



Charlotte Anthony starts a new victory garden

Grass Into Gardens

Victory Gardens For All targets usable landscapes

I first met Charlotte Anthony on a vast expanse of bark mulch high above Washington Street, facing west. I arrived with my camera and a notebook (and, luckily, a hat) intending to observe Victory Gardens for All in action. But Anthony immediately put me to work with the others, clearing away mulch and hauling compost in a bucket brigade, as she directed the transformation of this recently cleared area into a productive vegetable garden. Among the eight or so helpers at work that afternoon were the slightly bemused owners, perhaps wondering just what they were getting into.

Anthony is the driving force behind Victory Gardens for All (VGA), a small but dedicated group that seeks to turn all available space into vegetable beds. If you have space for a garden but lack the knowledge or time to get started, just let Anthony know. She'll soon be over with tools, a work crew, veggie starts and her own abundant energy. If you can afford it, you will be asked to pay \$50. If you are able-bodied, you (with a couple of friends, if possible) will help put in your garden and — a crucial point — undertake to “pay forward” by participating in the transformation of someone else's yard.

Once you have a garden, you are pretty much on your own, but Anthony's methods may improve your chances of success. After excavating narrow paths between beds about 4 ft. wide and piling the soil on top of the beds, she adds a small amount of compost (for a new garden, about 5 gallons for a 5 x 4 ft. bed) and a source of minerals such as ¼ cup of Azomite. Then she applies mycorrhizal fungi and “effective microorganisms” (EM). “I have never had a problem with fertility after using these,” says Anthony, who has experience in soil work and bioremediation. “I believe they help bring nitrogen in from the air as well as freeing what is fixed in the soil.” She claims she has turned pure orange clay subsoil to 6 inches of black, friable, topsoil with these two additives.

Growing vegetables is hot right now. On any given day this spring in many neighborhoods you are sure to spot someone tilling up a chunk of the front lawn, and there is a lottery for community garden plots that once went vacant. All this digging may be spurred by health concerns

and rising food costs, and farmers' markets have introduced many people to the taste and texture of really fresh food. VGA, like similar organizations around the world, believes organic home gardens can increase local food security and help combat climate change.

Anthony is a strong and determined woman, but I worry she may wear herself out. Upcoming projects are posted to an email list with mixed results. A couple of gardens have been postponed for want of labor, and at one of last week's gardens (loaned for her own use, in a friend's beautiful back yard) I found her working by herself, the promised help having not materialized. I asked her if participation in the labor force has been a problem. “Once I let go of the ‘you said you'd be here today’ thing it's been OK,” she said, with a laugh. The proof, of course, is the number of gardens she's accomplished.

As of last week, VGA had installed upward of 220 vegetable gardens in the Eugene-Springfield area since November 2007, including one for Carolyn Crockett, who read a story about VGA in the newspaper. Crockett is physically challenged and needed elevated beds — a first for VGA. She has very little food money and says this is her only chance for fresh green vegetables. The impressive 20 x 4 ft. beds were built of reclaimed lumber with volunteer labor and filled with donated soil. Crockett was all smiles as the soil went in.

Joann Ernst (recently elected to the EWEB board, if the name seems familiar) saw a flyer at the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference. Ernst already had a small garden area on difficult clay soil. VGA ripped out some old raised beds, covered the area with cardboard. Ernst had collected and laid new soil in Anthony's pleasing design of concentric, curving beds. Then they planted starts of greens and potatoes and sowed some seeds. Ernst would have had a garden anyway, but at 20 x 20 ft., “This is way bigger,” she says. Now, a month later, she is eating greens and strawberries from her garden. She wants me to stress how great it feels to plant gardens and see them grow.

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