

# ACTION

## A Community Garden thrives in East Palo Alto

by Denise Ladwig

Most of us are aware of the challenges facing East Palo Alto, including the need for designated open space, parks and gardens. The Weeks Street Community Garden, sponsored by Bay Area Action and EPA HAS, is quickly becoming part of the solution as a shining example of beautifully restored land.

The Community Garden offers a place for families to spend time together and grow their own organic produce. It also provides an opportunity for an agriculturally-based heritage to be passed from one generation to the next, a safe haven where local children can play and learn and a hub for community outreach.

In just three summers, a three-quarter acre lot has been transformed from a local dump site into an oasis. In the first year more than ten bins of trash were removed. Our thanks to all the many hard workers of previous summers including Jim Steinmetz and Lachen Pence.

As the initial director this year, Cheryl Campbell launched the project in early June. Her bright spirit and enthusiasm enlisted many BAA volunteers, and the local children quickly took note. Soon they had trash bags and shovels in hand and were planting their own garden beds while learning about bio-intensive gardening techniques such as double-digging.

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The first week in July we canvassed the neighborhood, letting everyone know about a big kick-off and planting. Local nurseries were telephoned and in just three days over \$1,600 worth of starter plants were donated to the project. Come Saturday, ten local families arrived, each planting a variety of tomatoes, squash, flowers, herbs, corn, and chiles, chiles, chiles in their 20-square foot individual plots. After little more than one month's time, those small starter plants and seeds have grown from a few inches to a few feet and families are now harvesting vegetables they've grown.

So, what's next? The boys who began in June are becoming entrepreneurs. Due to their remarkable enthusiasm and the amount of work we had accomplished, we set our sights on an adjacent lot. It too has been cleared of three bins of trash and concrete. The sight of each boy driving a tractor, with the help of Dennis Scherzer, was one to remember. In October, they will sell their corn and other vegetables at farmers' markets and to local restaurants.

As neighbors have taken note of the project's growth, additional land has been offered. As demonstrated by the rich agricultural history of East Palo Alto, the land is fertile, as is the potential for similar projects. We hope to assemble a team that can spearhead several more community gardens in the area.

Leading the way, Heru Hall and

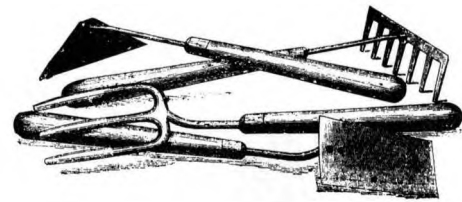


Cheryl & Denise

NfrTm Johnson have already implemented garden education and youth outreach programs. They and other visionaries are working to make the Bay Area a center for organically-grown produce, offering an inspiring example of sustainability nationwide.

The garden project has also provided a means for people of diverse cultural and economic backgrounds to come together and learn from one another. So far over 180 volunteers from BAA and other local volunteer and youth organizations have enjoyed helping local families while creating new friendships. The community has become accustomed to seeing dedicated volunteers like Co-Director Michelle Lewis, Leland Francois, Jacquie Chu and Larry Durbin, and people have reciprocated by offering their homes, help and tasty meals.

Some of the specific upcoming projects we have slated for Saturday mornings this fall are to install an



irrigation system, dig a well, build a fence (to help prevent vandalism and theft in the garden as experienced in previous years), paint a fence (including murals), clear and prepare more land for additional families to garden and help the children get their produce to local markets and restaurants.

It's not all work though. We're also planning a scarecrow-making day and a potluck fiesta with a local band providing la musica in mid-September. If you would like to offer a class or event to the local children, please let us know, they'll be delighted.

So get ready for your phone to start ringing again, and come help a community garden (or two, three, four...) sprout in East Palo Alto.

Special thanks to the Columbia Foundation for their foresight, generosity and belief in Bay Area Action!

*Denise Ladwig is Director of the East Palo Alto Garden Project. Her enthusiasm and dedication has been an inspiration to us all.*

### Donors to the East Palo Alto Community Garden

Muchas gracias!

Land owners:  
Jerry Steinmetz and Syrtiller Kabat

Fogline Nursery  
Instant Color  
Dell's Ivy Acres  
D & M Nursery  
Barron Park Supply  
High C Nursery  
Podesta Nursery  
Nurserymen's Exchange  
Duriagno Nursery  
Tab Growers  
Ladera Hardware and Supply  
Common Ground  
Northern California Fencing  
Thompson & Thompson Fencing  
BFI

Ladera Hardware  
D'z Eats  
Craig Murray  
Meg Hilbert  
David Dierdopolis  
Bruce Bauer Lumber  
Baylands Nursery  
Yerba Buena Nursery  
Payless (Menlo Park)  
Woolworth's Nursery  
Cambridge Hardware  
Our friends at 831 Weeks St.



Jack Hogan

## Midtown Garden flourishes

Under the supervision of Jack Hogan, the Midtown Garden has flourished this summer. We're already harvesting some of the produce and soon hope to make donations to local homeless shelters.

One summer highlight was Kid's Day in late July. Sixteen kids from the East Palo Alto garden joined local children for a day of harvesting goodies, planting sunflowers, making ice cream and playing games such as potato sack races. The garden is obviously good for wildlife.

This fall we're offering tours of the garden to schools and other groups interested in learning about organic gardening. All BAA members are encouraged to come to the Sunday evening BAA-B-Qs on September 24 and October 29 at 5pm. Bring something to grill and help yourself to produce from the garden.

Common Ground / Ecology Action has some terrific gardening classes coming up this fall. For a schedule, call 415-328-6752.



Our many thanks go to the numerous BAA Midtown Garden volunteers, and to our friends at the Palo Alto Co-op for precious water.



The Weeks Street Garden attracts kids from the area to romp and play, and learn how to sustain a garden.