

We have received a wide variety of responses to the garden, almost all positive. Many of these volunteers have never been exposed to a garden or nature; they are reluctant to be around bugs, worms, bees or soil. Others come to us with considerable knowledge, they grew up on a farm or helped granny in the garden every summer. We try to identify the strengths and skills of our helpers. There seems to be a cook, an artist and a mechanic in each group, who would think those are needed so often in the garden?? Some are excellent waterers, weeders and harvesters. We target our tasks to these skills to allow them to feel successful and competent. Of course, everyone is expected to do those everyday jobs as needed.

A major component of our education is to introduce new foods, think about where your food has come from and what has been done to it along the way. We encourage trying new vegetables, even offering alternative ways to prepare. I have heard the statement "I don't eat anything green" so many times I have come to expect it. Most participants are good sports and will try most things, especially when we tell them it's ok to spit it out. They are very surprised to actual like them.

We consider our program a success if we can help make someone more aware about nature. We feel this adds to their general knowledge of the importance of gardens and food. They go home eating better and sharing plants and veggies with their family, have a new understanding of how to contribute to their community and have learned how teamwork can help us come together for a common goal. We expect each worker to fill out a time card that explains what they have done that shift and; the most important thing, "what did I learn today". If they didn't learn something, they need to let us know and we teach them all something. A bug, a disease, garden techniques, etc.

We keep track of the poundage we donate. We average about 10,000 lbs each year, we even hit 15,000 pounds one year. I am happy that we donated over 9,000 lbs in 2020 even though we didn't have recap help until July.

I became a Master Gardener to learn more about plants. Along the way I discovered those beautiful, flavorful vegetables. I had a dream of "feeding the world" but we all know that is unrealistic. I decided we could feed our little corner of the world, a much more attainable goal. I feel blessed to participate in this program because I can educate along the way AND provide nutritious foods to people in need. It is rewarding to run into someone in public and hear, "I remember you, you taught me....."

