

# PLANTING SEEDS

## Hermiston's community garden teaches skills and responsibility

By JADE MCDOWELL East Oregonian

At Lovin' Spadeful Community Garden, Bill and Ann Webb's family is planting seeds.

There are pumpkin seeds and marigold seeds and bell pepper seeds. But there are also seeds of knowledge, hard work and responsibility.

"We want them to take a more active role and get a better idea of where our food comes from and how much work it takes to grow it," Bill said, explaining why they signed their children up for a plot at the community garden this year after moving to Hermiston.

The family visits the garden, located on Good Shepherd Health Care System's campus, a few times a week to take care of the variety of plants that are beginning to sprout. One of the advantages of the community garden is that all the tools, from a drip irrigation system to spades and hoes, are provided.

"I think it's a great program," he said. "There's a lot of value added to it."

Chelle Hankinson, who spearheads the garden, said a community garden can be a great option for people who live in an apartment or other situation where they don't have the space or supplies to grow their own vegetables or flowers. But even homeowners with spacious yards participate in the garden for the camaraderie.

Hankinson, for example, gardens there with her mother because they enjoy mingling with other gardeners and learning from them.

"Families at first come in and have no idea what to do with tomatoes, and then they run into someone who gives them pointers," she said. "People are talking to people they wouldn't talk to otherwise, sharing tips and sharing vegetables."

Lovin' Spadefuls started seven years ago with 40 plots and has since grown to 80. Seventeen are still available at a rate of \$10 for the season. New amenities continue to sprout at the site as a long list of local business donate sheds, benches, signs, fences, tomato cages, bark and other items. The garden also gets donated labor from people sentenced to community service, and students from Umatilla School District planted flowers around the outside of the fence.

"If anybody ever comes to me and says, 'What can I give?' I say 'What do you have?'" Hankinson said. "I never say no."

She said her next goal for the garden is to get some raised beds that would be more accessible to people with limited mobility.

When the garden first started, Hankinson said, there was a minor problem with thefts of produce. But since a camera system was installed and offenders were caught it has cleared up the problem.

The Umatilla County Master Gardeners help teach gardeners at the site and run an example plot that each year showcases innovations, such as vertical gardening. Participants have the option before the season starts of attending a six-week Seed to Supper class that mixes gardening and cooking tips.

Melissa Garrett said she took the class this year and really enjoyed it. Her family has gardened at Lovin' Spadefuls every year but one.

"Before, I was just trying things and hoping that it worked, but I felt like I learned a lot," she said.

She said she usually brings her kids over in the evenings, and she is grateful for the chance to teach them about eating healthy and learning a valuable skill.

"It's very beginner-friendly," she said of the garden. "It's a great resource. All the tools you need are already there, and it's not as intimidating as it seems."

Tomas Montoya's family is going for variety over quantity in their first year at the garden, growing zucchini, carrots, peppers, asparagus, tomatoes, parsley, eggplant, chard, cucumbers, celery and basil.

"Stuff is finally coming up through the soil, so that's exciting," he said.

His family recently moved to Hermiston and found the community garden a "handy" way to get started on a garden. He said they have made new friends at the garden and through the Lovin' Spadefuls Facebook page, where garden members ask questions and share advice.

"We enjoy the community part, and getting to know Hermiston from the ground up," he said.



Staff photos by Kathy Aney

**ABOVE:** A tomato hangs from a vine Wednesday at the Hermiston Community Garden. **BELOW LEFT:** Neva Gilcher pulls weeds Wednesday at the Hermiston Community Garden. **BELOW RIGHT:** Chelle Hankinson and David Martinez fix a problem with the drip irrigation system Wednesday at the Hermiston Community Garden.



From left to right, Lianna Correa, Rosanna Valet, Neva Gilcher, Chelle Hankinson and David Martinez get ready to pull weeds on Wednesday at the Hermiston Community Garden.

