

Growing & Sharing

We began the 2022 spring gardening season by launching our “Come Grow with Us” community garden promotion with a new outdoor program banner. This grant-funded banner can now be used annually to announce the start of the garden season. All garden events were also posted on our website and Facebook page. Flyers targeted to families promoting a free summer/fall gardening program were created for the first time in May and June. **In 2022** we had **three** new gardeners rent spaces for the season in addition to **six** returning gardeners. **Two** of the **three** new gardeners were also first-time gardeners full of hope and enthusiasm.

In early July we hosted a “Pumpkin Patch Planting” and family dinner. During August, *Kids Eat Right Month*, we conducted a family gardening project featuring an “Eat Your Colors” garden planting event and dinner. Families were given raised beds spaces and seeds to grow a colorful variety of vegetables: Rainbow Carrots, green beans, Bright Lights chard, red and green lettuces, Easter Egg radishes, red beets, and kale. Four families participated in these events with six children ranging from toddler to teens and their parents. Grant funds were used to purchase more vegetable seeds and seedling trays.

The August gardening event was featured in *The New Ark Post* along with an open invitation for neighbors and friends of St. Nicholas to discuss the future of our land and facilities use on August 15, 2022. This public meeting included updates and planning guidance from our State legislators, Ed Osienski and Bryan Townsend, New Castle County Police Officer, Corporal Gigliotti, and Madison Walter, Urban Agriculture Coordinator, New Castle Conservation District. The outcome of the public meeting has been increased awareness of the value and benefits of the St. Nicholas Community Garden and surrounding green space as well as need for neighbors and friends to support maintaining and expanding these natural resources. A “Friends of St. Nicholas” group is being launched in Spring 2023 to create a new volunteer network of gardeners. Grant funds were used to print A-frame sidewalk sign inserts to promote this new volunteer group start up in Spring 2023. Grant funds were also used to print two attractive outdoor Community Garden location signs on both sides of the main garden gate.

In the fall we continued to promote free garden spaces and seeds and held a planning meeting to establish more Delaware native pollinator plants around the garden. Carrie Murphy from UD Cooperative Extension met with St. Nicholas gardeners to designate appropriate plants and growing areas. Suzanne Halter, a

neighbor and employee of Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control has volunteered to lead this pollinator project along with her son.

To improve garden yield, grant funds were used to install a **four**-foot gated rabbit fence around the main garden. Prior to this fence we were yielding around 300 lbs. of produce. Despite a rather difficult growing season **in 2022** and fewer experienced gardeners we increased our Grow to Share production to over 450 lbs. 117 pounds of fresh produce was sent to Hope Dining Room in Brookside, **Delaware** and the Emmanuel Dining Room in Wilmington, **Delaware**. 167 pounds were given to neighbors surrounding the church and members of the St. Nicholas Parish. The additional grant purchase and soil filling of **four** new raised beds with animal barriers also improved production.

The St. Nicholas Growing & Sharing Project was designed to increase the production, yield, and food outreach program of our community garden. We were especially interested in promoting a new garden program for families with children in the neighborhood.

Our objectives were:

1. To become an inclusive hub of sustainable vegetable gardening in the Greater Chestnut Hill/Brookside Neighborhood.
2. To improve our church's community relations and spread goodwill in our neighborhood.
3. To teach youth and their families about sustainable agriculture and the health benefits of eating vegetables daily.
4. To provide fresh, organic foods to those in need.

Our overall goal and each objective were reached. More food than ever was produced and distributed. We succeeded in reaching new families with children and new adult gardeners. We have improved our community garden's visibility and value. We now have garden program marketing and promotional tools that can be used annually. We learned what it really takes to reach families with children to participate in gardening.

Families with children aka *parents* are busy and must make choices on how to spend their families' precious leisure time. Weeknight events that include quick, fun activities for multiple age and capacity children need to be carefully planned. Offering a

meal after a learning event makes it a win for everyone. Not all children and parents are used to being outside actively doing much in the summer hot/humid weather. They need shade, water, gloves, etc. Even when told to prepare they may not.

We surpassed our expectations with the community engagement at the August Public Meeting and the “Friends of St. Nicholas” volunteer group start up.

We are growing and sharing not only tasty and healthy organic produce we are growing our reputation as an asset to the neighborhood and educating others on food growing and the need to respect, protect and conserve our land and garden resources.

It’s always a delight to introduce children to growing their own food. Although children and families were the target audience this year there was great joy in working with a senior couple who had never gardened before: Pam & Rudy. Their enthusiasm and willingness to learn by doing in their retirement years was contagious. Some days they were moving better than others with Rudy’s bad heart and even Pam’s foot fracture and walking boot to boot they kept going and growing! They reminded all of us that we are never too old to do whatever we want if we are motivated, and it is never too late to teach others how to grow and share food on this Earth.