

**Tennessee Master Gardener Search For Excellence
2013 Application**

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 31, 2013

NAME OF PROJECT: Church Hill Senior Center Garden

NAME OF MG GROUP: Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association

COUNTY(IES): Hawkins

MASTER GARDENER CONTACT:

NAME Marcia Vandermause

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MASTER GARDENER COORDINATOR/EXTENSION STAFF:

NAME Chris Ramsey

TITLE Sullivan County Extension Agent

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CATEGORY---MUST SELECT AND SUBMIT IN ONLY ONE CATEGORY

- Youth
- Demonstration Garden
- Workshop or Presentation
- Community Service
- Innovative Project
- Research
- Special Needs Audience

COMMENCEMENT DATE OF PROJECT: March 2010

LIST THE NAMES OF MASTER GARDENERS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT. Do not include their roles or any other individuals in this listing. *(Place the cursor in the box to type a name.)* You may attach an additional page if necessary.

Project Leaders' Names:

Marcia Vandermause
Judy Penley
Christine Barger
Gary Woods
Aldwin Erickson

Number of Master Gardeners participating: 5

Place your cursor in the boxes and click twice.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT (include name, location, target audience, goals, and partnerships) 500 words or less.

The Church Hill Senior Center Garden is located on city donated land on Main St, Church Hill, TN adjacent to the police station. We are a 37 raised bed vegetable, herb, annual and native perennial garden. Our mission is to provide seniors and those in need access to fresh produce, to create a biodiverse environment where garden members can receive both exercise and well- being, and to provide educational opportunities for all age ranges in the community. To accomplish these goals, we have partnered with the local senior center whose daily lunch program utilizes fresh produce from the garden. We have become a steady provider of fresh produce to the local food pantry run by Of One Accord ministry. We have established relationships with many local youth groups including the Daisy Scouts, Brownies, and Boy Scouts and routinely host activities and learning sessions for the youth at the garden. Other community groups, such as church youth groups and the summer reading program at the local library, have utilized the garden for community service and educational purposes. The local Hawkins County newspaper, the Rogersville Review, routinely features our garden and informs the public of our activities. The very public location on Main Street has allowed the community to see the growth and the impact of the garden and has helped to foster new relationships each year.

DESCRIBE THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT. 500 words or less.

The original garden design was for 37 raised beds with a centerpiece herb garden and three compost bins. The city mayor was contacted, pitched the idea, and city donated land and signage was obtained. A local charitable organization, the Community Clothes Closet, was approached with the idea and agreed to supply monetary funding. Local master gardeners and gardening enthusiasts were recruited to help “grow” the project. The garden was built in phases over a period of 3 years. With the funding available, it was decided to have one compost bin and a small number of beds up and growing the first season in order to demonstrate the effect the garden would have on the community. After showing a production total of 1100 pounds the first season, with continued funding we were able to expand to 26 beds by the beginning of the second year and expanded to the full design of 37 beds, three compost bins, and herb bed and an additional native perennial and shrub bed around the garden sign by the start of the third year.

Local seniors were encouraged to come and help (or at least visit!) and local youth groups-- Boy Scouts and church groups-- were recruited to help with major work days that involved building or movement of large amounts of material such as aisle fill and compost. The local library posted notice of work days and we advertised our activities on the local community bulletin board and in the local newspaper. A weekly harvest day is held throughout the growing season at which time the produce is distributed to the food pantry and the seniors.

HOW HAS THE PROJECT BEEN FUNDED AND HOW HAVE THOSE FUNDS BEEN SPENT? 500 Words or less.

Our main funding source is the local organization, Community Clothes Closet. We receive a maximum of \$500 each year. These funds have been used to buy lumber and other materials for construction of the raised beds, compost bins, and garden supports, crushed stone for aisle fill, and a few bedding plants and seeds. A garden shed and rain barrels were added this year. The members of the garden solicit donations from local businesses and churches to help us continue to plant and maintain the garden. Our other major funding source is the ingenuity and work of our members. Garden members save seed and grow vegetable seedlings for many of the beds. We utilize scrap lumber or yard sale finds to make vegetable supports and enhancements for the garden. We make our own compost from donated horse manure and disease free remnants from the garden beds. Community groups provide free labor when large projects are scheduled such as shed construction and yearly filling of beds with new compost. The local Church Hill library helps with printing out learning material and extension publications when youth groups visit the garden.

DESCRIBE THE OUTCOMES OF THIS PROJECT. HOW HAS IT AUGMENTED LEARNING, INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OR CHANGED PRACTICES TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE? INCLUDE THE METHODS YOU USED TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT. These impacts could be economical, educational, environmental, health or community based. 500 words or less.

Hawkins County is located in a “food insecure” region of Northeast Tennessee. A study done by Feeding America shows that 13.5% of the overall county population is unable, at times, to provide or have access to nutritionally adequate foods. An even grimmer statistic shows that 24.5% of the children in the county fall into this category. Seniors over age 65 make up over 50% of the recurring clientele at food pantries. By supplying fresh produce to our local food pantry and the senior center lunch program, the Church Hill Senior Center Garden is helping to alleviate these statistics.

Last year, the food pantry served over 300 families per month. No discrimination by age, sex, race or creed is made when reviewing the applicants – only lack of income necessary to provide adequate food supply. One third of the clientele served were below the age of 18. Although local stores donate old produce they are no longer able to sell, most of these items are soon inedible. The garden provided one ton of fresh picked produce last year and 3000 more pounds this year – but weight alone does not show the true value of the contribution. As an example, the 81 pounds of fresh lettuce provided 650 servings. The nutritional value of the fresh vegetables provided by the garden helps to improve the diet of all age ranges served by the pantry and the senior center.

The garden targets the youth of the area in its educational outreach. By hosting youth groups during the year, we strive to teach both the importance and the joy of gardening. The youngsters learn that growing things involve much more than just dropping a seed in the ground – they start to learn about all of the interrelationships involved in a successful harvest and they can use these lessons learned in the garden in all aspects of their lives.

The true impact of the garden is revealed when one hears the delighted squeal of a young Daisy Scout as she hunts and finds her first lady bug, when one sees the tears of gratitude in a food pantry patron’s eyes as garden fresh lettuce and onions are placed in her cart, when one hears the spontaneous applause of a group of seniors appreciating the box of ripe nutritious tomatoes that has been delivered to the kitchen just in time for lunch, and when one studies the intent look on the face of a youngster learning how to plant beans for the first time. This is what keeps the gardeners coming back each season to help our community grow.