



# Growing your Greens

## EXPLORING THE HIGH SPRINGS COMMUNITY GARDENS

BY ALLISON CANDREVA

Fresh peas and asparagus flourish among the High Springs Community Gardens. It is only the start of the growing season, but these gardens already have an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Whether residents are looking to plant some strawberries or even some romaine lettuce,

the gardens are sure to accommodate. With two locations, the Downtown Community Garden and the Douglas Community Garden, locals looking to get their fingers in the dirt can still find some available plots.

Lys Burden, volunteer coordinator of the gardens, said she had seen community gardens along the west coast of Canada and thought they were beautiful. She

said she wanted to start a garden open to residents in the area, but it was just a matter of funding.

After her friend applied for a \$500 dollar grant (which they received), Burden drew up plans for the downtown garden, located in the James Paul Park area. The 36-foot-long garden contains 24 plots, each 4 feet by 8 feet, and has a majority of commuter gardeners. She said \$300 from the grant was used for 10 cubic yards of mushroom compost and to build half of the boxes.

"The compost made everything grow so well," she said. "We had sunflowers that were 10 feet tall, and huge cabbages and broccoli."

During the first season, Burden had to cultivate nine of the boxes herself. She sold her produce at the local farmer's market and said she put her profit of \$300 back into the garden.

In January of 2008, the City of High Springs identified the Douglas garden spot but did not have the money to get it started. Burden said she had to scrounge up compost and use scrap wood for the boxes. She said the city was very helpful by installing irrigation, donating woodchips

and hauling compost.

"It's been a partnership," she said. "I took a tree out, and they took it away."

Burden said that so many gardens are catalysts for urban renewal, and they really empower people in the community. There is a bit of that in the Douglas garden, she said, and it generally has a good spirit. Everyone will chip in and water everyone else's plants. However, there have been a couple of watermelon thefts.

"It's funny," she said. "They didn't know how to pick watermelons because they were too green."

The Downtown garden has a drip-irrigation system, which uses less water. Burden wants to add the drip system to the Douglas garden soon. In both of the gardens, an organic method is emphasized, which avoids chemical fertilizers.

For nitrogen,

Burden goes to the University of Florida to get a 5-gallon bucket of bat guano each month.

For those interested in having a plot in either the Downtown Community Garden or the Douglas Community Garden, the cost is \$15 for one planting season. The price includes the plot itself, some compost, water, and use of the tools stored at the garden. Burden said anyone on public assistance does not have to pay; they just have to commit to keeping up their plot. Just go to the City of High Springs Web site, city.highsprings.com, and download the application, rules and contract.

If anyone is discouraged about gardening, Burden said not to worry. Everyone in the garden pitches in and helps each other learn new ways to garden.

"The plants teach you.

The plots teach you. The other gardeners teach you," she said. "We're constantly learning from each other."

Burden would like to start another garden on the west end of town. In the end, it takes about \$5,000 to establish a lot-sized garden. She said. She would like to recruit a volunteer manager for each of the gardens, preferably someone who loves to garden and loves to help people garden. \$



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*through the editor: editor@towerpublications.com.*



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