

The annual Kitsap County Fair is just around the corner. Monday, August 21 is check in day for produce, hobbies and crafts. The Fair runs from August 22 through August 27. I hope some of you will enter your own produce or flowers in the fair. Maybe you'll win a major prize, ribbon or certificate. I visited my friend Kathy Morse's 4-H group to learn what they'll be doing at this year's fair. Read on, you'll be amazed by these youngsters.

"The Hare Raisers" have been meeting at Kathy's home for nearly three years. The kids range in age from first through twelfth grade. I had the great privilege of meeting: Devon and Adrian Sampson, Brittain and Adrian Mason, Sylvia and Glen Stahlmacher, Jake and Leah Fetterman and Jenna Morse. Leah isn't officially in 4-H yet but she comes to all the meetings so I think she's their mascot at least. In addition to 4-H activities the youngsters are involved in sports, music, church, kayaking, hiking, student government and civic activities.

The group is working on a display for the fair called "The Market Garden" chronicling their activities at the Bainbridge Farmers Market over the last two years. Oldest member Devon Sampson operates Blackberry Farm on Johnsonville Road on Bainbridge Island and has received many awards for his efforts. From April through September you'll find him at the Farmers Market nearly every Saturday morning. Other members of the "Hare Raisers" take turns bringing their produce to sell. Devon shares his space with group members.

I visited the Bainbridge Farmers Market in early April and purchased some of Devon's famous salad greens. I also took home some baby eggplant starts and a small bleeding heart (*Dicentra*) for one of our shade gardens. Seven year old Jake Fetterman was selling produce and making change. All members of the group have learned how to propagate plants from starting seeds or taking cuttings. They've learned by doing and have incredible knowledge about horticulture. Each one has learned how to track expenses and income.

An elderly neighbor of one family donated a working beehive. The kids learned how to care for and maintain a colony of bees. This year the Hare Raisers harvested honey and sold it at the Farmers Market. Jenna Morse and Brittain Mason learned how to extract the honey from the hive. In addition to pollination of their gardens from the honey bees the group has learned all about mason bees. In February and March everyone made mason bee houses to sell.

Brittain and Adrian Mason live in the Crystal Springs area of Bainbridge and grow dahlias and other flowers to sell. Their bouquets are very popular. I asked Brittain about deer problems. She said they've tried everything – coyote urine, dog and human hair, even the motion-activated sprinkler. All the kids shook their heads in sympathy. None of us could come up with a magic solution to deter deer. And each year the deer's appetites change. Group members keep a journal of the 4-H year; I'll bet the deer chronicles make quite interesting reading.

Jenna Morse has become the pea expert of the group. She likes raising rabbits best but enjoys growing peas. Jenna hopes to show her bunnies at the Fair. Several members of Hare Raisers want to raise llamas, sheep or goats in the future and have already raised guinea pigs. Devon Sampson raises goats at Blackberry Farm and will be showing the goats at the Fair. We all agreed that the byproducts of all these animals definitely make excellent organic fertilizer for gardens.

All of the Hare Raisers plan to stay in 4-H until they graduate from high school. Devon's taking it one step further. He'll be attending an agricultural university and plans to be growing and/or developing earth and people friendly organic produce for years to come.

The 4-H motto is "To make the best better." Their pledge says: I pledge my Head to clearer thinking; My Heart to greater loyalty; My Hands to larger service; and My Health to better living. Be sure to see the 4-H displays in Presidents Hall and in the animal barns at the Fairgrounds. You'll be glad you did. If you see Devon and Adrian Sampson, Brittain and Adrian Mason, Jenna Morse, Leah and Jake Fetterman or Sylvia and Glen Stahlmacher at the Bainbridge Farmers Market or find them in Presidents Hall during the Fair shake their hands and tell them what a fabulous job they're doing.

To learn more about 4-H opportunities in Kitsap County call the County Extension Office at 337-7157. Maybe you'll want to be a 4-H leader. Or perhaps your kids will want to be in a group. Informational meetings are held the beginning of October each year.

You can email comments to Peg Tillery at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.