

Saturday April 15 a group of young people from West Sound Academy taught me how to instantly design and layout a vegetable and flower garden. You too can use their methods to put in an instant garden.

When we arrived at their site we saw seventeen yards of Emu top soil piled up. It looked huge, but in less than an hour the kids formed it into raised beds shaped into a circle with two intersecting paths that divided the circle into quarters. The kids also dug out one small raised circle in the center with a path around it. Each bed is six-inches high. The outer beds will have vegetables, flowers and herbs and the small circle will have plants forming a hand. Their garden is called "The Giving Garden."

Giving Gardeners are 6th grader Rachel Donnelly, 8th graders Tasia Halady, Jason Crabtree, 9th graders Kate Newman, Morgan Terry, Zach Wackazuru, Shannon Crabtree, Emily Kubiak, Nora Carlson, 10th graders Colin Turner, Tom Wischhoefer, and 11th grader Beth Shlifer. While the kids prepared the garden, parents Mike Halady, Tuck Donnelly and Colleen Crabtree cleared Scotch Broom off an area nearby. Other Scotch Broom demolishers were Peter Donnelly (4th grade) and his brother Timmy (4-1/2 years).

The students have a mission statement: "The mission of the Giving Garden is to grow vegetables, fruit and flowers using organic gardening methods. All produce will either be donated or sold and the proceeds donated to local charities. The garden will be used as a learning facility for West Sound Academy students." Ann Lovejoy donated the Emu topsoil to the students and has been helping the kids explore the world of horticulture. Admissions Coordinator Megan Todd is their advisor. Megan and the students meet during their lunch hour once a week to plan their garden. In addition they'll find time to devote several Saturdays a month to their project.

We as gardeners can help feed others in our community. The easiest way is to donate some of our own vegetable starts this spring to the kids at West Sound Academy. The students also have a wish list for donations of tools and a wheelbarrow. Call Megan at 598-5954 and she'll tell you how to connect the kids up with the plants or give you suggestions for donating items. The Garden Writers of America have a project called "Plant a Row for the Hungry." They're asking gardeners to put in an extra row or two of vegetables to harvest and deliver to local foodbanks. Please remember throughout the growing season to donate your extra fruit and vegetables to our local foodbanks.

To design your own fairly instant vegetable garden find a space in your yard that receives at least six to eight hours of sun daily. If you have wood available make frames for raised beds. Raised beds can be anywhere from six to twelve inches deep (I've even seen some eighteen inches deep). Make beds narrow enough to reach across and pull weeds easily. You don't even need frames, mounding the soil up works fine. Till up existing soil or fill in the beds with fresh topsoil and/or compost.

To make paths put down a layer of flattened cardboard (refrigerator boxes work great) or thick layers of newspaper. (All inks are soy based now.) You can also use weed-barrier cloth (read the directions so the correct side is facing up). Next spread straw, bark or gravel over the barrier to complete your paths. The Herb Farm in Fall City uses crushed hazelnuts. Crushed hazelnut paths are my "win the lotto" dream.

Finally, cover the soil up with mulch to feed plants and inhibit weeds. Ann Lovejoy recommends using dairy manure as a mulch (to feed plants) and alyssum as a cover crop (to attract bees). Last year at the Raab Park Youth Garden we used organic mulch from Vern's Organic Topsoil on Bond Road. The mulch looked like teensy bits of fir needles but it was great stuff. Mulches make the weeds easy to pull out if they do grow. Once your beds are prepared plant away. Try vegetables and flowers together. Mix in a few herbs for interest, texture and culinary seasoning.

To find out more about organic gardening visit the library or your favorite local bookstore and peruse "Organic Gardening" (Reader's Digest Publication) ISBN 0895774089 or "The Organic Garden Book – The Complete Guide to Growing Flowers, Fruit and Vegetables Naturally" (DK Publishing) ISBN 15648528X both by Geoff Hamilton. Any books by Rodale are excellent too. One of my favorite Rodale books is "Jeff Cox's 100 Greatest Garden Ideas" subtitled "Tips, Techniques, and Projects for a Bountiful Garden and a Beautiful Backyard" ISBN 0875969771.

Send questions or comments to Peg at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.