



The Hackensack Community Garden emphasizes natural gardening practices such as no till, minimal soil disturbance and lots of mulch and cover crops. Photos submitted

Hackensack garden promotes natural gardening practices

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In many ways, the Hackensack Community Garden is similar to others in Cass County. Started two years ago as part of the SHIP program, it gives people who don't have the basics needed to garden where they live, the chance to rent a plot and garden in the company of more experienced gardeners.

What sets Hackensack apart is the emphasis on natural gardening practices.

"At [our garden], no insecticides, herbicides or fungicides are allowed," explains Jim Etzel, who owns Earth is Our Home Environmental Solutions and serves as a consultant for the Hackensack garden.

"With natural gardening, they are not needed. We practice no till, no chemicals, minimal soil disturbance, and lots of mulch, cover crops and pioneer plant utilization."

The garden is located at the east end of Lake Avenue in Hackensack, in the Bona Paulson Wildlife Observatory that Paulson donated to the city for a nature preserve after her death.

The fenced area is 120-by-40 feet with several access points. It has nine 10-by-20 foot beds, three 10-by-10 beds and nine raised beds, plus a shed to store tools, supplies and soil amendments.

Currently nine gardeners have plots or raised beds reserved; two gardeners passed away in recent months.

Only natural fertilizers are used: wood ash from Deep Portage Learning Center's wood gasification heating system, and pelletized sulfur and compost from a local farmer.

Last summer posed a few challenges. In addition to the summer-long drought, the on site water source failed, and gardeners had to haul water to their plots.

"We will have water [on

site] for the 2022 growing season!" Etzel promises.

Despite this setback, which created a lot of work for gardeners, natural gardening practices proved beneficial, because the soil stayed cooler and held the water longer.

"People [harvested] produce from their plots," he reports. "It provided a wonderful classroom to see what can handle drought and what cannot survive. In my eyes, it was a success as to what nature can teach us."

He sees gardeners enjoying the community aspect of the garden. "People like to learn new techniques for creating healthy soils that provide healthy food."

Plans for 2022 include finishing the well and making sure people have an easy source of water.

There will be continued emphasis on improving the garden's soil with cover crop usage, companion plant techniques, pioneer plant utilization (AKA



Hackensack gardeners successfully harvested lush produce from their plots, even in a drought summer.

'weeds and how we can use them'), and lots of education on pollinator health and how humans affect the natural world.

The Hackensack garden aims to promote natural gardening that mimics the natural world, starting with the utmost care for the soil

system.

"If you feed the soil system and keep it healthy, it will hold more water and nutrients, sequester carbon to help with global warming and provide nutrient-dense foods that will help with the health of all living creatures," Etzel stresses. "Ev-

everything deserves a chance at life. Nature is what will keep us healthy, and this is how we protect it!"

This year, Karen Holle will be the contact person for garden information or to reserve a spot. Phone (218) 821-1752 or email karenholle@tds.net



This fat, green globe will probably add a few more inches and ounces before it's ready to be picked.



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- Natural Landscape design that maximizes water catchment, soil health, and takes into consideration the utilities on your property so they work correctly.
- Ecological forest management planning for wildlife
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For more information and to schedule an appointment, contact Jim Etzel at 218-252-3258 earthsteward1@gmail.com www.earthisourhome.net