

This year when we plant our vegetables let's plant extra to share with local foodbanks. GWAA (Garden Writers Association of America) and HGTV (Home and Garden Television) are the sponsors of a nationwide program called "Plant a Row," PAR for short. Last year PAR gardeners donated over two million pounds of produce to food banks. This year Master Gardener Kara Mullane and I are asking everyone in Kitsap County to plant an extra row or two or three or more of vegetables to share with the hungry throughout the county.

Master Gardeners at Anna Smith Children's Garden in Tracyton and all the kids, guided by Master Gardeners and parents, at the Raab Park Youth Garden in Poulsbo have been donating their produce to our local foodbanks each year. Produce from Anna Smith is donated to the Bremerton and Central Kitsap foodbanks and Raab Park produce is donated to Fishline and Kingston foodbanks. Thousands of pounds were donated in the last four years.

Last year West Sound Academy students created a "Giving Garden" and donated their produce to Bainbridge Island's Helpline House. This year they're planting vegetables at the Raab Park Youth Garden to donate to Helpline House, Fishline and Kingston Foodbank. The students will be assisted by all the kids who garden at Raab Park. PAR will provide a large sign to mark the garden. Visitors to the park can also take home pamphlets telling about "Plant a Row." Marilyn Gremmse at Helpline House said, "I can't keep enough produce to feed the people who come to Helpline House." She appreciated all the donations from West Sound Academy last year and is looking forward to this year.

Residents of Martha and Mary Health Care Center in Poulsbo are also growing vegetables to donate to Fishline. Horticulture Therapist Joann Norrie is helping the residents create a PAR garden at the center. Poulsbo Garden Club donated the soil amendments to the project. Norrie said, "The residents are excited about being able to give back to their community by growing produce." Some of the residents will be able to walk their donations over to Fishline a few blocks away.

PAR is providing record forms so we can keep track of how much produce we all donate in Kitsap County. Gardeners all over America will be reporting their donations to PAR. Then GWAA and HGTV will broadcast the amounts so that more and more gardeners each year will donate ever-increasing amounts of produce to foodbanks to feed the hungry. We're hoping to double or triple last year's amount. For information on how you can participate in this worthwhile project email Kara at karam@real.com or me at gardenmentor@yahoo.com.

Locations of foodbanks in Kitsap County and the phone numbers are as follows: Fishline, 18916 3rd Avenue NE, Poulsbo, 360-779-5190; Helpline House, 282 Knechtel Way NE, Bainbridge Island, 206-842-7621; Kingston Foodbank, 26096 West 1st Street NE, Kingston, 360-297-4188; Central Kitsap Foodbank, 3790 NW Anderson Hill Rd, Silverdale, 360-692-9818; and Bremerton Food Line, 1318 Park Avenue, Bremerton, 360-479-6188.

If you want great ideas about plants to grow and how to grow them this year, visit one of our outstanding Master Gardener demonstration gardens. All gardens are free and are open during daylight hours. Master Gardeners will show you how they've created their gardens and will answer your questions.

Anna Smith Children's' Garden in Tracyton is the oldest of the gardens. It's located on Tracyton Beach Road near the intersection of Fairgrounds Road. Parking is on Fairgrounds Road and it's a short walk down the hill to the garden. You'll find perennials, vegetables, herbs and an area planted just for kids. You'll find Master Gardeners there 5-7 p.m. on Mondays and 9-11:30 a.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Givens Community Center in Port Orchard is the home of the water-wise garden. This garden will give you great ideas for very drought tolerant plants. You can find Master Gardeners there on Tuesdays from 9-11 a.m.

A formal walled garden surrounds the plantings created and maintained by Master Gardeners at the NW College of Art. The entrance is near Milepost 9 on Highway 305 (across from the George Fireworks Stand). You'll find gardeners there 9 a.m. to noon every Monday and Saturday. Remember too that you can purchase compost tea for two dollars every second Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon at this site.

Last but certainly not least is the Raab Park Youth Garden at the south end of Caldart Avenue in Poulsbo. Master Gardeners and kids are there every Wednesday from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. April 4 through June 20. Summertime activities begin every Monday 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. from June 25 through August 27. The Youth Garden is also a composting demonstration site. In fact, all of the gardens mentioned have compost systems and information available.