

VINEYARD GAZETTE

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Not In My Back Yard Gardens

By Susan Catling

Now that First Lady Michelle Obama has started an organic vegetable garden next to the White House tennis court, her healthy food-healthy living agenda has come home to — grow. It's the first vegetable garden at the White House since Eleanor Roosevelt's victory garden.



Amy, Lila and Shay Sullivan dig in at the Farm Institute.

It's reported that the raised beds will be fertilized by crab meal from the Chesapeake Bay and compost from the White House. Hope there are no state secrets leaching out from those tomatillos.

On the Island, the Farm Institute in Katama recognizes that enthusiasm and offers the community a garden patch to call its own. Every year, 10 eight-by-twenty-foot garden plots are leased for \$75 a season and come ready to plant. The Farm staff enhances the soil, provides tools, wood chips and compost, and is in charge of watering twice a week.

Development director Rob Goldfarb hopes the gardeners will share their excess crops with each other or donate them to the farm stand, which will be open to the public Monday to Saturday, 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. this year. He also encourages potluck dinners in season so the gardeners can spend time with each other enjoying their production — sitting down.

Returning gardeners Tom and Amy Sullivan saw the community garden as a good way to bring their family together. Amy said, "We didn't really have an area at home to put a vegetable garden and I loved the idea of having the support of Farm staff for help and to bounce ideas and questions off of."

They haven't decided on everything they want to plant this year. They'll plant

chard because it worked well last year but won't be trying peppers again because they had a hard time with them.

"We will definitely plant carrots because they are really fun for the kids to pick, and Sun Gold [cherry] tomatoes because we ate them right off the vine," Ms. Sullivan said. "I think we'll plant arugula because we have just discovered arugula pesto; also some herbs, at least basil and parsley." The White House garden will also include arugula.

Her children Lila and Shay are regular participants at the Farm and it seemed like a good way to be there regularly. "Some weeks it was hard to get out there to weed and then I had some serious hours ahead of me trying to catch up with it," she said. "The kids would help for the first bit and then they'd take off to go hang out with the lambs or the piglets."

Chappaquiddicker Margaret Knight is a first-time gardener and even though her husband Sidney Morris works at the Farm Institute, she isn't counting on him to do the weeding. She's always had a garden at home but is challenged by the sandy soil, so she wanted to see how things would do in better soil.

"Also, our garden is not that big and now my daughter is living at home and likes to garden so it seemed like it'd be nice to have more space for growing, and more things for preserving as well as eating," she said. "Probably they have way fewer mosquitoes than we do, too."

Ms. Knight is interested in getting a community garden started on Chappaquiddick at some point and wanted to see how it works.

Since she'll be commuting by boat to her garden, she plans to grow vegetables that don't have to be harvested at a specific time, like carrots, beets and parsnips. She may also try peppers and Brussels sprouts. "I was thinking about winter squash, too, but I'm not sure how that works with something that has a big vine that will probably grow into the path or someone else's plot," she said. Being a good neighbor is part of community gardening.

Melissa Mueller and her husband, Bill, are also new to the community garden. They spend most of the summer in Katama and noticed the garden on their walks last year. They're planning to share the work and the bounty with another couple who live nearby.

"I tried to get a plot last year, but there were none left, so this year I called in early February and was able to secure one plot," Melissa said.

They are planning a mix of flowers and vegetables including peas, lettuce, carrots, beans and tomatoes. Other possibilities are spinach, if they can do an

early planting, herbs, and a few strawberry plants to get started for future years. “And just a few zucchini and squash plants,” she said. “We’re all eager to learn how to do this gardening in an organic fashion.”

A summer of upkeep and harvesting is not for everyone. Chef Steve Buckley of Buckley Gourmet Catering started a plot last year but was so busy he couldn’t maintain it and eventually it was engulfed in weeds.

But already the plots for this year are spoken for and there is a waiting list.

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