

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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## Extension Master Gardeners Team Up with Tazewell County Health Department to Grow Food for Local Families

What one eat plays a critical role in a person's health. Unfortunately, not everyone can easily afford healthy, fresh produce. University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners provide many people with free produce through several "giving gardens." Thanks to a partnership with Tazewell County Health Department, one of these giving gardens has expanded its offerings and is gearing up to add gardening and cooking lessons.

The WIC Garden was created to supplement food options for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in Tazewell County. One out of every five residents in Illinois has poor access to food. Some effects of food insecurity include greater risks of chronic health conditions and poor academic and behavioral performance in children.

"Our goal is to grow fresh fruits and vegetables for the WIC program, and expand access to healthy food," explained Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Vickie White.

The garden, located behind the health department, provides a wide variety of chemical-free fruits and vegetables. "We have permanent beds containing rhubarb, raspberries, and strawberries as well as raised beds of potatoes, cabbage, radish, and more" explained EMG Trudy Yazujian, "You're never going to eat a potato that tastes as good as one grown from the garden!"

Health department staff water the garden and distribute the harvest to program participants. Any leftovers are taken to local food pantries.

"We see that some items are very popular," stated Crindie Hopping, Tazewell County Health Department Nutritionist. "Tomatoes, green beans, and potatoes are particularly sought after."

"Support from the Master Gardeners has been key," explained Health Educator Shanita Wallace. "Their efforts have expanded the garden more than double."

Future goals include continuing to expand the garden and increase the connection with the community. As restrictions on gatherings ease, the Master Gardeners hope to host families for gardening lessons and harvest sessions, while health department staff provide recipes and cooking lessons with the in-season produce.

"Bringing people out to the garden is my dream," stated Trudy.

EMGs joining Vickie and Trudy volunteering at the WIC Garden include Pam Scott, Janine Donahue, and Michelene Koch.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

*University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Trudy Yazujian is excited to see all of the growth in and of the giving garden at Tazewell County Health Department. A team of EMGs has expanded the size of the garden and will offer gardening lessons and harvest sessions.*

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