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More than crops sprout at JBLM community garden

Lewis North plot is fertile ground for friendships

Marisa Petrich/Northwest Guardian

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The Joint Base Lewis-McChord community garden doesn't look like much right now — but that's about to change.

Soon the rows of raised beds will be full of spring flowers and vegetables. After a long winter, the garden plots will be open to rent for the growing season as of April 1.

"There is nothing better than picking a vegetable, bringing it home and eating it still warm from the sun," JBLM sustainability outreach coordinator Miriam Villacian said.

The garden, which started in the 1970s, is in the middle of being reimagined by Villacian and those that work there. In the last three years, about 65 raised beds have been built, and a few wheelchair-accessible plots (raised even farther above the ground so they can be accessed from chair level) are in the works.

This year compost will be provided on-site in addition to hoses and various garden tools in hopes of making gardening as easy as possible. All participants have to provide themselves are the plants.

"It's a good excuse to get outside," Villacian said, as well as an affordable and nutritious way to feed a family.

There's more to the whole idea than that, though. For some participants the "community" part of the garden is a crucial element.

"It's been a joy and delight to use the garden," gardener Virginia Rawlings said.

Rawlings, whose own yard doesn't get enough sun to grow produce, has two plots of vegetables — one for her and one for Shadow, the service rabbit she brings on visits to nursing and convalescent homes. Far from the iconic Mr. McGregor, Rawlings gladly provides Shadow with radishes, snow peas and kale.

She also provides help and advice for her fellow gardeners. Last year, the woman who worked in the neighboring bed was just learning about the process. Her husband was deployed at the time, and she and Rawlings, whose husband is a retiree, had plenty to talk about.

"It's been a really great community," she said.

The sense of support is just one reason the group gardening space is good for beginners. With the beds already built and many of the necessary supplies provided, renting a space is much easier than starting from scratch, Villacian said.

In fact, if there's interest she's willing to offer classes for those getting started on growing vegetables and food preservation. For those who don't want the commitment of caring for their own bed, the garden is always looking for volunteers to help maintain it.

DID YOU KNOW?

The JBLM community gardens are located on a gravel road off Flora Road near the Lewis North stables.

New gardeners can reserve raised garden beds for the growing season starting April 1. Fees are \$25 for a pre-built box and \$15 to build your own (though space for new beds is limited).

For more information, or to volunteer, contact JBLM sustainability outreach coordinator Miriam Villacian at 966-1734.

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