

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



2011 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 2011 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 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).

In 2011, the Focus Group and Master Gardener community lost a wonderful friend and supporter. Despite a brave battle, Jackie Fantasia succumbed to kidney cancer on February 19. Jackie was not only a tireless volunteer, but also arranged for the contribution of tomato and eggplant seedlings, which yields a significant portion of our production results. This report is dedicated to Jackie, with thanks for her volunteerism and fond memories of working together.



On a brighter note, we welcomed a great group of Interns, and most will continue to work with the group. We are so excited that such enthusiastic gardeners will remain with us to pound stakes, tie tomatoes, pull weeds, fret over the eggplant, squish pests, turn compost, and schlep produce to the soup kitchen and food pantry!

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 2011 was a marked decrease in summer production. Weather certainly played a factor and others suspected soil texture and perhaps nutrients were inadequate, despite soil test results. In response, several yards of compost and horse manure were added in the planting rows and around the outer perimeter in the Fall.



**Tim Grilley
tamping the
rows after
compost was
incorporated**

What Went Right...What We Learned...and Challenges and Goals for 2012

- ⇒ **Tools, Techniques, and Efficiencies** We expanded the soaker system which came in handy during some very dry spells, however hand watering was still necessary in areas not covered by the soaker hoses. Having several new interns sign on to our group from the Haddam office aided in the monitoring and care of the garden. We pulled our first planting of beans early enough in the season to have two successful plantings.
- ⇒ **New Crops** We planted the entire perimeter of the garden with snow peas for the first time. This proved to be a very prolific and desirable crop. Although pea supports were erected in some areas along the inside of the fence, the peas grew up the deer fencing and we concluded that special support was not required in the future. Rhubarb was planted on the outside of the fencing and has grown beautifully, and so far has not been bothered by deer. A complete kitchen herb garden was planted, some inside and some outside the fence, depending on how desirable they are to deer.
- ⇒ **Pest Management** The biggest pest challenge this year was flea beetles on the eggplant. We tried sticky traps and eventually the eggplant recovered, but they were battered and it delayed and likely diminished their production. Because the eggplants were small and not hardened off before planting, this likely made them much more vulnerable. We plan to purchase eggplant earlier and replot into larger containers, and harden off in 2012. Voles continue to be present in the garden, but did not appear to do as much damage to crops this year.
- ⇒ **Composting** We continued to make compost in our 3-bin system, received a donation of two yards of aged horse manure and purchased five yards of compost from Town & Country. All of this material was added to our soil at the end of the 2011 gardening season in preparation for 2012.
- ⇒ **Extension Center Improvements** Members of our group participated in a foundation weeding and mulching day at the Haddam Extension Center organized by Cherry Czuba. The rain gardens were also weeded thoroughly.
- ⇒ **Outreach** We continued to focus on community outreach and education during 2011. Outreach included:
 - Presentations at Russell and Durham Libraries on composting, organic gardening and container gardening
 - A tour of the garden to a group of Boy Scouts from Burma
 - Manning the Master Gardener booth at Durham and Haddam Neck Fairs

Missteps/Crop Failures

- ⇒ **Watering Issues** Despite increased soaker hoses, certain areas of the garden still suffered from inadequate water, which negatively impacted cucumbers in particular, along with other crops planted around the perimeter of the garden. Onions suffered from hoses being dragged around for hand watering.
- ⇒ **Eggplant** As mentioned earlier, the eggplant was negatively impacted by the flea beetles, and we should consider floating row covers to prevent this from happening again, along with using larger plants to start with and taking quick action with sticky traps in the event the preventive measures do not work.

- ⇒ **Tomatoes** Overall production of this crop was disappointing compared to what had been achieved in previous years. The weather certainly was a factor but there was also a significant amount of leaf spot and other disease present on the plants. We will consider some more disease-resistant plants in the future.

Challenges and Goals for 2012

- ⇒ **Cold Frame** We managed to use the cold frame for some crops, but the soil in the frame dries out quickly and is difficult to keep watered. The melons we planted grew, but ultimately didn't mature and ripen completely. We need to select a crop suitable to the conditions offered by the cold frame, perhaps okra. We still need to repair the hinges on the cold frame to have it function properly
- ⇒ **Soil Health** We gave a real boost to the soil in the fall since it appeared our production was not what it had been in previous years. It will be interesting to see how the addition of compost and manure will impact 2012 production.
- ⇒ **Maintenance** The fence netting needs tightening and rainbarrels need attention
- ⇒ **People Power/Garden Monitoring** With the MG class being held in Norwich this year, it is likely we will not attract many new interns to the garden for 2012, and might not have the benefit of ongoing monitoring by interns while they are at the Haddam Extension Center



Planting Day, May 2011



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 2011, we expanded the soaker hose system and created a kitchen herb garden.
- We used the fence as our support for our pea crop, planted around the perimeter of the garden.



Cold Frame with Deer Barrier and Rhubarb

Spinach



John Carlson tends to the compost bins

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

A cold frame, built primarily by Tage Carlson with a CMGA grant, was used for melons during the summer and greens in the cooler fall months.



Annual Production

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



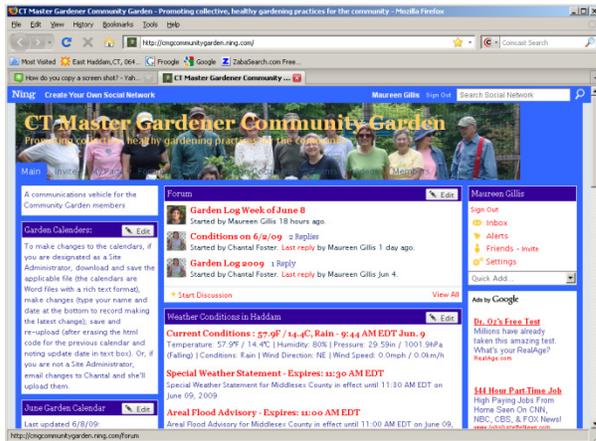
Production History for our garden is shown below.

The Middlesex County Master Gardener Focus Group
A Model Community Garden
Production History

Crop	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Red Tomatoes (#)	468 plus 70 lbs	239	336	Deter. 384	Indeter. 271
Yellow Tomatoes (#)	278	333	196	Indeter. 236	
Heirloom (#)		108		Cherry 10.5 Gals	Cherry 7.5 Gals
Total Tomatoes (#)	746 plus 70 lbs	680	532	620 plus 10.5 Gals	271 plus 7.5 Gals
Eggplant (#)			209	288	67
Peppers (#)	215 plus 2 Gal	346	273	320 (mostly hot)	602
Cucumbers (#)	121	355	304	208	43
Yellow Squash (#)	80	18	29	n/a	4
Zucchini (#)	33	96	91	n/a	1 winter squash
Melons					4
Beans	11 1/2 Gal	17 1/2 Gal	18 Gal plus 1/2 Qt	20.5 Gals	17.5 Gals plus 16 lbs
Broccoli		35 lbs	n/a	n/a	n/a
Beets (#)			113	19	3.5 lbs plus 1 gal
Radishes					20 plus 1/2 bag
Parsnips					12
Carrots	3 1/2 Gal plus 27 (#)		n/a	failed	35
Lettuce/Other Greens		101 heads	2 large paper bags and 2 Gal bags	5.25 Gal	.5 Gal
Spinach		2 bushels	1 large paper bag and 5 Gal bag	30 Gal	17.5 lbs plus 6 Gal
Swiss Chard		1 bushel	n/a	failed	5 Gal
Garlic (#)			n/a	44	127
Onions (#)		68	n/a	74	70
Snow Peas			n/a	8 oz	18 lbs plus 10 Gal
Herbs (Basil, Cilantro, Parsley, Tarragon, Thyme, Oregano)			n/a	3.25 Qts and 6 bunches	Lotz!
Rhubarb					1 bag



Our Web Sites



MC MG Community Garden



<http://cmgcommunitygarden.ning.com/> and <http://mcmgcg.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.

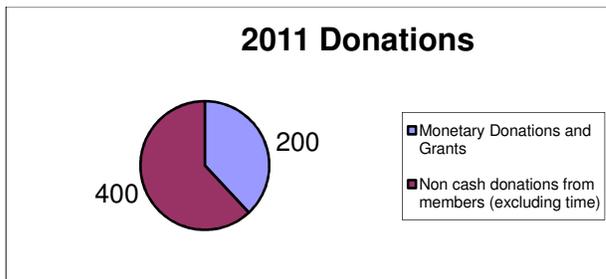
- ✓ Crop and pest guides created by our group
- ✓ Historical documents such as soil tests, meeting agendas, garden journals, annual reports, and minutes
- ✓ Photos

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.

2011 Financial Summary

Unreserved Fund Balance, January 1, 2011	\$431
Monetary Donations and Grants	<u>\$200</u>
Total Funds Available in 2011	\$631
Expenses	<u>\$315</u>
Unreserved Fund Balance, December 31, 2011	\$316



The \$200 in monetary donations in 2011 came from the following sources:

- ✓ Russell Library (for Outreach) \$150
- ✓ Extension Council (in memory of Jackie Fantasia) \$50

In 2011, non-monetary donations from Focus Group members included:

- ✓ Seeds, seedlings, and bulbs
- ✓ Salt hay substitute mulch
- ✓ Fertilizer, compost, soil bags
- ✓ Wooden stakes, soaker hoses
- ✓ Miscellaneous supplies
- ✓ Web site fee