

Just-in Time For Gardening

by Justin Alex



The gardens developed by the participants in The Lower Cape Children's Garden group mentor program, with help from their mentor master gardener, are quite impressive. JUSTIN ALEX PHOTOS



Happy faces all around. It's great to see children enjoying gardening.

A Fun Summer Gardening Program For Kids

There's a lot of negativity in today's world, so it's nice to take some time and focus on the good things that are happening across our local communities.

In my time writing the garden column, I've been extremely fortunate to meet some amazing people using gardening as a tool to teach future generations. One group that I featured in a column last summer was the Lower Cape Children's Garden group, which is organized by the Master Gardeners of Cape Cod. This exciting summer program teaches kids how to garden and grow their own vegetables. It also teaches them about the importance of protecting the environment. I wanted to feature these wonderful people in this month's column because applications for this year's children's gardening program will be available by the last week of this month.

A brief history of the Lower Cape Garden demonstrates the energy and time dedicated volunteers have put into this very successful project. It all began in fall 2006 when the Brewster Conservation Trust provided an area to develop a gardening plot adjacent to the Brewster Community Gardens. They also installed a water line with three taps. Master gardeners Karl Rauch and Al Saperstein had envisioned creating the Lower Cape Children's Garden with the space but lacked the funds to get it started. Sadly, Karl Rauch passed away. Friends and family contributed to the Children's Garden in his memory, which helped make the dream come true. Eight students participated in the program's first season.

In 2008, a shed was generously donated and helped give the gardeners a place to leave their tools and other planting materials and equipment. In addition to the shed, master gardener Jim Michaels built a three-bin composter, adding to the overall space. In 2014, 20 raised beds, each measuring four by 20 inches, were designed by Saperstein and built by master gardener volunteers. The next year a drip irrigation system was installed by master gardener Mike Almonte. In addition,

AmeriCorps volunteers built a fence around the perimeter to keep the rabbits out and protect the plants. The space is quite impressive. When you see it and the program participants constructively working on their gardens, it really puts a smile on your face.

Currently there are 20 garden plots. Each young mentee works with a master gardener to plan, plant, tend and harvest their plots. There is a lesson each week, with subjects including soil composition, seeds, plant families, composting, good and bad bugs, bees, birds and flowers. There is a group activity where the mentees build scarecrows and get to add some flair to their creations. These very colorful scarecrows were definitely a highlight of my visit to the gardens last summer.

In addition to enjoying their wares, program participants can also submit their vegetables and flowers to the Barnstable County Fair. Many ribbons have been awarded over the years to program participants. There is an open house in early August for family and friends to see the gardens.

Currently there are two sessions for

this upcoming season, one on Tuesdays and another on Thursdays. They run from 3:30 to 5 p.m. from the beginning of May through the third week in August. If you have a child, I would highly suggest looking into this fantastic program.

Applications for this year's session will be available the last week in February under the "Programs" tab on the master gardeners' website. Here's the link: www.capecod.gov/departments/cooperative-extension/.



The Lower Cape Children's Garden group mentor program is a fantastic opportunity for participants.

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