

UConn Cooperative Extension
Middlesex County Master Gardener Focus Group
A Model Community Garden



2010 Annual Report

Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future



Middlesex County Extension Center

A Word from the Co-Chairs

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the Middlesex County Master Gardener Focus Group, we are pleased to present our 2010 report on achievements, challenges, and next year's goals. The Focus Group was established in 2006; its first significant accomplishment was to design and build a 900 square foot Model Community Garden in front of the of University of Connecticut's Extension Center in Haddam in early 2007. The Garden's mission is to provide fresh produce to community food banks/soup kitchens during the growing season and to offer our community an ongoing teaching and learning tool for organic horticultural practices throughout the year.

Since inception, much has been accomplished, thanks to our volunteers (both Master Gardeners and MG Interns), and ongoing support from the staff at UConn Middlesex County Extension Center, the Connecticut Master Gardener Program, and the Connecticut Master Gardener Association (CMGA). Focus Group volunteers logged in almost 700 hours in 2010, managing and operating the Community Garden, providing community outreach, creating and sharing educational tools and techniques, and beautifying the Extension Center grounds. These volunteers not only gave freely of their time and expertise, but also provided over \$800 in donated equipment, tools, and operational items to supplement grants used to manage and improve the garden.

In 2010, after an unsuccessful bid for a grant to build a second garden, we increased the capacity of the model garden by optimizing row design and focusing on succession and companion planting opportunities. We will continue to look for ways to increase production to feed the community.

Sincerely,



Maureen Gillis and Chantal Foster
Co-Chairs, Middlesex County Master Gardener Focus Group

About the Middlesex County Master Gardener Focus Group

Master Gardeners are enthusiastic, and willing to learn and share their knowledge and training with others. We embrace the mission, theme, and vision of the UConn Cooperative Extension System, which focuses on creating learning partnerships that enhance lives and build toward sustainable futures. The Middlesex County MG Focus Group is under the auspices of the UConn Extension Center and was founded in response to the CMGA's desire to establish focus groups in each county.

Our Mission

Middlesex County MG Focus Group will:

- Present opportunities for Master Gardeners at all levels to teach and learn in a collaborative environment;
- Provide forums for researching and experimenting with organic gardening; and
- Enhance sustainable living practices through community outreach and education.

The Model Community Garden will:

- Deliver fresh produce to community food banks/soup kitchens during the growing season; and
- Offer the community an ongoing teaching and learning tool for organic horticultural practices throughout the year.

Each year, the Focus Group recruits members from the current (Middlesex and New London Counties) Master Gardener Class to volunteer in the Community Garden and become members of the ongoing Focus Group. Expectations are that the MG Interns will assume primary responsibility for the Garden, as well as plan and execute a significant improvement. A major challenge in 2010 resulted from the MG classes being held in Norwich; this resulted in few Interns joining the group. In addition, we lost a few members. Nonetheless, we not only met weather and pest challenges but made several long-term improvements.



**Chantal Foster
and Chaleen
Abely harvest
spinach**



**John Carlson,
Marsha Dowling,
Susan Logatto
confer on planting
day**

What Went Right...What We Learned...and Challenges and Goals for 2011

- ⇒ **Tools, Techniques, and Efficiencies** After much cheerful debate and varying opinions, we all agreed on a standardized crop plan before the spring planting to minimize soil compression and maximize production. This included using the area outside the fence. The new row scheme, combined with planting smaller determinates next far-reaching cherry tomatoes, allowed us to double the number of tomato plants. The wider rows also facilitated the use of soaker hoses, and we installed a system just in time for a very dry summer. While still manual, the system was more efficient and effective than hand watering.



**Soaker Hose
in Tomato
Bed**

- ⇒ **New Crops** We overwintered spinach for the first time, with great success. Three rows of spinach and broccoli raab were sowed, and we experimented with several methods of protection (row covers; mulch; no cover). While the broccoli raab failed, we harvested over 30 gallons of spinach. Our conclusion was that the “no cover no mulch” approach yielded the best results. We also planted garlic outside the fence for the first time, for a July 2010 crop (44 heads). Kale was attempted, but was battered by broccoli worms and failed.

**Chaleen
Abely ready
to deliver
spinach**



- ⇒ **Pest Management** Our biggest pest challenge in the past has been the squash vine borer and squash beetle, requiring a significant amount of vigilance, manual pest destruction, and crop failure. We decided not to grow squash in 2010, focusing on crops which are less prone to pests. This was a good decision; when delivering our “non squash” produce to St Vincent DePaul, we were told they had so much zucchini it couldn't all be used.

With the squash pests gone, the voles decided to move in. Chard, carrots, and beets were attacked vigorously. At the end of the summer, we installed a vole barrier around the garden and set traps. As of this winter, the voles were still in the garden and this will be an issue that continues to need attention in 2011. When the covers were taken off the cold frame, deer decided to munch on the carrot tops and parsley.

- ⇒ **Composting** This year, we picked up vegetable scraps from St Vincent DePaul to compost. Many, many gallons were fed into the bins. Also, free (tested) completed compost was obtained from Essex and delivered by our volunteers, and free bags of soil were donated by Town & Country Nurseries.
- ⇒ **Extension Center Improvements** The Center's herb garden was in a poor location, being choked by tree roots. We moved the perennial herbs to outside our fence and reseeded the old area. An espaliered pear tree was also added outside the fence for demonstration purposes. Members of our group also worked on maintaining and improving the foundation plantings. MG Coordinator Vicky McCarthy hosted a picnic for Focus Group/Interns/Center staff, and we ceremoniously cut our first tomato for the group to enjoy.



Espalier Pear Tree



First tomato

- ⇒ **Outreach** We continued to focus on community outreach and education during 2010. Outreach included:
 - Helping with the 4H "terrarium class" at the Extension Center
 - Expanding teaching participation with Groton Community Garden, including a "hands on" demonstration of building a freestanding trellis and education about nutrition
 - Participating in the "Discovery Center" at the Durham Fair and at the Portland Fair (organic gardening, pest management, and composting exhibit), as well as manning the MG booth at the Durham Fair



Jamie Burgess, John Carlson



TriFolds and "Hands on" Samples

Missteps/Crop Failures

- ⇒ **Harvest Timing** We could have improved spinach output by harvesting earlier. Snap peas and pole beans were left too long on the vines.

- ⇒ **Peppers** In addition to the chard, carrot, beet and kale issues described above, the sweet bell peppers (and so a large extent, the cubanelles) failed because of some disease (undetermined). Hot peppers survived. This was experienced in many members' personal gardens as well.
- ⇒ **Resources** Peoplepower resources were an increased challenge for several reasons; some members left the group (illness, moving, natural attrition) and few Interns joined the group (the MG Class was held in New London).

Challenges and Goals for 2011

- ⇒ **Cold Frame** We did not finish the cold frame in time for optimal use in 2010; also, even though the automatic top lifts were installed, 1 is not working properly and if the cover is off, deer step into the frame and eat the produce. These issues will need to be addressed in 2011.
- ⇒ **Harvesting** We need to harvest earlier and more often for some crops (spinach, peas)
- ⇒ **Maintenance** The fence and gate need attention
- ⇒ **Pests** Vole Control!



About the Model Community Garden

The 900 square foot garden was originally tilled to 6" and heavily composted. Its 7.5' vinyl (18 gauge, uv protected) deer fence is stapled to locust posts (milled on site) and 10 gauge leader wire is used at the top and bottom of the fence for strength.

- Soil tests are conducted at least annually to ensure proper pH and the presence of adequate organic matter and nutrients
- Newspaper and salt hay substitute is used to provide moisture retention for plants benefiting from mulch
- Water is provided by 3 rain barrels that capture roof runoff, as well as a reel-and-hose and soaker systems.
- In 2010, we installed a soaker hose system for the 3 largest beds, just in time for a particularly dry summer!
- We also moved the herb garden plants to the perimeter of the garden, as the prior location was rootbound



Planting onion bulbs

Herbs outside fence



John Carlson tends to the compost bins

A model 3 Bin Compost System, built by our volunteers, provides organic matter for the soil.

- We recently moved the system to provide the best location for the cold frame, built by the 2009 MG class volunteers and funded by CMGA.

A cold frame, built primarily by Tage Carlson with a CMGA grant, is being used to overwinter carrots, parsley, and turnips



Annual Production

We deliver all produce from the Garden to Middletown's soup kitchen (St. Vincent DePaul Place) and food pantry (Amazing Grace).



Production History for our garden is shown below.

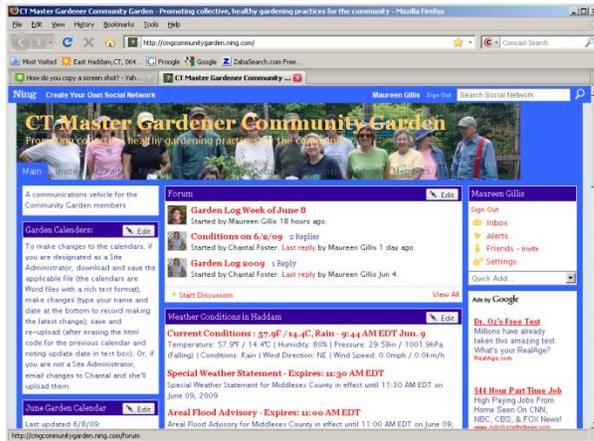
The Middlesex County Master Gardener Focus Group
A Model Community Garden

Production History

Crop	2007	2008	2009	2010
Tomatoes (#)	746 plus 70 lbs	680	532	620 plus 10.5 Gals
Eggplant (#)			209	288
Peppers (#)	215 plus 2 Gal	346	273	320 (mostly hot)
Cucumbers (#)	121	355	304	208
Squash (#)	133	114	120	
Beans	11 ½ Gal	17 ½ Gal	18 Gal plus 1/2 Qt	20.5 Gals
Broccoli		35 lbs		
Beets (#)			113	19
Carrots	3 ½ Gal plus 27 (#)			failed
Lettuce/Spinach/Other Greens/Chard		101 heads and 2 3 bushels	3 large paper bags and 7 Gal bags	35.25 Gal
Garlic (#)				44
Onions (#)		68		74
Snow Peas				8 oz
Herbs (Basil, Cilantro, Parsley)				3.25 Qts and 6 bunches



Our Web Sites



<http://cmgcommunitygarden.ning.com/> and <http://mcmgwg.weebly.com/>

Before 2009, Garden and Production Logs and Journals were available in hardcopy only at the garden. Communication by email assisted Focus Group members in managing the garden to some degree, but because volunteers work on Model Community Garden projects and activities individually (rather than on specified days and times), we realized we required a tool for continuous and immediate communication. We needed to discuss harvest and pest status and alerts, integrated pest management techniques, meeting agendas, and resource needs. And, we wanted to instill a greater sense of camaraderie and garden “ownership” between the monthly Focus Group meetings. The CT Master Gardener Community Garden Web site uses a social network facility to enhance ongoing communication and idea sharing among members. Access is by email invitation only, to mitigate the risks associated with social networking sites.

Features of the site include:

- ✓ Online storage of monthly calendars, production logs, crop plans
- ✓ Weekly garden logs in the form of Discussion Forums
- ✓ Photos and Videos of our group’s activities
- ✓ Blogs, used for announcements and to discuss ideas and projects that are not part of daily operations
- ✓ Live feed of Haddam Weather conditions

For more information about our interactive Web site, or to gain access, email Maureen Gillis at moberngillis@comcast.net or call Chantal Foster at (860) 342-0619.

Our more traditional Web site contains historical items not supported by the network site.

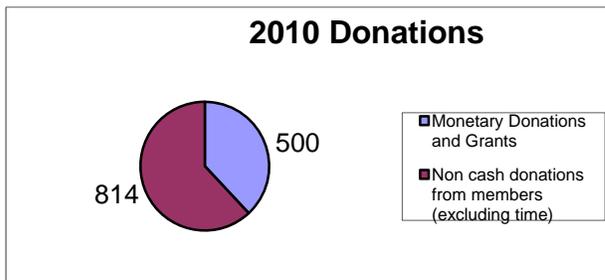
- ✓ Crop and pest guides created by our group
- ✓ Historical documents such as soil tests, meeting agendas, garden journals, annual reports, and minutes
- ✓ Photos

Financial Information

The Community Garden was established with funding from the 2007 Middlesex/New London Counties Master Gardener Class and a grant from CMGA, as well as non-monetary donations from founding Focus Group members. Since then, funding has primarily come from the CMGA, supplemented with significant non-monetary contributions of equipment and supplies from Focus Group members. In addition, the MG Program contributed to us this year as we were low on funds. All financial transactions are processed through a fund maintained and controlled by the University of Connecticut.

2010 Financial Summary

Unreserved Fund Balance, January 1, 2010	\$100
Fund Balance Reserved for Cold Frame	\$350
Monetary Donations and Grants	<u>\$500</u>
Total Funds Available in 2010	\$950
Expenses, including Cold Frame	<u>\$519</u>
Unreserved Fund Balance, December 31, 2010	\$431



The \$500 in monetary donations in 2010 came from the following sources:

- ✓ CMGA general purpose grant \$300
- ✓ MG Program Grant \$200

In 2010, non-monetary donations of approximately \$814 from Focus Group members included:

- ✓ Bricks, hinges, and other donations for cold frame
- ✓ Seeds, seedlings, and bulbs
- ✓ Salt hay substitute mulch
- ✓ Fertilizer, compost, soil bags
- ✓ Wooden stakes, soaker hoses
- ✓ Miscellaneous supplies
- ✓ Brochure printing, Web site fee

