

How Does Your Garden Grow: a look at Cass' eight community gardens

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Ever since humans moved beyond the hunter-gatherer stage, gardens have been vital to the survival of people worldwide.

Those early ancestors purposely planted seeds to grow crops, then harvested them for food. No longer nomads, they put down roots, creating the basis for a civilized society.

In the not-too-distant past, almost every family had a garden plot near their home, where they grew fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers.

Today gardens have taken on new importance. Not only do they provide healthy food but they connect people with nature and create a sense of normalcy and calm in an increasingly unpredictable world.

The University of Minnesota Extension, in conjunction with the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP), makes gardening an important part of its mission. The program aims to build and improve community gardens so that people can learn how to garden responsibly, produce vegetables and fruits, and exercise while doing so.

Simon Whitehead, is SHIP's Health and Nutrition Educator for Cass County.

"Cass County SHIP believes that community gardens afford more access to fruits and vegetables, more consumption and increased physical activity. [They] promote healthy eating and reduce obesity levels and can be a source of community pride and spirit," he declares.

Cass has eight community gardens, spread across the county. This week let's visit the gardens in Walker and Onigum.



Walker's "Little Red Hen" Garden is located next to the municipal water tower on Tower Avenue, overlooking the town and Leech Lake. Photos submitted

Walker Community Garden

The Walker Community Garden, also called the Little Red Hen Community Garden, commands the high ground on Tower Avenue next to the city water towers overlooking Leech Lake.

The garden was first a project of the WHA School District but gradually fell into disuse. In 2018 Cass County SHIP took over and Simon Whitehead secured a grant to revive the garden. In the fall of 2018, SHIP and Turf Tech of Walker installed a water supply with sprinklers. Ryan Hunt donated 15 circle garden beds, and Walker Home Store

donated 45 10-inch timber stakes for fencing.

A garden shed with tools was made available to all; and rich dirt was supplied for gardeners to add to their plots. Steve Hoopman with Keller Fencing donated his time and experience to add gates and expand the garden. The area was cleaned and weeded prior to spring 2019.

"Little Red Hen Garden" became so popular that in 2021 the space doubled. There are 40 6-by-6 foot plots at \$20-25 per season and 15 circle beds at \$15.

Those who work the garden and contribute get first pick of the plots — echoing the message of "The Little

Red Hen," an American fable that taught the importance of hard work and personal initiative.

Alice Groth lives a block from the garden. She's become the de facto overseer, partly due to proximity but also because she loves gardening.

"I find myself helping people, maybe weeding a bit in someone's garden," she says. "Weeding is a way to get rid of stress!"

But she quickly credits co-manager and fellow gardener Ron Rude for putting "a tremendous amount of work [into the garden] to the benefit of everyone. He was easy to consult with and a great encourager!"

"Ron put a ton of time into the garden last year," Whitehead agrees.

Sometimes Alice even calls gardeners if produce is ready to be picked and they haven't shown up. "Everybody responds for their own picking!"

Gardeners are encouraged to stay as organic as possible with fertilizer, which may not be needed because the soil is very rich. Pesticides and herbicides are not encouraged but there have been very few bugs.

"We did have a hungry ground squirrel, but someone live-trapped it," Alice recalls.

Gardeners are a mix of first-timers and experienced, even Master Gar-



A bounty of fruit and veggies are picked at the Walker Community Garden.

deners. Whatever the level, everyone asks questions and shares knowledge. Almost all garden plots included flowers, as well as vegetables, attracting beneficial pollinators.

The summer of 2021 was an excellent growing season. It also was the first year that a plot was designated for the Walker Area Food Shelf. Master Gardener Terri Fierstine tended the Food Shelf plot, which

had a bountiful yield. "That was a real plus," Alice reports. "It produced about 550 pounds of fresh produce!"

The 2022 gardening season will start in mid-May, depending on the weather, with most planting completed by Memorial Day weekend. To reserve a plot, call Travis at WHA School at (218) 547-4360.



The instructions for making compost are pretty straightforward. Green stuff goes here. Brown stuff goes there. Turn stuff over. Repeat.

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A plot was designated for the Walker Area Food Shelf in 2021, which produced about 550 pounds of fresh produce.

Hubbard County

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Razor-type vehicle in his yard, confronted suspect who wouldn't identify himself. Last seen going south on C.R. 2. Orange and white vehicle/razor, male driver with glasses wearing a gaiter head covering, C.R. 2, Nevis.

Officer assist — Caller wants his girlfriend removed from his residence, Third Ave., Nevis.

Domestic — Fifteen year old states he

was assaulted by his brother and sister, Wild Wing Dr.

Animal complaint — Caller stated three cows in middle of intersection.

Animal complaint — Dogs in the middle of the road, they have killed his chickens in the past.

Disputes/disturbances — Elderly man with cane is intoxicated, in the Nevis gym.,