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The Edible Acre at ETHS - Year 2

BY ELLEN GALLAND

A year ago the *RoundTable* reported on the initial efforts of the **Edible Acre** Pilot Project in the May 25, 2010, issue. Now well into its second year, the **Edible Acre**, just east of Evanston Township High School, is no longer a “pilot” project. Based on recent Project Diary entries, it is clearly thriving and, with an expected output this year of more than 750 pounds of produce, it is well on its way to surpassing last year’s 554.5 pounds.

The project began in the fall of 2009 when ETHS students from the Horticulture, Senior Studies, Community Service and Green Team programs helped design this 5,000-square-foot (1/8 of an acre) organic community garden. The actual growing area is just over 1,200 square feet. Sponsored jointly by The Talking Farm, a local not-for-profit, and Evanston Township High School, the project is interdepartmental and has local community support and involvement. According to The Talking Farm’s website www.thetalkingfarm.org, the **Edible Acre** project intends to provide “learning experiences, leadership opportunities and summer jobs for ETHS students, as well as fresh produce and health benefits for the larger community.” Linda Kruhmin, farm operations manager of The Talking Farm and coordinator of the **Edible Acre**, has been crucial in nurturing and directing the project.

In the fall of 2009 four senior studies students prepared massive piles of cardboard boxes so that, as the bottom layer of the wood-chipped, mulched gardens, they would prevent weeds. Later that fall, a total of 24 non-treated-wood raised beds were built by students in the manufacturing class. Students also built the leaf-composting bins on the east edge of the site, which volunteers from the Lake Street Church fill annually with leaves to make a leaf mold soil amendment. Much of the time that fall was spent filling the beds with soil. In December volunteers planted 650 hyacinth, tulip, daffodil, crocus and allium bulbs donated by the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Last spring the vegetable planting began, and in the summer students from the City of Evanston Youth Employment Program (SYEP) watered, weeded and harvested. They also learned about food and farm policy, and basic accounting and marketing techniques.

By early summer, enough lettuce was produced from the raised gardens of the **Edible Acre** that seven grocery bags were donated to the Soup Kitchen at Evanston’s Second Baptist Church. Lettuce beds were then replanted with carrots, lemon cucumbers, tomatoes and basil.

By late June, produce was being sent weekly to ETHS summer school cafeterias. The students received Caesar salads, steamed beans and basil pesto, and the extras went to the teachers’ lounge. After the summer school ended, SYEP students sold produce at three mini farmers’ markets at the Civic Center.

When classes resumed at ETHS in the fall, gallons of vegetables were used in the school cafeterias, including such items as cherry, plum and heirloom tomatoes, Genovese and lime basil, oregano,



Members of Evanston Township High School’s senior studies program worked on the Edible Acre, helping to get it in shape for spring planting, in part by making spiral gardens such as the one at left. Plants on the upper level use less moisture than those on lower tiers.

Photo by Ellen Galland

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dill, lemon cucumbers, crooked neck squash, four kinds of eggplant, hot peppers, and purple, yellow and orange carrots.

Mums were planted around the exterior of the fence for fall color, and orange climbing roses and blue clematis were added for color in future springs and summers.

While the gardens were producing vegetables and herbs, additional infrastructure was being built. This included the limestone paths and six brick spiral planter beds.

The spiral beds were planted with herbs or strawberries that wintered over under beds of straw. The spiral garden works well planted with herbs on top that need less water, and herbs lower down that need more.

Rabbits were deterred from eating the produce by a peppermint/garlic oil spray.

Currently the gardens are recovering from the slow spring.

Tours of the garden have been given to visitors from Oakton Community College, NorthShore University HealthSystem and New Trier, Niles North, Niles West and Maine East High Schools.

ETHS's on-site preschool is also benefitting from the **Edible Acre** project. Senior Studies students, assisted by students from the auto shop, are working with Linda Kruhmin to design, build and plant three color-themed circle gardens, each with colored stones matching the color of the flowers (red, blue and yellow) within the preschool courtyard. The preschoolers will also be given a 4' x 4' section of a raised bed to plant peas and lettuce in the **Edible Acre** itself. Involving preschoolers in gardening suggests that the **Edible Acre** project will move well beyond Year 2.

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