

Plant Exchange

A Summer In The Garden

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or let us know what you enjoy most about these plants and people who grow them. Contact news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson. See "Plant Exchange" blog on Facebook or www.brendakjohnson-plantexchange.wordpress.com

BY BRENDA K JOHNSON

The sixth season of Yankton community gardens has just closed. Thanks to the partnership of Healthy Yankton members and volunteers, and the City of Yankton, about 220 plots served local gardeners this season. Here and next Friday you'll see what a few gardeners said about their plots in mid July on a Saturday morning.

Thanks to them for sharing about their first gardening experience, about gardening skillfully and helping others and about the exquisite taste of growing one's own food.



COURTESY PHOTO

Jerry Hemmer and his wife eat salads from the garden in summer. Some of these didn't make it home last week.

Tomatoes For Tonight's Salad

Jerry Hemmer has had the same plot in the middle of the gardens near the entrance the past four years.

"I'm close to water and know the gardeners. We take care of each other's aisles. It's almost social. Whatever fruits and vegetables you get are a plus," Hemmer said.

He grew tomatoes, potatoes, peppers cucumbers and onions and harvested some Yukon Gold potatoes in mid July.

"This year I had to buy more (to plant). In the past, I've had leftovers for a second generation," Hemmer said.

"Today I've got way more cucumbers than I need so I'll give some to neighbors and I just gave

some to that gentleman. We eat what we can and give some away," he said.

Hemmer likes planting the same vegetables and fruits in the same spots: potatoes on one side, tomatoes down the middle, and cucumbers and onions on the other side.

"It's what we enjoy eating; lots of salads in the summertime. What's nice about this is I know we are going to have chicken tonight, and salad. I'll get tomatoes and cucumbers. Got onions the other day," he said.

"About a week ago the cherry tomatoes started in. I told my wife, 'I washed them off and ate them before I got home,'" Hemmer said.

Yankton Boys And Girls Club Plot

Emma Wagner is a traditional unit coordinator with Boys & Girls Club of Yankton. In "Positive Sprouts" program at Boys and Girls Club, she leads a group of youth that want to know more about gardening. This is a new project. They formed a garden club of eight or so youth that met this summer in their free time, and into the school year.

"We have a plot at the community gardens," Wagner said. "Positive Sprouts is a program to have an impact on youth. The program is measurable, so the youth took a test about gardening, plants and produce." They'll take another one later after harvest to see how important gardening is to them than when they first started.

They went to see the plot and pull early weeds. Back at the Boys and Girls Club, they decided what plants they wanted to grow. Then they found out what plants needed to grow.

"Then we planted them. Now we're weeding. We haven't decided what to do with the produce. That will be up to them. How they want the garden to look? It's completely theirs," she said.

Wagner takes four or so regulars to the garden twice a week in the summer. The club meets Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. The schedule changes after school starts. Mya is a seventh grader at Yankton Middle School and a garden regular.

"I water and pull weeds," said Mya. "We use a sprayer and start at the top and go down. We have tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, and carrots. The plants aren't too tall yet."

"We planted in June," Wagner said. "That was hard waiting for everything to grow. Then we had to look up what plants look like so we could weed the correct plants. Lettuce is growing (about 6 inches now) and we have a back room where we do 'Healthy Lifestyles' learning. We could try out the produce and let others try it too, if they want."

Mya hasn't had a garden before this summer. Her tip to new gardeners is "Come over once in a while to water and weed." See more about youth programs at Yankton Boys and Girls Club on their Facebook page.



COURTESY PHOTO

McDonald devised an irrigation system that required only one hose for watering his two plots. He wanted water spray close to the ground for less evaporation so he set up plastic tree irrigation pipe and about 12 inch Rainbird irrigation spray heads around the garden.

Duane McDonald's Yard-To-Garden Tips

Three years ago Duane McDonald started applying home yard success to two plots on the north end of the community gardens. His plots received full sun all day except late afternoon shade.

"Some were concerned about trees to the west, but morning sun is important to me. First year weeds were bad," McDonald said. "Now you don't see any; you keep pulling them. Once the gardens are open, I use grass clippings from my yard because I know it is weed free."

Various small animals feed on garden produce in open areas like the community gardens. McDonald put his homemade fence around his garden since the first year. It has been portable, easy to step over so no gate is needed and easy to store between seasons. Wood frames came from recycled wood when he replaced a deck at home.

"(Wood frame sections) were 8 feet long and 28 inches high, the width chicken wire comes in so you don't have to cut wire but in lengths," he said. He put

frame rectangles with chicken wire mats in place at his plots and secured sections together with flexible wire.

"I haven't had rabbit or ground squirrel problems," he said. Inside his fence grew tomatoes, acorn squash, lettuce, radishes and green peppers. He harvested some cucumbers, potatoes and onions by mid-July.

These days were hot and sunny. He figured out a system to irrigate plants, as they grew taller.

"I water every other day or so with one hose for an hour. At home I use this system with plants around trees. I got irrigation pipe you use with trees and put (about 12 inches tall Rainbird) heads around the perimeter and into the garden." The system slowed and distributed the water flow around the plants and the head sprayed low for less evaporation.

His tomato plants had plenty of space around them.

"First year I planted too many," he said. His sturdy tomato cages were about

five feet high and came from a roll of concrete reinforcement wire at Menards.

"One cage is 13 squares. Cages are held together with hog nose rings. I cut off part of the bottom square to make prongs that go in the ground," he said. He stored them in winter "as is" rather than taking them apart.

What did he get from gardening?

"It's fun. I'm an old farm boy. I'm happy here. Healthy Yankton and the city do a good job. I have no complaints. Some complained because they lost some last year. I had enough and gave some away. I'd rather give it to them," he said.

"I'm happy all the gardens look good. Lots of younger gardeners are here this year. People share their ideas. Someone else built a fence like this one at the gardens. You learn something new. Someone told me what to do if the tomatoes got blight. Sometimes I sit in the shade while watering. Sometimes I bring my tablet," McDonald said.

What Makes The Gardens Go?

Todd Larson, director of Yankton parks and recreation, explains how the city of Yankton and Healthy Yankton members work together for the community gardens. He represented the city at Healthy Yankton planning meetings as the gardens were established.

"Healthy Yankton members administer the gardens," Larson said. Healthy Yankton members set policies so gardens run smoothly. They get people to sign up and find volunteers to help get the gardens ready in spring. During the season they check to make sure plots are weeded and then cleared at the end of the season. If necessary, gardeners are warned, and as a last resort, prohibited from signing up for a plot for a time if not in compliance.

200 VOLUNTEER PROJECTS

About 2007, 4-H Dogs Are Us volunteers approached the city for land for a dog park. Healthy Yankton members also approached the city with some funds but no land for a community garden.

"Dave Mingo in Yankton Community Development knew the city owned land along West City Limits Road," Larson said. "Part of the land is in the Marne Creek flood zone, so there could be no buildings there."

This low ground with good soil became the community gardens. Volunteers and supporters paid for and fenced higher ground adjacent to the gardens for the dog park. Projects share a parking lot installed by the city street department.

Planners first discussed how garden plots would be watered with temporary storage water containers and gardeners carrying buckets.

"With city support, the water department tapped the water line along West City Lim-



Larson

its Rd. They put in hose spigot hook ups so people could run hoses to their gardens," Larson said.

"By 2010, the community gardens and the dog

park were open and partnerships made it happen. No one knew how many garden plots to have (as the gardens opened.) That first year we had about 120 plots and rented about 50. By the next year they were full. This season we have rented about 220 plots," he said.

CITY & HEALTHY YANKTON EFFORTS

Water management between the city and Healthy Yankton members provides access for water that gardeners need.

"City pays the bill for water and at the end of the season, we send Healthy Yankton a water bill. With the fees they charge gardeners, they pay the water bill and the Spot-A-Pot there for all to use," Larson said. "We had a water rate increase. Healthy Yankton members have to cover expenses and they want a little in the bank for improvements."

City and Healthy Yankton member partnerships have benefited gardeners in several ways. City installed drinking fountains for gardeners and dog park use. Healthy Yankton pays for water use. Plot markers have been replaced with PVC pipe and sticker lettering by city workers. Healthy Yankton paid for the pipe and stickers.

Healthy Yankton members led the installation of two raised beds on concrete pads to allow people with mobility issues to garden. Flowerbeds

at the ends of the three garden plot entrance rows beautify the gardens during the season. Missouri Valley Master Gardener volunteers consult with gardeners.

"We have apple and other fruit trees (next to the gardens and dog park) for people to pick," he said. "Trees are not sprayed with chemicals. Spraying is quite limited in this area, except for thistles, so gardeners can have a natural garden."

Last season Healthy Yankton posted signs at the gardens to discourage visitors from taking vegetables. Gardeners were encouraged to share extra produce with the Contact Center.

"Hopefully people are considerate enough to realize other people are putting in time and money to grow produce and we can't just grab what we want. It's good to hear that signs make a difference this year," he said.

Now gardeners have cleared their plots. Healthy Yankton members and other volunteers lifted plot markers. Volunteer Mark Hunhoff of Mark's Machinery tilled the gardens. City workers turned off water to the exposed hose bibs and drinking fountains when night temperatures dipped below freezing.

"City is not accruing much costs here. City workers do some labor. We mow the area around the gardens and do weed whacking, but the city doesn't weed the gardens. The City disposes of garden refuse. We would have to maintain the area anyway," he said.

"This has been a great relationship to allow that use of land," Larson said. "People have access to gardening. Healthy Yankton members have had a good demand for gardens the past six seasons."

PROSPECTS FOR NEXT YEAR

Returning gardeners will be contacted in February and new gardeners will have opportunities to sign up in March when Healthy Yankton members set these up. Minor changes will occur at the community garden area by next spring but will not affect the plots.

Brittany Orr, Yankton parks and recreation coordinator, involves Healthy Yankton members in the annual February "Get Up And Play" weekend at Summit Activity Center. Orr is the current city representative at Healthy Yankton meetings. She keeps Larson apprised of community garden needs. She was on family leave at the time of the interview.

"Hard surface trails will be built along West City Limits Rd. between the tree line and road ditch to 23rd St. The parking lot entrance will be moved a little north to line up with Westbrook Estates housing area entrance," Larson said.

"In terms of enlarging the gardens, we'd have to look at other properties," he said. "Some churches have gardens for their members now. We are open if there is demand to expand. There is space on site to do more with raised beds if there is need from people with mobility issues."

November Plant Tips

Nurseryman Jay Gurney and nursery supervisor Cathy Weiss of Yankton Nurseries, Inc. 2000 Ferdig Ave. (605) 665-6560 discuss what homeowners often ask them about late season yard work. They invite you to stop in for supplies and holiday decorations.

• Perennials may be cut back for appearance. If you leave dried foliage, it acts as

a stocking cap to protect the crown of the plant.

• Protect budded roses such as teas and grafted floribundas. Place chicken wire cylinder about a foot wider than the plant around the rose and stake it. Fill with dry leaves, not grass clippings, because composting activity is not desired. Shrub roses such as Knockouts or Canadian

shrubs should be mulched, but plants are not covered.

• Tree wrap should be applied to young trees and smooth bark trees such as maple and fruit trees for winter sun scald protection. Rabbit tree guards and wrap for larger trees should be white to reflect winter sun.

• While you still have your water hoses out, water your

perennials, trees and shrubs. They need moisture going into winter.

• Late November is a great time to decorate with fragrant greenery, roping and wreaths. Fresh cut red twig dogwood, spruce, fir, pine and juniper are available at the nursery.

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