

Pillager Community Garden was started as a way to give back

by Gail DeBoer
Staff writer
gdeboer@pilotindependent.com

Cass County's southern-most community garden is in the town of Pillager, which hugs the Crow Wing River on the Cass-Morrison County line.

Like many community gardens, Pillager's is located on school district property. Unlike others, there is no charge to reserve one of the eight plots. The garden has high fences and a wa-

tering system, plus an on-site pump.

The garden was started in 2015 by Sue Van Hal, the school's former community connection coordinator, as a way to give back to the community.

"It's been well-received by those who use it," she reports.

Garden plots are generous in size, measuring about 25-by-30 feet. If more people were interested, plots might be subdivided. All plots are ground level and,

thanks to a county grant, many truckloads of black dirt have been hauled in to enrich the soil.

The garden is tilled at the start and the end of the gardening season and is irrigated with sprinklers from a well. The entire area is surrounded by high deer fencing.

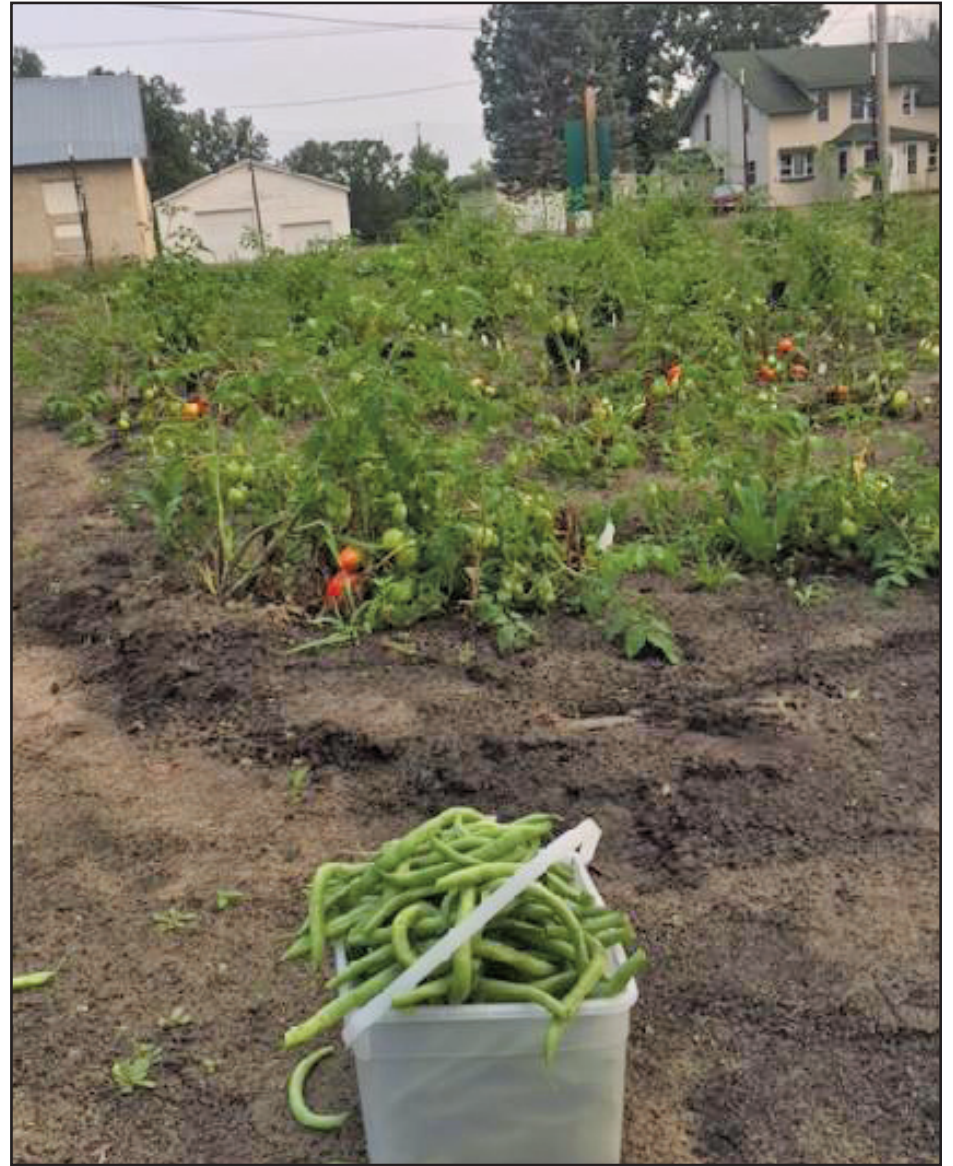
Each person is in charge of their own site, says Doug Johnson, who was the garden's point person in 2021. "Keep it weeded and cleaned after the season; help each other if needed."

The only other requirement is that gardeners share some of the produce with the local food shelf.

"We have a range of experience from years of gardening to first-timers," says Sue. "The more experienced gardeners are willing to help and advise the new ones; there's a very cooperative relationship between gardeners. Most raise typical produce: carrots, tomatoes, beans, melons."

Johnson says five gardeners used the garden last year — "a mix of old and new. Like me, I think they just enjoy the gardening experience and love eating their own produce."

Many people joined the garden because they wanted help and advice from others, Sue agrees. Many don't have room for a garden plot at their homes; or the soil is poor; or they have too much shade and



A bucket overflowing with green beans and tomato plants bending under the weight of red and green globes are evidence of success at the Pillager Garden. Photos submitted

Gardening enthusiasm grows throughout Cass County

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The Cass County Community Garden series would not have been possible without the following individuals who took time to talk about their respective gardens and provide photos for the articles.

- Walker: Alice Groth and Terri Fierstine
- Onigum: Polly Bedeau
- Hackensack: Jim Ertel and Karen Holle
- Backus: Becky Schmid and Rae Borst
- Longville: Carol Johnson, Paul Harwig, Dave Owens
- Remer: Matt and Lora Moracewski
- Pine River-Backus: Barb Mann
- Pillager: Sue Van Hal and Doug Johnson
- SHIP Nutrition Educator Simon Whitehead.

Growing interest in gardening can be seen by the number of Cass County residents who are Master Gardeners through the U of M Extension Service; now a total of 17.

We hope this series will encourage others to get involved in gardening, whether at a community garden or at their homes.

too many deer; and some join for the benefits of fencing and irrigation.

She's also noticed that

while plots are free and are advertised and promoted through the school newsletter, most current gardeners

come from outside the city itself to use the gardens.

No changes or additions are planned for the Pillager Community Garden in 2022.

Matt Moen of Pillager Community Ed is the contact person for anyone who wants to reserve a garden plot for 2022. Call him at (218) 330-4660 or email to mmoen@isd116.org

In a bit of late-breaking news, SHIP Nutrition Educator Simon Whitehead reports that the Pillager Family Center is willing to donate a plot of land on River Street (Pillager's main street) to be used as a garden — IF there is demand and based on local support.

To express support and interest, visit the following Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/565757674733011>

Any new garden would not compete with the existing one but would be in addition to it. The new garden could be a community creation with flowers, vegetables, seats to relax and a family area.

If interested, call Whitehead at (952) 220-1060 or come to the next meeting May 24, 6:30 p.m., at the site, just north of the car wash on River Street, Pillager.



The Pillager Community Garden features high deer-proof fencing.

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