

The Rise of the Urban Garden

- Morgan Johnson

Urban gardening is on the rise throughout many communities worldwide. Broad Ripple is one of them. These gardens provide a colorful and useful array of flowers, herbs and vegetables to an otherwise inner-city area. They provide a wildlife habitat as well. Along with beauty, these gardens bring butterflies, birds, insects (both beneficial and sometimes not so beneficial) and people. One cannot help but be drawn to these natural urban spaces. With our Urban Garden initiative, our intent is to draw attention to the Green benefits of locally grown food and the fun and practicality of producing it. Local food sources can be limited. Utilizing even the smallest of urban spaces can create a garden where food can be produced for local people. Last year our gardens produced enough that we were able to sell it to some of the restaurants in the Broad Ripple Village and to Ron Harris at his Locally Grown produce stand at 54th and the Monon Trail.



We started our first garden on May 31, 2008. Candace had already had the site prepped for us. She had covered the growing areas in newspaper and had Johnny Crockett Tree Services cover the site with mulch. This helped to fight back the weeds and create a clean look. We then planted Roma tomatoes, habañero peppers, jalapeño peppers, banana peppers, okra, scalloped squash, green beans, edamame beans, purple basil, sweet basil, parsley, Swiss chard, kale, cucumbers and flowers. Unfortunately we had a slug problem in the beds of Swiss chard and kale. We also found that the neighborhood rabbits love edamame! Who

would of thought? We had several weeks of weeding and experimenting with vinegar as a herbicide on thistles. By not using any pesticides or chemicals on the garden, it required some creative thinking to hold the pests at bay. Despite our continued struggle with the thistles, we were able to grow and harvest an impressive amount of produce.

I am proud to say that Green Broad Ripple Urban Garden # 1 was a success! A special thanks to Candace Glass, who provided the ideal lot on 61st Street along the alleyway between Winthrop and Guilford. Candace is our very own Earth mother. She kindly allowed GBR to use her empty lot this past season. Many of you may have strolled by this lot. Candace has been growing flowers and delightful asparagus for several years here. Mary and Jim Holland who live across the street from the garden were gracious enough to supply water and a very durable garden hose. Bill Scott donated an invaluable composting bin along with his amazing knowledge of how to create fertile soil. Several friends and neighbors gathered as he showed us how to compost successfully. Bill was also a very gracious walk-by weeder! Actually I would like to thank all of our friends who randomly stopped by and picked a few weeds. Without all of you the garden would not have been as successful. Your enthusiasm has gone a long way in making this project a success.

Green Broad Ripple Urban Garden # 2 was located at Hair @ 6310 on College Avenue. Van and Dan were the men behind this one. The plants and flowers were in the front along College Ave. Dan and Van planted several seeds along with their grandchildren. The chemical free plants included: corn, tomatoes, bean, pumpkins and many beautiful flowers. The garden was a wonderful education tool for the grandchildren. They were able to watch the seeds grow into beautiful plants that produced vegetables. It was so successful that Van and Dan were giving away some awesome produce to friends, customers and passersby. This year they plan on creating a bigger vegetable garden. We should see an amazing rain garden in the back as well.

We have an exciting project in the works for 2009. The Green Broad Ripple Urban Garden Committee has established a partnership with the Indiana State Fair. Justin Armstrong, Director of the Normandy Barn, will be working with us to grow our plant starts in the new greenhouse at the fairgrounds. This will be an amazing addition to our gardening capabilities! Seed planting at the greenhouse will begin in mid February. There will be a couple of other community groups using the greenhouse as well. These winter starts will be used to jump start the garden plots earlier than last year. This collaborative effort will prove to be an excellent experience for all involved. As the co-chairman of the Urban Garden Committee, I am very excited and grateful for this wonderful opportunity. Thanks again to everyone who helped this past year!

Anyone who is interested in helping out in the Urban Gardens please e-mail Morgan Johnson at mojogogo@msn.com or info@greenbroadripple.org

Photo: Johnny Crockett Tree Service preps the site. – *Cortellini*

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