

## Notes from Garden Leader's Gathering – Sept. 13, 2009

### **Garden Security and Theft:**

Quann gardener Jim Winkle did a fabulous job leading this discussion. The following are ideas from the gardeners who joined us from a variety of Madison area community gardens and three local police officers:

- The Madison Police officers present were not aware of the scale of the problem of theft in our community gardens. The meeting was a real eye opener for them. These are a few of their comments:
  - To aid in prevention, a garden leader should contact their neighborhood officers about the problem in their community garden. Ask them to put the word out to all the district officers – who should all be made aware of the problem.
  - Gardeners should contact their neighborhood police each time theft occurs – so the police are aware of the prevalence of theft in that community garden
  - Gardeners should call 911 if the garden thieves are still present in the garden.
  - The police are NOT the solution. They are a resource.
  - Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a tool which would be appropriate for community gardens theft reduction.

I googled CPTED and found the following: CPTED emphasizes the proper design and effective use of a created environment in *preventing crime and related problems*, and enhancing *community safety* - the quality of life, through the processes of *planning* and *design* of the *environment*, on a range of scales from individual buildings and interiors to wider landscapes, neighborhoods and cities.
  - Scarecrows dressed in police uniforms might be a deterrent. (I loved this idea).
  - Consider taking photos at registration, and providing gardeners with photo name tags to wear while they garden, or to be displayed at each garden.
  - If your community garden is fenced in, limit the entrances – so that unwelcome visitors are easier to identify as they come and go. A fence surrounding the garden is not a “100% Solution” – thieves will use the entrances.
  - Barriers with thorny plants may reduce visitors.

- Involve kids in gardening so they are more invested in the process, and less likely to vandalize or steal from the garden.
- The following great ideas are from gardener attendees at the Gathering:
  - Get in the habit of greeting people you see in the garden. If you don't recognize them ask "How's your garden doing?" Greeting people helps to learn who gardens in the CG, where their plot is and what they grow.
  - If you see someone in a garden that you know does not belong to them, confront them with other gardeners at your side – there is strength in numbers.
  - Use signage, identifying the purpose of the garden. The name "community garden" to some people may unfortunately mean – the produce is free to the community. Signs can be used to clarify the actual nature of the garden.
  - Go door to door and invite the neighbors to join the community garden. People who live close will visit the garden much more frequently, and are more likely to know their fellow gardeners, and be able to identify strangers to the garden.
  - Have garden events to socialize and meet your fellow gardeners.
  - Don't send friends into your garden to harvest, without you present.
  - Keep the garden clean of trash. The garden appearance sets a tone for who should and should not enter.
  - A neglected garden may appear abandoned, and encourage theft if it's believed no one will care.
  - Don't grow tempting items, especially ones that take a long time to mature...winter squash, red peppers, cabbage. If you have to, then plant in areas more difficult to reach.
  - Plant more than you need.
  - Put "free" bins at the garden entrance for extra that the gardeners want to give away. Label them so visitors or other gardeners know they may take items from the bins.
  - Establish an area, preferably away from the main community garden as a "pick-your-own" garden. If among regular gardens, visitors may not understand the borders and pick in a neighbors plot. Grow kid friendly veggies in this plot.
  - Fences send a non-verbal message – "Stay out".
  - Individual fences around plots help reduce theft in those plots. Nearby gardens without fences may be easier targets.

- Sprinkle flour on plants – to duplicate the appearance of the insecticide SEVIN. It really scares people off.
- When a fence is not desirable, plant tall sunflowers around the edges to hide the view of the garden. One gardener uses a weed barrier to hide their plot.

## **Living Fence:**

The establishment and progress of the living fence surrounding Quann Community gardens was a real learning experience for the Quann gardeners. It was funded by a Neighborhood Enhancement Grant, and was intended to reduce entrance by dogs on their way to the local dog park and any critters (two and four legged) that would eat the produce, as well as providing a variety of fruits for the gardeners to share.

Mike Merling, our guest speaker – a gardener at Quann, was very helpful through a tour and discussion in providing these recommendations based on their experiences.

- Choose plants based on what does well in your area. Contact your local Extension agent for recommendations. Look for plants that are:
  - Disease and insect resistant
    - Japanese Beetles are a big problem at Quann, so find plants resistant to this threat
  - Cold tolerant
  - Suited for the amount of shade or sun present in your location
    - Currants, gooseberry and black raspberry are shade tolerant.
  - Require a separate male plant and female plant to produce fruit
    - Hardy Kiwi's require both plants, or you will not get any fruit.
- Choose plants that have fewer maintenance issues
  - Grapes need to be pruned, and it's important they are not under or over pruned – which effects quality of fruit crop.
  - Everbearing raspberry plants are easier to care for, just mow all the canes down each fall.
- Consider the framework of the fence you will use.
  - If the secondary purpose of the fence is to keep rabbits and other larger animals out – then use a small grid or mesh at the base of the fence. The shortcoming of a close grid is that vining weeds like Bindweed will twine around a mesh fence and make weeding a much bigger job. If the fence has only horizontal wires, a weed whacker can be used more efficiently to remove weeds along a fence with grape vines.