. We will continue to enjoy the harvest through November with potatoes for our Thanksgiving feast, and gourds for our cornucopia center piece.”

- Christie St Clair, Big Horn Enterprises



CNP classes in Washakie and Hot Springs County were enhanced by the use of vegetables from the community garden. Next year, this partnership will include working with CNP clients to harvest vegetables for their cooking classes, and learn about low cost gardening methods. The clients were excited to see what vegetables the instructor would bring each week!

Some of the things we were able to cook in our classes using the garden produce were Stuffed Baked Zucchini, Vegetable Frittata, Cabbage Burgers and Pumpkin Chili. In this series of classes the student's enthusiasm to try new recipes was bolstered by the use of garden produce that they were able to take home so they could repeat the recipe. One student enjoyed the Cabbage Burgers so much, she went home and made two batches with the cabbage [from the garden]. Another student loved the Baked Zucchini and repeated the recipe to share at a church picnic, something she would not have done before. These donations have truly inspired my students to try new recipes and incorporate more vegetables in their daily diet.

- Cindy Aguilar, CNP Educator for Washakie and Hot Springs County

Students from the WBS helped in the garden several times during the summer. They enjoyed the opportunity to work on a meaningful project and there were always opportunities to chat about their home life and educational plans while working. During one such work day, a garden volunteer brought a grill and the students harvested carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, peppers, and zucchini to go with their hamburgers for lunch.

The garden also benefited from the help of several youth enrolled in the Youth Alternatives Program who had mandated community service hours. Again, this was an opportunity to visit with them about some of their challenges and aspirations. Youth from the Worland Youth Learning center helped harvest and deliver vegetables to the Senior Center. The Worland Library, Worland Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center, and teachers used cornstalks, pumpkins, and gourds from the garden for fall décor.



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