

First Prineville's Community Garden Helps Church Reach Out to Neighbors

How the idea was sparked

I worked as our groundskeeper one summer and mowed the field where the garden is now. It was a waste of time and fuel to keep mowing a patch of ground with outstanding soil. I had seen many neighborhood community gardens in other places where I lived. Also, I was aware of how high Prineville's water prices are for residents in the city and knew that with our church's water well, fertile soil and some vision, that a garden could become a mission project.

Tie to mission and outreach

Our church mission states: We of this congregation aim to serve our Lord through the teachings of Jesus Christ, and we are committed to sharing God's bountiful blessings.

Our vision statement, in part, says: We are committed to our faith and denomination, our changing community, the growing diversity of Crook county, and addressing the shortage of positive activities for children and youth. Many different youth groups participated initially building the deer fence, laying out plots, and now keeping paths covered with mint slugs. We have spring start up and fall clean up work days and lots of kids -4 H, alcohol and drug residential kids, and others who come out to help, enjoy a church sponsored potluck and some volleyball (this year!) afterwards.

Together we prayed, I sought grants, I spoke with the Session, I listened to God and to the people around me, and began organizing the effort.

How it works

We follow a set of guidelines with advice taken from our Oregon State University Extension Service people and from a member who is a Master Gardener. To date, there have been no conflicts between gardeners. The clarity provided by the guidelines helps.

Originally, the church budgeted for tool loss due to anticipated theft. Instead, we have had many people bring us wonderful, gently used tools. We charge annually for plots, but will subsidize anyone who wants a plot and cannot afford. To be welcoming to our Hispanic neighbors, we advertise in Spanish. Our 40 plots have only 3 church members and the rest are from the community. There is an orchard and berry plot for community use also.

Helping low-income neighbors

Our goal was to serve the poor and have the excess produce go to our local food bank. My husband and I sell the produce (grown by me) at the Farmer's Market and donate all proceeds to St. Vincent de Paul. Last year we donated nearly \$1500 and gave away bushels of fresh, organic vegetables.

A few pieces of advice to those who want to get started

Pray first, talk to the naysayers and hear, really hear, their concerns. Have a plumber or water master-goddess-irrigation specialist on call at all times!

Provided by Kim Kambak, a member of First Presbyterian, Prineville.

For more information: Send your specific questions to Kim Kambak or John Say, First Presbyterian Church 1771 N Madras Highway Prineville, OR 97754

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