

Pride Takes Root In Groton's Community Garden

By [Katie Warchut](#) Published on 8/2/2009



By Special To The Day

Courtney Kolakowski works on a plot in the Groton Community Garden on Fort Hill Road.

Maureen Gillis and Chantal Foster passed along free tips to a small group of eager learners, all hoping to turn their plots - and the Groton Community Garden as a whole - into a success.

"This is a regular jungle," said Ernie Williams, who said he and his wife Janice have a garden at home that doesn't get enough sun to thrive.

The soil in Groton's garden, next to the Human Services building on Fort Hill Road, is well-prepared with thick compost, he said, and the tomatoes are turning out much better. However, the garden also has a resident bunny, and a pesky woodchuck that garden organizers hope to drive away.

Gillis taught them weeding isn't just for aesthetics - weeds take all the nutrients and water away from the vegetables. They said, "the more you harvest, the more you get" and warned that bugs and pests will get worse in the future when they discover the plants.

"Next year, it's party time," Gillis said.

Envisioned last winter, the garden offers around 40 plots, most of which have been rented. In addition, a communal area tended by the garden committee has brought a steady supply of vegetables to those in need right next door.

"The people who take the produce are impressed that it comes from the garden out back, it's grown for our clients and it's so fresh," said Nancy Albert, a Human Services employee.

Another portion is dedicated to education, where children in Parks and Recreation programs learn about and care for plants, said Courtney Kolakowski, who heads the garden committee and works for Sprigs and Twigs.

Groton - Nancy Gilly doesn't have huge expectations in her first year of gardening, but she picked a couple of cucumbers Saturday, checked on growing pumpkins and noticed red peppers beginning to come up.

Gilly, who pruned her 10-by-10-foot plot in the Groton Community Garden with her two children, said she rents her home and wouldn't otherwise have the chance to grow her own vegetables.

She also appreciates having experienced people around, such as the two master gardeners in training who gave a "Gardening 102" lesson Saturday.

"It's easy to go to the grocery store and fill up the cart," Kolakowski said. "Here, you can see how hard it is to grow food."

The TVCCA rents a small area cared for by special needs people, she said, while another corner is filled with corn from a resident who wanted to try growing it outside his plot.

One of the advantages is being able to see other gardeners' methods, such as bamboo sticks for peas and a string trellis for beans, said Kolakowski, who is a lifelong gardener but is tending her own raised bed plot in a community garden for the first time.

"You don't have to be here every day," she said, but regular care is important. "If you take pride in your plot, it transfers to those around you."

The garden committee is always looking for more experienced gardeners to help out, Kolakowski said.

For more information, visit www.town.groton.ct.us/depts/parksrec/garden.asp. ■