



PARTNERSHIP HELPS PRESERVE WAUKESHA COUNTY HERITAGE

Gardeners keep history alive

“Almost chaos,” is how Marie McGinnis describes the scene a stone’s throw from the idyllic spot where she and

other Master Gardeners spend Tuesday evenings growing produce for local food pantries.

“You go back here and it’s so quiet,” she says.

“Back here” is Eble Park, a 33-acre gem hidden amid the strip malls, chain stores and whizzing traffic on Bluemound Road. A big white barn marks the spot where the park lies in the Town of Brookfield near Goerke’s Corners.

Donated to Waukesha County by Florence Eble in 1988, the park includes an ice arena, farmhouse, rolling fields and picture-perfect “demonstration” gardens lovingly cared for by a dozen Master Gardeners like McGinnis.

“People think of them as just a little garden group,” says Ann Wied, a horticulture educator with Waukesha County UW-Extension. “They do so much more.”

Working together to create ‘a great community asset’

In exchange for 36 hours of basic horticulture training, continuing education and support from UW-Extension, Master Gardeners agree to “give back” at least 24 hours a year of volunteer service. Some, like Eileen Rudnick of Brookfield, who volunteers at Eble Park, put in 200 to 300 hours a year on horticulture education and demonstration gardens throughout southeastern Wisconsin.

All told, about a dozen Master Gardeners spend more than 500 volunteer hours a year maintaining Eble Park’s flower, herb and vegetable gardens.

“We don’t just do ‘free’ gardening,” Rudnick points out. “At Eble, we’re maintaining the gardens so that people can see different plants, different horticultural practices and good, solid Extension-based methods of doing things.”

Of eight county parks, the oasis on Bluemound Road is unique: It’s the only one with gardens created and maintained by Master Gardeners.

(more on back)



Master Gardeners Marie McGinnis (left) and Eileen Rudnick showcase plants and horticultural practices at Eble Park on Bluemound Road.

“We would not be able to do what they do,” says Jim Kavemeier, park system manager for the Waukesha County Department of Parks and Land Use. “That’s very labor intensive and labor is expensive.”

In tending the gardens, Master Gardeners help keep alive the legacy of Florence Eble, an avid gardener and the last resident of the old farmhouse, Kavemeier explains.

“We’re hoping to maintain that rural island so that people can remember and understand the heritage of the area.”

The parks manager says the Extension-Master Gardener-Parks partnership “shows how private and public can work together to provide a great community asset.”

Growing ‘foods people crave’

Eble Park is definitely a community asset. In the flower and herb garden, hand-painted signs, informational brochures, a rose-covered trellis and stone path lead visitors into a sensory delight: the smell of fennel, lovage, lemon balm, lavender and mint mingle with the sight of pink peonies and purple iris.

Rudnick talks about plans to add new educational sections – “plants of the pioneers” and “today’s kitchen” – to the butterfly habitat.

In the nearby fenced vegetable garden, wooden plaques, handmade by Master Gardener McGinnis, identify Copenhagen cabbage, brussels sprouts, turnip greens and other edibles. Last year, gardeners harvested more than 1,500 pounds of produce from the 40-foot by 60-foot plot.

In order to grow “foods people crave,” McGinnis asked pantry users what they wanted. That’s why this year’s garden features ethnic foods like tomatillos, collards, habaneros and okra.

McGinnis, of Franklin, says caring for the garden helps her relax and make new friends. “It’s a nice de-stressor,” she says, “especially after working all day.”

Rudnick agrees. Before retiring several years ago as a legal secretary for the state public defender’s office, she spent a lot of time working in the Milwaukee County jail.

“It was not a nice environment,” she says, smiling and gazing over the peaceful park tucked away from the outside world, “and this is beautiful.”

This story is part of a series on the role UW-Extension plays in serving Wisconsin’s \$3 billion green industry. To learn more, visit waukesha.uwex.edu, or milwaukee.uwex.edu. UW-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA.

About Master Gardeners

Some 300 Master Gardeners in Milwaukee and Waukesha counties conduct horticulture education at schools, parks, zoos, historical sites, churches and senior centers, investing more than 19,000 hours in their communities.

To learn more, contact Horticulture Educator Ann Wied at 262/548-7788.