

Growing Community Gardens in the Copper Basin



Above, Glennallen School students working together in the Community Garden. Below, Kael Gerlach and Samuel Foil during planting season in the Garden. Photos courtesy Tamara Hamby

The idea of the Community Garden in Glennallen originated from several parents of students who decided they would like opportunities for a garden-based learning experience at the Glennallen School.

These parents formed a phased plan and approached the Copper River School District Board of Education; it unanimously approved the idea and the garden grew.

The first year for planting in the garden, located on the Glennallen Schools campus, was in 2013. Since then, it has become a place for the teachers, students, and community members to grow, tend, and harvest nutritious veggies. According to Michael Johnson, CRSD Superintendent, "Our students' enthusiasm for the garden project is a result of the many hours Ann Biddle and Tamara Hamby have invested in the project. It is a hands-on, highly motivational activity that

was entirely developed by parent volunteers in cooperation with classroom teachers."

Its main purpose is to provide a place for students at Glennallen School to have the opportunity to learn about growing, planting, and harvesting garden vegetables. Several of the garden beds are tended by community members. At this point, the garden consists of 12 4 x 12' raised beds, a perennial bed, and garden shed.

So far, the garden has been partially funded through State of Alaska and Tolsona Community Revenue Sharing funds, and from donation requests of Glennallen, Silver Springs Subdivision, and Gakona. Other funding has come from a grant from the Disney Company and the Glennallen School PTO. The CRSD has provided constant support through wood shop projects (garden beds and shed), location, and water usage.

The garden is primarily maintained by parents and community volunteers. The Glennallen Growers is a volunteer-led organization formed to help facilitate the garden-based education in the school, and the Kenny Lake Soil and Water Conservation District also supports the garden with seeds and staff time to help with the garden education. Volunteers are always needed and welcomed throughout the growing season to help with the watering and weeding.

While the garden was originally intended for the use of the classrooms, not all of the teachers wished to participate in the growing and planting, opening a couple of garden beds to be available for community members. It is anticipated each year that there will be a couple of the beds available for community members to tend; available on a first come, first served basis.



There are several nice picnic tables available for anyone to sit and enjoy their lunch in the garden, or while watching their young ones run around on the adjacent grassy field.

A wide variety of vegetables, herbs, and flowers are grown in the garden: potatoes, carrots, onions, dill, turnips, greens, strawberries, rhubarb, sunflowers, broccoli, cauliflower, marigolds, poppies, delphiniums, chives, irises, kohlrabi, pumpkins. What the classrooms plant is driven by teacher requests; the Glennallen Growers supplies a variety of seeds from which to choose. Community members plant whatever they wish.

Veggies with short growing seasons are harvested as they ripen by the volunteers. Other veggies that ripen at the beginning of the school year are harvested by the school classes and eaten. This year the group plans to seed lettuce in mid-July to have salad fixins available at the beginning of the school year, in addition to potatoes and carrots. Future options for the garden could include a class for growing, tending, harvesting, and selling at the Glennallen Wednesday Market and/or growing and possibly selling veggies and flower starts or hanging baskets.

The end goal of this garden project is to have a greenhouse, perennial gardens, raised beds, and a small field plot to raise veggies for the school and community. Being able to provide community and classroom demonstration classes, business learning opportunities, outdoor classroom space, and a place for community relaxation/reflection are all futures hopes of this garden.

There are so many ways to help out: have your family adopt the garden for a week this summer, request your own family garden bed that can be yours to plant, maintain and harvest, water or weed whenever you're up at the school, harvest what would otherwise go to waste, and help out in the classrooms the last week of school when the classes are planting their beds. To participate, contact Tamara Hamby at 822-5752 or tehamby@hotmail.com, or Ann Biddle at 259-5999, mgr.kls-wcd@gmail.com, or annbiddle@cvineternet.net.

Kenny Lake Memory Garden

The Memory Garden at Kenny Lake School on the Edgerton was conceived by teacher Felicia Riedel who envisioned taking advantage of the special, undeveloped area she saw outside her classroom window. Because of its abundant sunshine, it would make a great garden where students could get outdoors to plant, learn where food comes from, and how good fresh veggies really taste.

It could be used for science and experiments and agricultural education for older students. It would also landscape well, so it could become a beautiful corner for parents or community to enjoy picnics, with shrubs and tables being donated as memorials.

Thanks to Margo Hanson and others, there was already a strong background in gardening. For 15 years the elementary has been growing and selling plants to raise money for enrichment projects. In order to make the Memory Garden a reality,



Above, Kenny Lake students proudly showing off the Memorial Garden and asking for support.

Photo courtesy Barbara Wallace

it took the continued support and hard work from many dedicated individuals, students and local divisions of agricultural programs.

With construction of raised beds, the first crop was planted by the 4th and 5th grade class in spring of 2010 and included some basic science experiments. Some of those students harvested it as 6th graders that fall, cooked and served it to their elementary classmates, and used some to make artistic potato prints.

In 2014, the kindergarten, first, and second grade classes planted and harvested carrots and potatoes; they learned to prepare them and chose to share them with the entire school.

They made pickles and tried 'almost everything' the local farmers came to share with them; from raw vegetables and honey to chocolate beet muffins.

In 2015, crops have been expanded; they will maintain and add to the garden through the summer and look forward to fresh greens welcoming students back to school in August.

For five years the group has fostered creative avenues to introduce horticulture, agriculture and healthy living to students and the community. The garden has been a part of a larger educational project which has included 'Meet the Farmer', 'Food For Thought', and 4H.

The students are eager to learn, love digging in the dirt, and enjoy teaming up with volunteers.

The garden is developed, maintained, harvested, and used by volunteers who meet to plan or plant and engage children in growing. There is a tacit sense that it will develop organically, depending on what the community wants and donates. Future plans include putting down topsoil for a grassy area; adding memorial benches, picnic tables, shrubs or whatever community members choose to remember a loved one or community helper; and building a stage. Anyone who is interested is welcome and can contact Felicia Riedel at 822-5831. ■