Encouraging Engagement with the Community Sharing Garden

Alex L. Boyd’15 and Lena S. Wright’16
Beloit College Sustainability Fellows Program, Summer 2015

“To strengthen the Merrill Neighborhood by turning vacant land into productive and beautiful assets to the community and bring out the neighborhood characteristics of collaboration and sharing.” 1 - The Community Sharing Garden Mission Statement

Creating Visual Interest

Many of the projects undertaken at the garden this year have focused on creating a sense of visual identity for the garden, to make it stand out and be recognizable.

**New Sign and Giant Chair**
- At the start of the summer, Community Action installed a giant Adirondack chair with a Community Sharing Garden logo mounted on it.
- Featured prominently at the main entrance to the garden
- Functions as a memorable and easily describable landmark

**Many Hands Tree**
- Groups of volunteers are invited to add their handprints to the tree
- Communicates to volunteers that although they may not be immediately visible, there are many hands involved in helping in the garden and the neighborhood

**Murals**
- With the help of local elementary school students, artist Brianne Hansen painted three murals for the garden around the theme “Imagine Growth”

**Outreach**

The Community Sharing Garden is less about plants and more about people, so we have looked for ways to spread the word about the garden to more people within and beyond the Merrill Community.2

**Within the Merrill Community**

**Gardening Club**
- Once a week, we assist two Americorps members with gardening activities for local kids
- Students learn basic gardening skills and healthy eating ideas
- Opportunity to tell students and parents about how they can help in the garden

**Beyond the Merrill Community**

**Online and Print Media**
Information about the garden spread through newspaper articles and online media has the potential to reach a wider audience, although many of the people reached may not be within the Merrill community

- Positive impact, as there need to be efforts to dispel the reputation of Merrill as a ‘bad neighborhood’
- Articles have been published in the Janesville Gazette (as seen on right), the Beloit Daily News, and other local newspapers

**Communicating Garden Knowledge**

Because some plants look very different growing in the ground compared to how they look at a grocery store, we have tried several strategies to help people identify what is growing in the garden and what is ready to harvest.

**Carrots/Zanahoria**

When to pick:
Carrots are great raw, cut up in a salad, roasted or cooked in the oven, or cooked and blended with garlic and onions in a soup.

When to pick:
Dig up carrots when the orange tops are sticking out of the dirt and about 1.5 to 2 inches around.

CÓMO COMER ZANAHORIAS:
Las zanahorias son grandes crudos, cortados en una ensalada, asado en el horno o cocidos y se mezcla con el ajo y la cebolla en una sopa.

**Instructional Signs**
- We are creating signs for most of the plants with basic instructions on how to harvest and some basic uses for different foods
- Signs are in English, Spanish, and feature illustrations

**Chalk Board**
- Updated regularly as things come in and out of season
- Clearly announces what is ready to be picked
- Useful for when we are not available to tell visitors what is ready

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**Sources:**
2. This message was conveyed to us in a personal communication from John Ramstad, June 2015.

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