

In Easton: Backyard gardens provide a nutrient-rich harvest

Written by Laura Modlin

Wednesday, 03 August 2011 18:57



As people become increasingly concerned about the source of their food, some families in Easton are turning to their back yards to harvest their own food supplies.

Many backyard gardeners believe growing your own food is the surest way to know that it is free of chemicals and high in nutrients. They also believe it is an important part of cultivating a strong and healthy local food system.

For some, though, it just tastes good.

Eastonite Kit Briner has been gardening in his back yard for a couple of decades and his motivation is quite simple: He likes to eat. And for him, it is worth the investment of time and resources to have his favorites close at hand.

“I love tomatoes,” said Mr. Briner, “and the best way to eat them is fresh.”

He grows several varieties of tomatoes every year in a number of colors, including some very sweet cherry tomatoes. Cucumbers are another favorite, and he contends they begin to lose their flavor right away, so picking them in his back yard when he is ready to eat is key.

Dennis Canada, owner of Easton Evergreen Services LLC, has noticed that for some, growing their own food is also an important cultural step.

Mr. Canada has helped homeowners throughout Fairfield County create gardens in their yards. Apart from growing fresh produce, one of his recent clients wanted to also use her garden to educate her children.

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“It’s not so much about putting food on the table as introducing her kids to seeing plants grow,” Mr. Canada said.

His business has helped several local families create a space to take charge of their food supplies, a trend that is no surprise to him.

“I’ve noticed that a lot of people in Easton like to be hands-on with their property,” Mr. Canada said.

One of the biggest concerns he has heard when starting a garden is wondering how to keep out animals.

“We can use different kinds of fencing ... usually we’ll use a wooden fence, a split rail with a wire fence attached on the inside of the wooden fence,” he said.

Size is another issue.

“I tell people to go bigger than they think they’ll use,” Mr. Canada said. “Then they can leave some room to grow.”

Not all plants need to be secured inside a fence, though. There are some that can be planted outside and covered with netting when they’re about to be mature, thereby saving valuable fenced-in space.



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Another important issue to consider when deciding where to place your garden is sunlight.

“You need an area that gets five or more hours of sun [each day],” Mr. Canada said. “More is better.”

Some people choose to split up the location of their garden. One might, for instance, see an herb garden near a kitchen entrance while the vegetables are someplace else.

And, while drainage is not a big issue, according to Mr. Canada, you want to avoid places where water pools.

Making sure you have enough water, however, is an important factor during the heat of summer and the potential for drought.

“You can put in an irrigation system or have a hose nearby,” Mr. Canada said.

He typically uses raised beds — framed, slightly elevated areas — when installing garden structures. There might be several raised beds in one garden. They are often made of wood or stone.

Advantages of using raised beds include being able to add to or replace the soil each year — for greatest agricultural value — and reducing the quantity of weeds when compared to directly planting in the ground.

The areas between the raised beds can be augmented with gravel, stone pathways or brick for aesthetic and practical purposes. Lining the area with landscape fabric or heavy mulch can help with weed control, according to Mr. Canada.

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Other tips from Mr. Canada include keeping a workbench inside your garden area and having a shed nearby for tools.

People might choose to add a kitchen garden to their properties for any of a number of reasons, including health, cultural, lifestyle, or food flavor.

When Mr. Canada helps people with this link to their local food supply, one of the common themes he has noticed is enthusiasm.

“People are very excited to get out into the garden,” he said.

Laura Modlin writes a blog at thefarmingjournalist.com.