MINNIE MILLER
GARDENER'S
CORNER

'People's Gardens'

USDA program focuses on creating public spaces to benefit communities

The first "People's Garden" was was established just more than a year ago at the United States Department of Agriculture headquarters in Washington, D.C., as part of a national initiative.

This spring, People's Gardens sprung up throughout South Carolina at USDA Service Centers in Bamberg, Barnwell, Colleton, Dorchester, Edgefield, Horry, Laurens, Lee, Newberry, Orangeburg, Spartanburg and Williamsburg.

Visit any of these local gardens and you will see how the various components have come together to help the community and the environment. Each garden differs in size, layout and content, but the basic principles are the same and each is meeting the three main goals set by the initiative:

- Benefit the community in multiple ways to include providing a public space for leisure activity, producing harvest for local food banks and creating a wildlife friendly environment.
- Be a collaborative between volunteers, neighbors and community organizations.
- Incorporate sustainable practices that nurture the environment.

The Barnwell garden, located at the USDA Service Center, demonstrates how a small space can be put to good use. Linda Pickering, administrative assistant, describes their garden as a trial garden project involving the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Barnwell Conservation District.

"It is a very small garden in our flower bed," Pickering said.

Despite its small size, their garden contains all the basics of the initiative and is benefiting the community.

Orangeburg County's People's Garden, located at the Bowman Community Center, is a joint effort between a multitude of community members. While some donated land, others donated time, money, supplies and support. Morgan Judy of Clemson Extension Service is one of the many adults involved.

"We have three 8-foot by 16-foot beds," Judy said. "FSA and Orangeburg County (with Councilman Johnny Ravenell's help) provided the funding, the Town of Bowman provided the space and the kids who are in my 4-H group helped plant and maintain the garden."

SPECIAL TO THE T&D

Youth volunteers have been a mainstay in Bowman's People's Garden. The Farm Service Agency and Orangeburg County (with Councilman Johnny Ravenell's help) provided the funding, the Town of Bowman provided the space and the kids in Clemson Extension Agent Morgan Judy's 4-H group helped plant and maintain the garden. Harvesting some of the produce are, from left, Purity Wilson, Zakirrah Dantzler and Tydreeona Dantzler. At right, the Barnwell People's Garden, located at the USDA Service Center, demonstrates the efficient use of a small plot of land.

The garden includes tomatoes, peppers, okra, corn, cucumbers, squash, watermelon, cantaloupe and sunflowers.

"The harvest was shared by the kids who helped maintain the garden," Judy said. "They have been taking the produce home to their families. One day we had a 4-H cooking lesson and used the tomatoes, peppers and corn from our garden to prepare a meal."

In the 2,500-square-foot garden behind the Bamberg USDA Service Center, they are picking cucumbers and squash. Pollinator plants planted around the garden attract beneficial insects. A micro-irrigation system demonstrates water conservation methods. Produce from the garden has been donated to the Barnwell-Bamberg Baptist Association's Food Pantry and the Blair D. Crosby Wellness Center.

T&D GARDEN COLUMNIST MINNIE MILLER

Bamberg USDA Service Center employees, from left, Kelli Brown; Chris Wallace, Bamberg County FSA executive director; and Wilfred Pace, NRCS supervisory district conservationist, lend a hand with the People's Garden plot behind their office.

Those involved in maintaining the garden have seen that "providing wholesome, nutritious summer vegetables to someone is a sure way to brighten a person's day and this says to them that there is someone who truly cares about others and what they eat."

To become involved in this worthwhile project, contact the USDA Service Center in your county.

More information about the People's Garden initiative can be found at www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden.

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