

"Planting the Seeds of Success Community Gardens"

2nd Annual Veggie Tour Garden Locations and Stories

Saturday, August 13, 2011

10:00 am - 2:00 pm

Rockford Area

Please note: This is a self guided tour. No buses are available. You will need to provide your own transportation to travel between the gardens on the Veggie Tour.

Some of the grounds may be uneven and difficult for wheelchairs or walking. This is a rain or shine event and restrooms will not be available at the gardens. Please leave your pets at home.

Welcome to the Second Annual Veggie Tour! Specific locations and information are listed below. To add to your experience, please be sure to read the Planting the Seeds of Success Community Gardens project background for more information on this unique program, its many benefits and partners.

Locations: Are listed in alphabetical order by garden name. The numbers shown below are ONLY to assist you in matching the name of the garden to the descriptions and map location and are NOT to indicate order of viewing. Start and stop wherever you like. More information and maps can be obtained on the Neighborhood Network website: www.rockfordneighborhoodnetwork.org, or go to the map at: <http://www.RockfordNeighborhoodNetwork.org/VeggieTourMap.pdf>

1. Churchill's Grove/Lawn Place Garden, lot at 995 N. Main St., Rockford
2. Ellis Heights United Neighborhood Center, 1810 W. State St., Rockford
3. Garden of Glory, lot at 725 N. Winnebago St., Rockford
4. Gentle Shepherd Garden (also known as Rotary Garden), 5120 Rotary Rd., Cherry Valley
5. Jeremiah's Garden, southeast corner of Park Ave. and Court St., Rockford
6. Northeast Christian Church, 5651 E. Riverside Blvd., Rockford
7. ORCHID and Kishwaukee Corridor Weed & Seed, lot at 723/727 S. 3rd St., Rockford

The Stories of the Gardens – As Told by the Gardens

1. Churchill's Grove/Lawn Place Garden

995 North Main St., Rockford, east side of N. Main, south of Franklin Pl. and Harlem Blvd. (Some parking at site, additional street parking across street)

This effort transformed a vacant lot into a garden complete with 34 boxes and raised beds. This is our garden's 2nd year. We are very pleased to beautify and utilize this empty property for the enjoyment of those living, working and passing by. Most of the consistent garden crew are novice gardeners. We feel that we are learning as we go, and enjoy sharing our experiences, including our mistakes! The garden

has increased our sense of community. We have welcomed neighbors of 995 N. Main to share in the planting, maintenance and the harvest, and we are consistently bringing produce to local food pantries.

The garden is indeed a community effort and we have many people to thank. A local businessman, John Fridh, permitted the use of his empty lot when it became difficult for two groups, Churchill's Grove and Lawn Place (a smaller community within the Grove) to find the right space. Tyler Smith of Tyler's Nursery, resident of the Grove, was a significant help in providing labor to build the boxes and providing many of the plants in 2010, our first year. Water is graciously supplied by our next-door neighbor, the attorney firm of Reese & Reese. Items being grown include: sunflowers, raspberries, strawberries, turnip/collard/mustard greens, lettuce, Swiss Chard, cucumbers, peppers, arugula, string beans, kale, 3 kinds of potatoes, onions, spinach, carrots, beets, eggplant, herbs, leeks, several types of tomatoes, squash, rhubarb, and regular and heat tolerant radishes.

2. Ellis Heights

1810 West State St., Rockford (on street parking)

The Ellis Heights United Neighborhood Center is the current location and the garden is the gathering place, and activity focus for several area neighborhood groups and residents.

The start was rocky, literally. James DeVoe explains that when the Rockford Park District cleared the sod from the ground in what today is the raised bed garden we found a surprise. Under the sod was the remains of the building that once stood there. The foundation was filled with broken chunks of concrete, bricks, and other items which were pushed into the hole which once was the basement. So a few of us spent many hours digging up the cement. The first year of the garden did not quite follow our dream. What was a dream to have the kids from the neighborhood did not come and work and learn about growing food. And, what grew was hardly worth taking home. The best part was being able to have a few homeless individuals be able to come by and pick what they wanted.

The second year nothing was done. Then we talked about raised bed gardens, researched the idea on the internet, and came up with ideas as to what to where to start. Kim Philbrook filed the paper work to apply for a grant from the city and we received our money. Once the boxes were built, filled and planted, things started to work in my mind.

I laid out events surrounding the garden - cook outs, a Fall Festival, Make a Difference Day, Bird Houses, Christmas Trees, things to do with kids and adults. Once the money the city gave us ran out, we started to dig into our pocket for more money. I know I put over \$200.00 dollars into the garden. We asked for money from Sunday schools where we go to church. We have a drop box for donations. Next year possibly a Farmers Market. The ideas just keep coming in. Some businesses in the area have stepped up to help out, also.

The garden, its interest and impact continues to grow. Bird and critter watching is popular as the garden has a squirrel, birds, a ground hog, a hawk, and some cats. Additional beds were built, vegetables are being shared.

The Ellis Heights garden will be relocating at the end of this season due to road construction. Funds and volunteers will be needed. In a previous letter, James said, "what I don't want to lose is the fact we have something that we feel belongs to us. The Ellis Heights community has taken some pride in what

we are building. We have built something that gives back to our neighborhood and reaches out beyond. I think it shows what people can do to help themselves and to help others.” Please consider joining us as we rebuild these important gardens next year.

3. Garden of Glory

Lot at 725 N. Winnebago St., Rockford, south of Whitman St. (on street parking)

Community change can start in a garden, come see the neighborhood gathered in work and play. This truly urban garden was established on a shoe-string budget by people with a passion for creating a better neighborhood and a better world. The Garden of Glory has become a gathering place, especially for area youth, complete with work days and cookouts. Recycled paving stones mark a path through the plants, and unique raised beds were created with hay bales and recycled refrigerators. New projects this year include the start of a prairie area and unique décor as the local artists helped the area youth paint the refrigerators with an urban flair.

4. Gentle Shepherd Garden (also known as Rotary Garden)

5120 Rotary Rd., Cherry Valley

The garden welcomes visitors to the Veggie Tour. We look forward to learning from you and sharing our gardening techniques.

Who would guess that having even minimal decorating skills might be useful in a garden? Jude, the owner of the land, strategically decorates the land by laying carpet remnants to diminish weeds; though the carpet has the extra benefit of easy on the feet and body. Garden volunteers begin potting in February, amending the soil with manure and perlite.

The seeds start in darkness, but soon tiny plants pop up and are then transferred to a small greenhouse. As weather warms the volunteers – adults and teens – amend the soil again for optimal growth and begin to plant into the five acre garden. Between six and eight volunteers help to harvest the mature fruits and vegetables. One half of what is picked goes to the Gentle Fellowship food pantry while the other half goes to the volunteers.

5. Jeremiah’s Garden

Southeast corner of Park Ave. and Court St., Rockford (street parking)

Jeremiah’s Garden is one of a number of projects of Jeremiah Development, NFP (JD). JD was conceived almost four years ago by four west-side, downtown churches: Court Street United Methodist Church, Emmanuel Episcopal Church, First Presbyterian Church, and Second Congregational United Church of Christ. The name of the garden is inspired by JD’s guiding vision found in Jeremiah 19:7 – “Seek the well-being of the city...for in its well-being, you will find your well-being.”

Now in our second year, we have doubled the original size of the garden. We garden using raised beds (16) and soil berms. New to the garden this year are sweet potatoes, rhubarb and blueberry bushes as well as additional perennial beds of flowering plants. Planting continues to follow organic and companion planting guidelines. Many of our plants are raised in the spring from seed by our gardeners.

Volunteer gardeners come primarily, but not exclusively, from our churches. The area in which our churches and garden are located is a low-income, urban area. Our neighbors know they are welcome to visit the garden at any time and help themselves. Some have told us that if it were not for this garden, they would not have fresh produce to eat. In this regard, Jeremiah's Garden is truly a neighborhood garden!

6. Northeast Christian Church **5651 East Riverside Boulevard, Rockford**

This huge garden, located on the campus of Northwest Christian Church, is called "Common Ground", and you'll find it hard to believe that it was started on April 30 of this year and already has 97 raised garden beds! Common Ground is not one of the gardens funded by Community Services Block Grant funds, but it is such an incredible example of a faith-based, community garden that we wanted to include it on the tour. Several volunteer Master Gardeners assisted in its inception, and are amazed at its progress. The Common Ground Facebook page tells the story very well: "Now more than ever Rockford families need help. Many families are struggling to provide healthy food for their families in the face of long-term unemployment and economic uncertainty. We believe that we can be part of the solution. Not only do we want to raise fresh, healthy produce for our own families, but we want to help meet the same needs for other families. Common Ground desires for this project to be a "community" garden in three aspects: (1) We want to create a community of growers, (2) we want this project to be open to community involvement, and (3) we want half of what we grow to be used to help feed our community. We hope you will join us in this effort!" For more information, go to: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Common-Ground-Community-Garden/144571095613428>.

7. ORCHiD/Kishwaukee Corridor Weed and Seed **Lot at 723/727 S. 3rd St. (on street parking)**

Joe Owen, ORCHiD Garden Coordinator, says: ORCHiD Community Garden was established in 2009 on vacant city property, and that year we had several ground plots and five raised beds. Our sponsors included the City of Rockford Human Services Department for its grant, the Rockford Park District for tilling, and the City of Rockford Forestry Division for wood chips. That first year was great and we learned many lessons. Both the garden and lessons grew in 2010.

This year our garden is even better, with several improvements. We used cold frames to start seeds and harden off plants. We've continued to add ornamental plantings and will be putting in a bench for people who come and visit. We partnered with Kishwaukee Corridor Weed and Seed (KCWS) to add 11 more raised beds, and were able to install much needed water through grant assistance from KCWS, and ORCHiD purchased the meter. We also involved Kishwaukee Elementary School students to pre-start plants in the classrooms, and have the students' families involved in having a garden at our garden. Several residents also have plots or raised beds.

We are growing tomatoes, carrots, peppers (all kinds), corn, cucumbers, squash, peas, beans, lettuce, broccoli, onions (all kinds), radishes, turnips, beets, okra, cabbage, melons (all kinds), celery and potatoes. We also have an herb garden. We continue to donate vegetables to area hungry.

As ORCHiD Garden Coordinator, my personal goal was to be inclusive and representative. I hoped that someone from every culture that makes up our neighborhood would garden at our Community Garden, in harmony with each other. This year I am proud to say we have achieved this goal.

Interested in helping in the growing success of Community Gardens?

Do you have some spare time to plant, water, weed, harvest or even deliver vegetables to the pantries? Teach others? Take photos? Tell about our stories on Facebook? How about tools or pots in the garage, leftover seeds, or perennials that can be split and shared? We are always looking for volunteers, equipment, plants, seeds, other donations or funding.

For more information contact:

- Cyndie Hall, Neighborhood Network Executive Director, 815-967-4034, cyndie.hall@rockfordil.gov
- Christopher Greenwood, City of Rockford Human Services, 915-967-4039, christopher.greenwood@rockfordil.gov

Community Vegetable Gardens are funded by the City of Rockford Human Services Department, Community Services Block Grants. Assistance is provided by Neighborhood Network, University of Illinois Extension-Winnebago, volunteer area Master Gardeners, and hundreds of volunteers.