



From late April to early July, 29 gardeners converted a few thousand square feet of sod into a virtual "horn of plenty".

In the fall, several community garden committee members, partners and gardeners gathered at the site along with PrairieLand's award for 2010 Top Project presented by the Nebraska RC&D State Association.

Category: Community Development

Project: Columbus Community Garden

In the fall of 2009, the Columbus Multicultural Alliance (CMA) set up several committees to address various issues and complete projects in the Columbus community. The CMA Church Committee chose community gardening as their targeted project and asked Al Mittan, PrairieLand RC&D Coordinator, to assist with organizing the garden effort. A site for the garden was acquired on the Roy and Mae Walter property and Wilke Nursery and Landscaping cut the sod for removal from the plots. The UNL Extension Master Gardeners served on the garden organizing committee, helped measure out and mark the garden plots, developed a set of rules and guidelines for the garden and provided oversight of the garden.

Public service announcements encouraged citizens to sign up for the garden plots and the 40 plots were all quickly assigned to the 27 applicants. Gardeners included Anglo and Hispanic community members, a Hispanic church and the Columbus Community Hospital. A ribbon cutting, held on Earth Day, April 22nd, was attended by project partners, the PrairieLand Council and NRCS State Conservationist, Steve Chick.

The First United Methodist Church provided the liability insurance for the garden site, handled the project funds and hosted a special community garden supper featuring several pounds of fresh produce from the garden. The 45 attendees were provided with the recipes for all of the dishes served and were also provided with guidance on canning and other food preservation techniques.

The Columbus Community Garden project allowed 27 gardeners and their families to produce and enjoy their own locally grown vegetables. The gardeners represented a cross section of Columbus community members, organizations and cultures. They were able to become better acquainted with their fellow gardeners, to network and socialize as they worked their garden plots. The Columbus Community Hospital brought some of their physical therapy patients to the garden to work in the plots. The hospital made produce from their plots available to needy families at minimal cost and donated the proceeds back to the local United Way. Total dollar value of the project, including the 1500 volunteer hours contributed by the garden committee and gardeners, was \$52,582. One of the local school industrial arts classes built 2 hinged benches that were convertible into picnic tables that were purchased by the garden committee and set up at the garden site.

Project Partners and contributions: Roy and Mae Walter (site hosts), PrairieLand RC&D and Natural Resources Conservation Service (provided technical assistance, signage, park benches, gardening tools, an equipment storage box and an irrigation system for the garden @ \$1100), Columbus Multicultural Alliance (provided organizational assistance), Columbus Community Hospital (donated \$500), Columbus United Way (donated \$500), the First United Methodist Church (provided insurance and fund management), 1C Church of Columbus (donated \$200), UNL Extension Master Gardeners (technical assistance and \$100), Wilke Nursery and Landscaping (sod cutting and \$100) and Three Eagles Communications (provided free radio public address announcements) and the gardeners provided over 1500 hours of their time to plant, nurture and harvest produce from the 40, newly created, community gardens.