

## **Village of Dexter Community Garden**

### **2010: A First Year in Review**

#### **How it began:**

On Monday April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010, a group of people gathered at the Dexter District Library as part of a loosely named Community Garden Planning Committee. They gathered to explore the idea of a community garden in the village of Dexter. The meeting's purpose was to discuss garden location options, garden guidelines, membership, and to gauge the overall interest in the community. Some participants at the meeting expressed a desire for a gardening space for themselves, others were interested in the idea of growing food for donation to local food banks, and another participant talked about the real need for some in the community to have access to fresh produce. For these people in the community the chance to grow their own fresh food is a wonderful opportunity.



The outcome of the meeting showed there certainly was an interest on the part of Dexter residents to have a community garden, and that next steps should be taken to keep the project moving forward with the hopes of a community garden in place for the 2010 growing season.

#### **Moving forward with the project:**

For the project to move forward and be successful, the Dexter Village Council needed to discuss and agree on issues facing the community garden such as location, leadership, budget and garden guidelines. Village council gave their approval for the garden to be created at a village- owned piece of land on Dan Hoey Rd. Village Council members appointed the village manager as the staff person to oversee the project and asked that a committee be formed and merge with the Farmer's Market committee, thus renaming that oversight committee the Farmer's Market/Community Garden Committee.

Village Council also asked that funding be secured to support the project budget in its initial season. Working together, the village manager and a community member applied to the Chelsea Area Wellness Foundation for a grant to start the community garden. The CAWF approved the grant and with that approval all roadblocks with funding were eliminated.

Working together again, the village manager and a community member developed documents to present to council outlining how the garden would be run, i.e. rules for the space, how community members could join, parameters for joining the garden (Dexter Village residents initially, all Dexter school district residents ultimately), and administration of the garden and gardeners.

After thorough discussions with various council members to assure everyone's understanding and support, council approved the project and work on the garden began!

### **Getting the garden growing**

Announcements of the new Village of Dexter community garden were made in the newspaper, with temporary signs, on the Village of Dexter web site and flyers placed at Dexter businesses. People interested in gardening at the site were directed to visit the community garden page on the Village of Dexter web site where they could learn more about the garden and download an application.

Simultaneously, local businesses were approached asking for donations of goods such as shovels, rakes, hoses, tape measures, hay, and fencing. Dexter's generous business people donated many items to the garden giving the gardeners plenty of tools and materials to work with the 2010 growing season.

Locating the garden at the property on Dan Hoey Road was the next step. Making sure the garden space had plenty of sun, was easy to reach and was within close proximity to water were all factors playing into the final placement of the garden on the site. In a pasture which used to be used for grazing sheep, only a few shrubs needed to be removed. As to water, an old well is conveniently located near the garden. The well was inspected to insure it would work and produce enough water as well as the water itself being tested to determine if it was potable (it was). Finally, the location of tool storage and parking for the gardeners was selected, moving the timeline ahead to the actual working of the soil!

After a rather wet and rainy start to May, the garden was plowed later in May. The site was then staked out (measured and marked) and each plot was numbered to coincide with the garden map. Community members had been submitting their applications for plots throughout May. Their applications had been processed and gardeners chose between half (10x20) or full (20x20) plots. Confirmations were emailed to gardeners complete with a map of the site letting them know where their particular plot was located.



*Staking out freshly plowed garden*



*Staking out supplies*



*New seedlings in the brand new garden*

### **From fallow field to food:**

With the garden ready to go and the weather just right to start gardening, gardeners were invited to a garden kick-off on May 25<sup>th</sup> where the logistics of the site (such as water location), garden guidelines and site etiquette were discussed.

On June 5<sup>th</sup> the Village of Dexter community garden had its first work party. This time together gave the gardeners the opportunity to meet each other and to accomplish some much needed chores: placing a fence around the perimeter of the garden, attaching gates at either end of the garden and laying down woodchips for a center path.



*Raising the fence*



*Making the gate for the garden fence*

On July 24<sup>th</sup> there was another get together intended solely as a meet and greet for the gardeners.



*A garden plot full of healthy, growing plants*



*Japanese greens*

After a long and lovely growing season the garden was closed October 16<sup>th</sup> with a final work party where the gardeners closed and cleaned up their plots preparing them for the fall plowing, took down part of the fence, put away the hoses and tools for the season and in general tidied the area for the winter and prepared it for next spring's growing season!



*A bountiful harvest!*



*Pointing out deer control methods*



*Baby Melon*

## Village of Dexter Community Garden

### Gardener Survey Results 2010



*One of many jars of pickles canned by one of our community gardeners.*



*Morning sunshine in the garden.*

\*All gardeners were asked to participate in the community garden survey. Not all gardeners responded to the survey, and not all of those responding answered all the questions on the survey.

**Number of garden plots in garden:** 10 full plots (or, 20 half plots)

**Number of primary gardeners:** 14

**Number of surveys received:** 7



## Survey Question Results

(answer below represent combined totals and are best estimates on the part of the participants)

**How many people gardened in your plot this growing season?:** 29

**Did you share your produce with others?:** Produce was shared with friends, co-workers, Faith in Action, extended family, neighbors, immediate family

**How many people did you share your produce with?:** 120

**How much have you shared with others this growing season?:** 85lbs

**What did you grow in your plot?:** Bush string beans, zucchini, sugar snap peas, sugar baby watermelon, Daikon green, Mizuna, Komatsuna ( Japanese mustard spinach), basil, Shiso ( Japanese basil ), watermelon, corn, peas, turnips, radishes, frisee, basil, lettuce, spinach, tomatoes, sunflowers, pumpkins, cucumbers, eggplant, leeks, carrots, beets, swiss chard, marigolds, celery, green peppers, hot peppers, & banana peppers, summer squash, yellow & green beans, kohlrabi, cherry tomatoes, beef steak tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, winter squash, cantaloupe

**How much would you say you have harvested from your plot this growing season?:** ~300 lbs of produce (*author's note: many gardeners responded to this question with "1/2 bushel" or "4 bunches of lettuce". The number in pounds is mine, and a best estimate*)

### **Other thoughts from the gardeners:**

"Having this garden plot was so valuable to my family this season. Not only did such a small plot provide plenty of produce for my family, it also proved to be a much-needed space for quiet and peace from a busy household. I very much appreciated the opportunity to teach the children in my life about the cycle of planting and harvesting, connection with nature and a self-reliance that comes with growing produce. I look forward to next season and am considering taking on a larger plot to increase the amount of produce I am able to raise for my family. Thank you!"



"I am very sorry that we can not join the last meeting, because we are moving back to Japan on Oct.12th. Attached is a community garden survey. I cleaned up our plot the other day, so when you have chance to head to the garden, please check out our plot. And if you have any concern, let me know. We really had good crops this year, especially tomatoes. Everyone liked my tomatoes. And my son Yuma loved them too! ( Before he didn't like to eat tomatoes that I bought from the store, but now he ask more for his favorite white tomato from our garden.) Thank you for all the arrangement for the community garden. I am going to miss the garden, but I am hoping that you'll have another great success on Community garden project next year too, and everyone have fun !! Please give our best regards to all the community gardeners at the last meeting."

"I'm hoping that there will be a community garden again next year. I loved the plot that we shared. Being a redhead, I could garden in the morning in the shade and would like to put in use what I learned by renting a whole plot next Spring. Please stay in touch and thank you so much for everything that you did this year!"



*A few of the first Village of Dexter Community Gardeners!*