

ALASKA



FOOD COALITION

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“Families that participate in community garden efforts eat 89% more fresh veggies than usual.”

Community Gardening in Rural Regions: Enhancing Food Security and Nutrition, Center on Hunger and Poverty, Tufts University

Preparing for Harvest – Community Gardens as a Resource

According to the American Community Garden Association, a community garden is any piece of land gardened by a group of individuals. Historically, gardening was not widely utilized as a food source in Alaska. In rural communities, today’s elders learned from Russian immigrants and miners who brought gardening techniques with them to the Greatland. Gardening is an excellent supplement to subsistence gathered food sources, and should be viewed as complementary to subsistence. If you are distributing emergency food in your community, you should consider local gardens as a resource. Community members benefit from the produce that is grown locally, saving shipping and storage costs. Excess food can be shared with local pantries and senior centers. Consider encouraging your local gardeners to plant a row for the hungry. It is estimated a 10 x 10 subsistence garden can produce:

- ✓ 10 lbs. of Zucchini
- ✓ 5 lbs. potatoes
- ✓ 1 broccoli
- ✓ 1 cabbage
- ✓ 12 turnips
- ✓ 3 heads of lettuce
- ✓ 12 carrots
- ✓ 5 lbs of snap beans

This equates to about 50 lbs. of vegetables, approximately \$300.00 worth of food.

‘So You Want to Start a Community Garden in Alaska?’ By Heidi Rader, UAF CES and Tanana Chiefs Conference

<http://cals.arizona.edu/myice/sites/cals.arizona.edu.myice/files/content/raderh/Community%20Garden%20Works%20Heidi.pdf>

Community Gardens are for Everyone

Community gardens require community support. As diets change and a variety of fresh foods become staples, communities are looking at ways to improve access to fresh produce. Garden plots can be shared or individual. Tools, fences and water are usually shared. There is usually an annual fee per plot, and grants from government agencies and private foundations are often available to help with start-up costs. Some communities have individual pots in greenhouses. You will need leaders and community involvement to manage and maintain your community garden. It is useful to have at least one individual involved in the project who has gardening experience. If your garden is outdoors, you must first identify a location on which to place the garden. A garden can have a specific focus:

- ✓ Youth created/school project gardens help kids learn about the food chain
- ✓ Gardens can produce food for elders and organizations that support elders
- ✓ Gardens can be used to grow food for local charities
- ✓ Gardens can be for personal use only
- ✓ Gardens can be a therapeutic outlet for a group

High Tunnels, Hoop Houses

A hoop house, also called a high tunnel, is a covered structure at least 4 feet high that is used to trap the sun's heat to provide a warmer climate for the plants growing inside. Hoop houses tend to be fairly simple structures that usually don't need building permits since they aren't considered permanent structures. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has funding for high tunnels. This is a 3 year pilot program, 2012 will be the final year of funding. Kenai Peninsula Food Bank and growers in Ruby are just some of the recent recipients. For additional information on this grant program:

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/news/releases/2011/high_tunnels_1.7.2011.html

Community Gardening in Rural Alaska

Communities across Alaska work with UAF Cooperative Extension Services (CES) to start local projects. Here are some success stories:

Last year, Ed Sarten in Ruby grew potatoes in the community garden and had excess to share. Students pitch in to help weed and water; he teaches students about gardening by having them start seeds in a container. Several residents have started their own individual gardens. Ed works closely with CES and is looking forward to putting in a high tunnel to use later this season.

In Nome, CES will host an introductory sub-arctic horticulture gardening class on April 23; this class is free of charge. This is the fourth year gardeners have been growing vegetables in two greenhouses, and most recently a high tunnel at the high school. One greenhouse gardener who resides in senior housing shares his harvest with other senior residents.

In Delta Junction, CES staff plants an heirloom garden of potatoes, carrots and onions at the Sullivan Road Museum. On Harvest Day, community members are invited to harvest the veggies for a community soup that is sold to help pay for the garden.

Bethel will be sponsoring their 3rd annual community garden this year, the first meeting for participants was held April 19. Approximately 25 families participate. Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower and kale do well, along with other root vegetables. Leif Albertson with CES has been growing potatoes for UAA research. He shares his harvest with other gardeners for seed potatoes. Lief considers turnips to be a very successful crop for this region. Individual gardeners have been known to share excess produce with friends and family.

In Kenai, the community garden is organized by the city. There are 22 plots that rent for \$20 each. The city provides fencing, water and rototilling; gardeners must bring hoses, seed and fertilizer. One local gardener always grows a little extra for a local senior center.

A Juneau middle school created a community garden and planted a variety of Tlingit heirloom potatoes as part of their study of Tlingit culture. The potatoes were donated to a local shelter.

4 years ago, the city of McGrath obtained a grant from UAF CES to start a community garden. The grant provided a moose fence, hoses, seeds, starts, fertilizers, tools and other supplies. Last year, local gardeners donated carrots, beets, potatoes, lettuce, berries and other produce to neighbors and elders. The McGrath Native Village Council donated potato starts to local gardeners last year. A head of iceberg lettuce costs about \$8 in McGrath. Kellie Peirce, who volunteers as the community garden coordinator, estimates she saved approximately \$7,000 last summer by gathering berries, growing produce and getting a moose for meat.

Cooperative Extension Services has helped individual and community gardeners across Alaska. If you know of a gardener in your community, now is the time to check in with them, ask them to plant a few seeds for your pantry or elders.

RESOURCES

Community Gardens in Alaska

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/publications-db/catalog/anr/HGA-00029.pdf>

<http://wecangrowit.blogspot.com>

<https://sites.google.com/site/alaskacommunitygardens/CommunityGardensinAlasak>

High Tunnels, Hoop Houses

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/publications-db/catalog/anr/HGA-00028.pdf>

Cooperative Extension Services

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/issues/gardening/>

American Community Garden Association Youth Garden Grants Program

<http://assoc.garden.org/grants/>

Juneau Community Gardens -Video

<http://www.youtube.com/user/UAFExtension#p/a/u/1/uB8iNW3dh3s>)

The Alaska Food Coalition is here to help. Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available online: <http://www.alaskafood.org/whitepapers.shtml> for additional information, contact Vanessa Salinas, Alaska Food Coalition Manager: afc@foodbankofalaska.org

NEXT MONTH: Planning for a Capitol Project