



# The Green Thumb Print

Green Thumb News and Topics of Interest to Community Gardeners in New York City

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The bulletin of Green Thumb, a program of City of New York Parks & Recreation

## Giving Back to the Community

Tucked behind a nook of the Gowanus Expressway and a multiple unit apartment building exists a community garden that is hard to see but big in presence.

For years before the 63rd & 64th Streets' Block Association in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn was created, the land was a garbage strewn, rat infested eyesore populated by drug-users, prostitutes and homeless people. Tenants of the adjacent building, frustrated and fed-up by the crime in the community decided to take back their right to a safe neighborhood. Maureen O'Boyle and other residents contacted the community board and assemblyman to help track down the owner of the property, the Department of Transportation. The DOT was delighted about a beautiful green space and even assisted with the efforts by providing a dumpster and fencing in exchange for active community participation in maintaining the site. In the 5 short years since the garden was formed, 63/64 Garden has blossomed from a few garden members to a widespread membership that reaches out to hundreds of people in the local community through partnerships with local-non profits.

63/64 Community Garden partnered with Neighbors Helping Neighbors, a local non-profit to secure a grant from United Way. Grant money from United Way helped fund summer youth employees who have provided much labor and to the development of the garden through the Garden Arts Project, the self-appointed name of the summer youth garden group. The summer youth is part of the Community Family Life program of Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Rahn Broady, the education coordinator of Center for Family Life hand-picked many of the summer participants who are also part of The Learning Academy, an alternative after-school education program that integrates art with math, social studies, English and other school subjects.



Rahn, a former high school algebra and biology teacher and current artist, is devoted to his work and provides much guidance and inspiration to the GAP team.

The GAP team spent the first part of the summer building raised beds for vegetables they grew from seed including tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and herbs. The vegetables are harvested and sent to the local food pantry. Diana Ortiz, 15 travels from Flatbush to tend to the garden. Diana never gardened before joining the GAP team. She is

not an avid gardener and is very proud of her role in beautifying and giving back to the community. "Taking vegetables to the food pantry makes me feel good," says Diana.

Tamahl Rahaman, 15 of Red Hook learned some garden basics from his neighbor, Gary Baum, who has taught carpentry workshops at past GreenThumb GrowTogethers. Despite the continuous weeding needed to maintain the site, Tamahl thinks, "gardening is a lot of fun". Tamahl who is a budding musician, writer and artist draws from his experiences with the GAP team. "It's a great experience - people don't get this everyday. I'm lucky."

The talented youth also visualize the garden as a gallery and have created a unique open space through their artistic vision. The resourceful GAP team have mosaiced an old sink into a bird bath, fixed up an old kitchen cabinet as an end table and even repainted a discarded gnome garden as the garden mascot. The youth also converted the unsightly guardrail at the entrance to the garden into a warm welcome sign that greets visitors with, "Welcome to Our Garden".

Maintaining the garden has been fun but maintaining the sidewalk has been difficult. A neighboring business leaves old glass panes that inevitably leave shattered glass around the periphery of the garden. But since the garden created a September 11th Memorial Walkway, the sidewalk has remained clean and well-maintained. The youth have also come up with an ingenious way of maintaining the garden's sidewalk by creating colorful planters out of discarded tires which will also double as a weed deterrent.

The Bay Ridge community is lucky to have a passionate and devoted group of gardeners and youth gardeners working to provide a beautiful open space and a community center. The garden has a melting pot of gardeners and visitors, including an old Chinese woman who grows herbal medicines and has agreed to teach Tai Chi in the garden and participants of Life Spire, (an organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities) who look forward to eating lunch in the garden every Wednesday.

The garden has maximized on the many talents of its membership to create a dynamic force in the neighborhood. Maureen O'Boyle a leading role in the success of the garden tapped into her



resources as an employee at JP MorganChase. The 63/64 Garden acquired benches and a picnic table through a program called Partners in the Community, where Chase supplies materials for projects employees volunteer with.

Members of the 63rd & 64th St Garden have worked hard to be the successful community garden it is today. Their mission now is to give back to the community and have many programs lined up. Have a bookshare in the summer. They want to give back to community with workshops. had a workshop on how to fix leaky faucets. Will have a pumpkin giveaway with local police teaching safety tips. Have good relationship with cops who always come around to see the garden.

The 63rd & 64th Garden has also partnered with Maureen O'Brien and Sheila McDevitt of Six Fifteen Community Garden in Park Slope to develop a composting demonstration site funded by

Department of Sanitation.