



Pink, purple and scarlet flowers make a bright contrast with squash, green beans, sunflowers and other vegetables. Photos submitted

## Pine River-Backus Community Garden has close ties to the school

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Gardeners everywhere would agree: there are some things you can't control,

Barb Mann knows this. She's been involved in the Pine River-Backus Community Garden since 2010, when she was the school district's community ed director.

The last two seasons have been a challenge. In 2021, a summer-long drought made gardening difficult. Just three people signed up for plots next to the Pine River-Backus school. Plus, water lines from the school to the garden were unusable due to school construction.

In 2020, with COVID-19, there were only nine gardeners. "Before that, we had 15 to 30 gardeners" every year.

Despite this, Barb and

her fellow gardeners are optimistic about 2022. The garden now measures 175-by-140 feet, has 53 15-by-15 foot plots and 12-15 raised beds and garden circles. There is also a 20-by-24 foot hoop house on site and a tool/garden shed.

Rental fees are \$15 per year for the 15 by 15 foot plots (53 available); and \$10 per year for the 4-by-8 foot beds (two available), and various raised circle beds with at least 10 available.

Pine River also offers "sweat equity exchange" to make the gardens accessible for all income levels.

On site resources include water lines to all plots, composted manure, natural soil amendments, sawdust for mulch, garden tools, full fencing and soil testing.

After 11 years (with minimal use the past two), it was time last fall to refresh

the plots by removing weed growth and hauling in fresh topsoil. All plots have been re-marked, fresh wood chip pathways were laid down, and water will definitely be available in 2022.

Gardeners are asked to follow certain guidelines, such as organic fertilizers only and natural gardening methods and to sign agreements. Orientation sessions are offered at the start of the season, and a few workdays are scheduled to keep the garden functioning well.

This spring a communal mixed-fruit orchard will be planted, that will take two to three years to establish. Other ideas include a mushroom bed and a kids' secret garden.

One of the garden's successes is that much of the formerly sandy site has been transformed into loamy soil, great for growing



The Pine River-Backus Community Garden is located adjacent to the school and attracts young gardeners.

"Success is also learning from each other and building community," Barb adds. Challenges? "Working with Mother Nature and her critters, once they discover 'gourmet dining' at the garden." While deer can be excluded with fences, "gophers still can dig quite well, and that population is a challenge!"

"We don't always know the broader impact and even the little impact from past gardeners, new and seasoned ones," she reflects. "We know we're having fun, passing it on ... and making it available as best we can. Many of us wish to improve the land

we live on, as best we can. "The Community Garden is partly about bringing people together, enriching each other and thus contributing to a stronger community."

On May 6, Tiger Pride Day, PRB students helped lay extended water lines, haul and spread wood chips, transplant irises and do other garden prep to ready the space for this year's gardeners.

A PR-B Community Garden orientation session for registered gardeners and those considering renting plots will be May 14, 9 a.m.-11 a.m., at the gardens, located behind the

school near the school forest and football field/track arena. Gardening classes and dates have yet to be determined.

Garden plot registrations are being accepted on a first come, first serve basis via the Community Ed Office. Contact Troy Gregory, Pine River-Backus Community Ed, (218) 587-2020, or go online to <https://prbschools/revtrak.net/rw-community-education/>



Raised circle beds that eliminate the need to bend over are popular at the Pine River-Backus Community Garden.





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