



## Community garden reaps fresh veggies

By Diane Urbani de la Paz, Peninsula Daily News  
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SEQUIM — Social studies can be delicious.

So can socializing.

A small flock of sixth-graders and older retirees have tasted those facts at the long-awaited Community Organic Garden of Sequim, behind St. Luke's Episcopal Church on Fifth Avenue.

"Holy Moses, snack on that," instructed Linda Dolan, the paraeducator and garden co-founder who walked over to the small plot with her Sequim Middle School students last Friday morning.

The sixth-graders, under the tutelage of Dolan and social studies teacherCarolynn MacDonald, reaped what they'd sown just last month: lettuce, chard and radishes that, plucked from the earth by young fingers, looked like cherries.

Brittany Zuck, Lavee Hess and Brandon Payne, all 12, held the blush globes aloft like birthday gifts.

There was a little too much soil on them for immediate eating, but Hess, Zuck and Hector Baylom, 12, obeyed Dolan's orders and munched on some young, fluffy lettuce.

Dolan then reminded the students to stay focused.

"Pull the weeds out," she said.

"They're going to compete with your food."

### **Two-year effort**

The community garden — first imagined more than two years ago by Dolan and a group of Sequim High School students — is a place where the preteens put their hands in dirt alongside people such as Elena Karr and Liz Harper, retirees renting 10-by-10-foot plots for vegetables, herbs and flowers.

This productive patch of ground isn't merely a reaction to rising food prices.

Rather, it's a place to learn about a lot of things: how plants prosper without pesticides, how food grows and how people can get along.

In their social studies and language arts block class, Dolan and MacDonald taught the sixth-graders about ancient cultures and how people built communities around small farms.

"We're tying this in with sustainability for our community," Dolan added, "and how we can provide for ourselves."

A few steps from the middle-schoolers' patch, Karr is making the most of her plot, and growing broccolini — a cross between broccoli and Chinese kai-lan broccoli — Swiss chard, Delicata squash, tomatoes, oregano, peppers and strawberries.

Karr could have done some of this at her home in SunLand North but preferred the community-spirited spot.

Karr, a retired mental health care provider and mediator, admitted that she and the other gardeners have had to be patient with this spring's cold weather.

But the tomatoes are finally flowering, and the unofficial slogan here is "keep hope alive," she said with a laugh.

### **Potluck inauguration**

On Saturday, Karr joined the garden's inaugural potluck celebration at St. Luke's, which donated the land for the garden.

Since her vegetables aren't quite ready yet, Karr brought her special orange-infused chocolate cake with cream cheese frosting.

The event included a blessing by retired St. Luke's rector Bill Sallee, who gave thanks for the soil, the water and the gardeners.

He added that since soil is the source of life, "getting your hands dirty is touching life at its core."

One of the best prayers of all, Sallee said, is "thank you, Mother Nature."

Sequim Mayor Laura Dubois stepped up next to say that the community garden suits the city's vision statement, which touts "keeping a small-town, community atmosphere."

Gardening together, Dubois added, gets people away from their television sets

and "spending time with neighbors and making friends."

Dubois, for her part, admitted that she can't grow anything.

"My husband has the green thumb . . . but I can pull weeds," she said.

**'Unofficial president'**

Harper, a retired school counselor and divorce mediator known as the "unofficial president" of the garden, said the garden's 20 plots are rented to community members for \$25.

They're all spoken for now, but Harper looks forward to welcoming another season of gardeners next spring.

The garden sprang, Harper added, from multiple sources in Sequim.

Friends of the Fields founder Bob Caldwell worked with St. Luke's to bring water to the plots and served as an adviser to the garden planners.

It all fits, Caldwell said, since Friends of the Fields is a Clallam County coalition striving to protect farmland.

"This is not quite a farm," Caldwell said, "but it's going to get people interested in local foods.

"It has all come together, and it's really exciting."

Sound Community Bank and Sequim First, an environmental advocacy group, were among those who made contributions even before the church provided the space, Harper added.

"We just had this dream.

"We didn't have any land, but they just believed this was going to happen."

Local nurseries such as McComb Gardens gave compost, while The Home Depot gave the garden a shed "at a deeply, deeply reduced price."

A mix of people is growing in the garden, Harper added with a smile.

"I've met people I never would have met otherwise," she said.

"This is about as far away from divorce mediation as I could get."

For more information, phone Harper at 360-683-7698.