

## Muddy Bloomers looking forward to another year of producing locally-grown vegetables

Volunteers with Caledon Community Services (CCS) are promoting the success of a garden they created to provide fresh, organic, locally-grown vegetables to the food program at the exchange.

Calling themselves Muddy Bloomers, they have completed their second year with what volunteer Barb Wynne called 'a bumper crop.'

She said the effort started about a year and a half ago, when she met Brigitte Malo, volunteer and program relations lead at CCS, who was interested in starting a new program to supply fresh produce to clients of the Exchange, which was still being developed at that point.

Community plots were available at Albion Hills Community Farm, and CCS leased about 500 square feet.

While there wasn't a lot of agricultural experience, a group of about six volunteers got together and enthusiastically went ahead. The first year proved to be a learning experience.

'We learned that some plants need lots of space, some plants benefit from regular thinning, pinching and pruning, and weeds rule over everything,' Wynne recalled. 'Despite our naivety and ignorance, we had a bumper crop of bush beans, and a reasonable crop of tomatoes and zucchini.'

That provided them with enough confidence to seek 1,000 square feet this year, and planning started in February, and with more volunteers, the work started in May.

Various varieties of squash, tomatoes, onions, leeks, bush beans, peas, carrots, chard, spinach, kale, beets and potatoes went into the ground.

'What a bumper crop we had,' she declared. 'Despite the weather, the weeds, and the poor soil quality, we were able to deliver pounds and pounds of produce to The Exchange.'

'It was a gratifying feeling the first time we dropped off a bunch of beans, zucchini and onions,' she added.

Other volunteers voiced their enthusiasm for the project, although they admitted there was a lot of hard work involved.

'There were a lot of weeds to be pulled,' Joan Leeves recalled. 'I would clear a patch one day, and come back a few days later with what seemed to be even more weeds than before. Once we got the weeds under control, everything planted, it was the daunting task of watering.'

'I enjoyed the part when we were actually able to pick the produce that we had worked for,' she added. 'I also learned a lot from the other volunteers about proper picking of the vegetables, what happens to the zucchini production when the leaves get mouldy and what flowers will aid in combatting bugs.'

'We have a core group of dedicated volunteers who share a belief that good food is a cornerstone of good health and who do not want to pollute our soil or our food or our bodies with toxic chemicals,' observed Dianne Susin. 'We have a commitment to raise healthier fresh green food organically and provide this service to our community.'

'Thanks to Dianne, our master gardener, I learned how to de-sucker tomatoes in order to get the best possible tomatoes, as well as how to recognize blight and how to eliminate it,' Crocetta Sikorski commented. 'The work on the farm was not only rewarding but therapeutic as well since it gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in the task at hand and forget about everything else.'

'It's a spiritual thing to be in the garden,' Wynne observed. 'All other concerns and worries in my life disappear when I'm in the garden with my ladies.'

Susin added they are looking for volunteers from all age groups; 'the young who are keen to learn; the not so young who have the knowledge to share.'

'There is a lack of knowing what is involved in healthy food production rather than food grown cheaply in a toxic environment that is trucked from thousands of kilometres away and its effect on our health,' she added. 'There is a generation of children who have no understanding that the peas and carrots they are eating originally came from the ground and not a can.'

