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June/July 2009

## Diggin' Barre: The Birth of a Community Garden

By Gretchen Gross



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(left to right) Karena Lapan, Lori Somaini, Teresa Allen and Emily Kaminsky enjoy a lovely May evening in Barre's newest digs - a community garden in the heart of the city.  
Photo: Margaret Michniewicz

Barre is well known for deep digging. Most of us think of skilled Italian immigrants and their families who have for years blasted out granite craved around the world. Starting this May, however, there's a whole lot of different digging going on in the Central Vermont city. Twenty new community garden plots are being weeded and tended by a diverse group of gardeners. Some have never had a garden and others can recite contents of each row from years gone by, by heart.

Thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of five local women, the Barre Community Garden at Metro Way is tilled, turned and ready to grow tiny vegetable plants and wildflowers. The group of gardeners is diverse. Member/gardeners include elders, able-bodied and physically-challenged gardeners, nurses, teachers, homeschoolers, stay-at-home mothers, and members of the Community High School, which serves at-risk youth and adults on parole. Their common ground is a piece of land, subdivided into 20 equal sized plots with a border of birches to break the wind, and a magnificent pine, ready to offer shade to the gardeners on the hottest July and August days.

The idea for the community garden germinated after an unexpectedly high turn-out at a midwinter seed swap. Gardeners Teresa Allen and Emily Kaminsky, herbalist Sandra Lory, Nancy Wolfe and Joann Darling (the head gardener at the Vermont State Capitol vegetable garden) put their heads together and started to look for a feasible plot for the garden. A conversation with Barre Mayor Thom Lauzon resulted in him offering to lease a piece of property he owns, located on

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Metro Way, with a southern exposure bordering the Stevens Branch River. For \$1 a year, the Community Garden leases the land, with an option to renew after two years.

2007

Mar  
2007

Between February and May the idea blossomed and by early May gardeners were assigned their plots. This gardening community is operating under a common set of rules and guidelines, and the kick-off dinner went off without a hitch. Friendships and garden relationships have started. Green thumb secrets are being shared. Compost and fertilizer guidelines have been reviewed, as this is an organic-only community garden. Pests are being discussed and strategized about, while members look to the sky for the right combination of bright warm sun and light but gently soaking rains.

Feb  
2007Dec  
2006

Community gardens are more than gardens with a common boundary. Members of this group, Teresa Allen states, agree to share duties and care for the overall property. Each member understands that food grown in the gardens cannot be sold. Many of the gardeners are growing to supplement their own tables while others are growing solely to donate to local food shelves and people in need in these tight times. No matter what the motivation, they agree to share responsibility for the space, to care for the tools, the upkeep of the garden and decision-making and policy setting.

Nov  
2006Oct  
2006Sep  
2006

Teresa recalls a moment when one of the gardeners needed some help with the application process. As they talked about the garden, it became clear that this woman knows how to can fruits and vegetables. When Teresa asked if she would conduct a canning workshop for members, she embraced the idea with enthusiasm. That is the essence of the community garden. Sharing time, secrets, knowledge and traditions. Becoming a community while growing and tending to their gardens, and to one another.

Aug  
2006Jul  
2006Jun  
2006

The roots of this garden grow deep and the committee members are no gardening slouches. Teresa has been gardening on her own for 50 years. Joann Darling is the head gardener of the vegetable garden at the State Capitol. Vermont is the only state capitol to have a vegetable garden on site. Members of the Barre Community Garden wrote a letter of support endorsing that capitol project. The Community Garden also applied and received a \$500 grant from Friends of Burlington Gardens and the Vermont Community Garden Network. The Central Vermont Community Action Council provided financial support for the garden. The Community National Bank and Espresso Bueno, a local espresso bar and coffee shop, also provided financial support. Local businesses offered soil, equipment, fencing, and plum trees, as well as garden posters. Individuals donated seeds, perennials, annuals and lumber.

May  
2006Apr  
2006Mar  
2006Feb.  
2006

When gardeners, new and experienced, garden side by side, there is learning and sharing. The diversity of skills, knowledge, and even cultural perspectives on gardening all enters into the mix of the pleasure of working the soil. The garden space is specifically a safe space, where all are welcome and all agree to keep it safe for each gardener, from the smallest to the eldest, the most able to the most vulnerable. Teresa Allen looks forward to the range of colors, textures, scents, recipes to be shared, gardening traditions to be learned and trust that will be built among this group of people who all share the desire to garden with others, not just in their back yards, or off their decks, but alongside a river in the shade of a tall pine, in a city that just keeps on digging.

2005

2004

2003

*Gretchen Gross lives and digs in So. Burlington.*

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