

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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Extension Master Gardeners partner with Phoenix Community Development to promote food access

Community focused, teamwork, and productive are words that [Extension Master Gardeners](#) (EMG) use to describe their Sow to Grow Garden project. This project started out growing fruits and vegetables in a giving garden at Glendale Commons. Now it has become a beautiful green space, a pollinator pocket in the city, an outdoor classroom, and an inspiration for additional community gardens in the neighborhood.

The [Sow to Grow Garden](#) was established five years ago in partnership with [Phoenix Community Development Services](#). Glendale Commons is apartments for homeless families or persons transitioning out of institutions, located in North Valley neighborhood near downtown Peoria. Sow to Grow is a fenced garden aimed at educating families and youth about healthy and nutritious food, as well as involving them in planting the garden. The harvested produce is provided free to residents. EMG Janine Donahue, of Morton, leads the project along with a team of three additional EMGs.

Every year the EMGs plan which vegetables to grow in the garden and try to provide a variety. "We like to try out vegetables that people might not be familiar with yet," commented Janine. "Some are very well accepted; other vegetables require more education on how they should be cooked and prepared."

But this project is about more than just nutritious food. Janine knows the benefits this community garden has for the area. "We increase the biodiversity in this urban area with flowers and plants that support pollinators," she explains. "And the addition of these spaces brings people and communities together."

In 2022, the garden received a grant from [The Big Picture](#) to paint the Phoenix Community Development mural onto the raised beds. Bradley University instructor and artist Heather Ford designed the artwork; and friends and neighbors completed the painting.

In 2021, Phoenix Community Development utilized grant funding to purchase two lots from a neighboring church and created another garden nearby, the Phoenix Community Garden. While Sow to Grow is targeted to Glendale Commons residents, Phoenix Community Garden is meant to provide produce and greenspace for all surrounding community members.

Joining Janine in volunteering at the Sow to Grow garden are EMGs Anthony Tiraboschi, Sarah Smith, and Sister Anna Flanigan. The team can be found in the garden every Tuesday evening during the growing season, providing seeds, planting, watering, weeding, and harvesting.



Colorful and inspirational artwork adorns raised planter boxes at the Sow to Grow Garden, a partnership between Extension Master Gardeners and Phoenix Community Development. EMGs involve the residents in the gardening process and provide them with the fresh produce. The garden also increases the biodiversity in the urban area.

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