

Bringing Knowledge to Life in

Oakland County

Oakland County

Oakland County Extension
1200 N. Telegraph Rd, Bldg 26 E
Pontiac, MI 48341-0416

P: 248-858-0880
F: 248-858-1477

E-mail: msue.oakland@county.msu.edu
Web: www.msue.msu.edu/oakland

Winter 2008

One man's dream benefits many



Harvesting for the hungry at Bittersweet Farm

The Bittersweet Farm Plant-A-Row (PAR) community garden took root the year after Bob McGowan and his wife Barbara Hamilton moved from their home in Birmingham to Clarkston, where they settled on land that had been a dairy farm for 150 years.

Because Bob wanted the farm to function in a way that reflected its history, he proposed a community service project to a newly forming garden club: a vegetable garden with the mission of supplying fresh, organically grown vegetables to local charities.

Two years later the group disbanded. Bob, a partner in a Southfield advertising agency, was faced with the impossibility of working the 10,000 square-foot garden by himself. That's when he enrolled in MSU Extension's Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) Program.

That experience helped him measurably increase his horticultural knowledge, including his understanding of low-labor gardening techniques.

MSU Extension approved the garden as a site where MGVs could earn volunteer hours to achieve and/or maintain their Master Gardener certification. Content of the Master Gardener Volunteer Program course work, the focus on extending MSUE's educational outreach through volunteers, and the commitment to community service resulted in Bittersweet Farm's PAR community garden doubling in size to 20,000 square feet.

Since its founding 16 years ago, Bittersweet Farm has raised and donated more than 25,000 pounds of produce to the Gleaners Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan.

In 2007, Bittersweet gardeners delivered a record-setting 3,246 pounds of vegetables to Gleaners' Oakland County facility. This was due in large part to the efforts and expertise of garden manager, Jim Tesnar, an advanced Master Gardener.

Today, Bittersweet Farm is one of 11 Oakland County PAR gardens, most of which are managed and staffed by MSU Extension MG volunteers, all supplying the food bank and emergency food providers with many thousands of pounds of fresh, locally grown produce each year.

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION**

Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Offices in counties across the state link the research of the land-grant university, MSU, to challenges facing communities. Citizens serving on county Extension councils regularly help select focus areas for programming. MSU Extension is funded jointly by county boards of commissioners, the state through Michigan State University and federally through the US Department of Agriculture.

Oakland County Master Gardener Fast Facts

- Oakland County MSU Extension has offered the 13-week, 52-hour Master Gardener Volunteer Program (MGVP) since 1977, when it first began in Michigan.
- The purpose of the MGVP is to extend MSU Extension's educational outreach in the community through volunteers.
- Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) provide educational information and answer consumer questions at seven Oakland County farmers' markets.
- More than 600 trained, certified MGVs are currently active throughout Oakland County.
- In 2007, Master Gardener Volunteers provided 25,206 hours, which represents the time commitment of 12 full-time employees.
- The economic value of the MGVs' contributions to Oakland County in 2007 was \$473,177 (@\$18.77 per hour).
- In 2007 Master Gardener Volunteers provided more than 308,435 county residents with educational information, programs and service to their communities.
- Plant-A-Row for the Hungry (PAR) is an initiative of the Garden Writers of America that encourages gardeners to plant an extra row of vegetables and donate that produce to food banks. MGVs in many Michigan counties participate in this program.
- Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan gathers and distributes food – either free or for pennies on the dollar – to soup kitchens, missions, shelters and pantries. It collects PAR produce from many locations.



During a break from harvesting on a nature walk, Bob McGowan introduces a group of young gardeners to Chinese Lantern plants.

“The success of Oakland County’s Plant-A-Row gardens is directly attributable to the skill and dedication of Master Gardener volunteers.”
-Bob McGowan

Bob McGowan is an avid MGV, a member of Gleaners Food Bank board of directors and a member of the MSU Extension Oakland County Leadership Council.

*Contact: Beverly Terry, County Extension Director
(248) 858-0885*

For more information about any of MSU Extension's innovative programs, visit our web site at:
www.msue.msu.edu/oakland
or call 248-858-0880.