

## Establishing a New Garden at Waterview

*By Susan Haidar, Recreation Leader Trainee at Waterview Recreation Center*

In late April 2014, Waterview Recreation Center received a \$200 grant from Weaver's Way Co-op in Mt. Airy to develop a small garden. We developed a three raised-bed garden, primarily for vegetables. We also replanted an existing small raised-bed with a pollinator-attracting flower mix to help beautify the Center and attract beneficial insects to the garden.

The grant helped with our largest expense—soil-- and its delivery took one half of the grant. We



Planting our pollinator flower garden in early May

then received the assistance of Parks & Recreation carpenters in supplying wood and labor to build the raised beds. The third we built from a found disassembled bed. Many of our starter plants came from free Garden Workshops at Bartram's Garden, sponsored by the Urban Nutrition Initiative. I recommend them to anyone interested in starting a garden at their Center.

We started the garden in May while school was still in session. By the time the first plantings occurred, it was close to Memorial Day due to all the components that needed to happen first (box construction, soil delivery, a way to water the garden). The soil was transported nearly a block's length by wheelbarrow and walked up a ramp we fabricated to reach the boxes. Children and teens helped with the soil transportation, the third box construction and the plantings. Children started



Campers enjoy cantaloupe and broccoli snacks

seeds indoors in late April; the successful seedlings were added to the garden. The watering system for the garden involved connecting 144' of hose in the rec center basement bathroom and running it through the outside sprayground to the garden. After watering the garden with the hose, we then filled the rain barrels and used watering cans to water for the next week or two. Many children helped with the bi-nightly waterings.



We decided to integrate gardening activities and lessons into our Summer Camp program. Approximately 25 kids participated in watering and picking vegetables, as well as weekly ½ hour lessons conducted by the 4-H staff, focusing on the parts of a plant. Perhaps the highlight of our gardening experience was our two cooking sessions where we made an afternoon snack using our vegetables. The first one was a vegetable stir fry with rice, using peppers, yellow zucchini squash and kale from our garden. The second was a ratatouille using peppers, yellow squash, basil and eggplant from the garden, served over pasta. For our final week, the 4-H staff brought in ingredients for fruit smoothies and fresh cantaloupe. I cut up cucumbers, small cherry tomatoes and broccoli from our garden. The kids quickly consumed the veggies, perhaps due to abundant ranch dressing dip. Parents and staff



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members took home kale and collard greens, as well as squash. The kids used the existing mint patch at the center to make several batches of mint tea.



Garden in late August

Our garden continues to flourish, with the exception of a bout of “blossom end rot” affecting several squash and pepper plants, and some “powdery mildew” that affected cantaloupe, pumpkin and squash. The garden is currently yielding two pints of black cherry tomatoes per week, as well as Chinese eggplant and peppers. Recently, we harvested at least two pounds of green beans. The cool summer resulted in a successful harvest of broccoli, and our watermelon and cantaloupe patch will soon yield several melons. Plus, we had a surprise last week... a pumpkin! (Thought it was a cantaloupe plant!) And last week, the kids learned where potatoes come from as they dug out the ones in our large pot (a true experiment for all of us).

The staff of PPR’s Urban Agriculture program was very helpful in providing technical assistance in starting and maintaining the garden. They provided advice, two wheelbarrows and bamboo stakes, not to mention a great, positive attitude towards the project.



Annie Preston of PPR’s Urban Agriculture program and volunteer cutting bamboo stakes

This fall, we will be adding some cool weather crops to the garden. I hope the garden will continue to flourish next year at Waterview.

If you wish to establish a garden at your recreation center, start planning it by March 2015. There are many resources to support you, within and outside the Department.

**You too can do it!**



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