

Growing Together Community Garden Grows **By Jean Kiedaisch**

When Hinesburg's Community Alliance Church decided to create a community garden to benefit residents of the town, they asked member Sahra Aschenbach if she thought she could recruit the gardeners. She took up the challenge eagerly: "I have been growing the food for our family since the 60's when we started our own organic gardens on fertile land adjacent to Lewis Creek in Hinesburg. I was excited to seek out both gardeners and non-gardeners who were eager to join others who wanted to grow their own organic vegetables, and to share the overflow with folks at the Food Shelf."

One of Sahra's first moves was to be in touch with Jim Flint of Friends of Burlington Gardens, to visit the demonstration garden, and then to apply for a grant. The \$500 grant helped pay for fencing, compost, and a beautiful sign that announces the garden's presence. The garden has been supported by a second grant in addition to the church's contributions, from the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund. This grant, awarded this past May, has paid for scholarships, raised beds, hoses, tools, and the EMG interns' demonstration gardens.

Looking now at the lush plots bursting with produce—vines heavy with tomatoes, cucumbers climbing trellises, the scent of basil in the air, it's hard to believe that a year and a half ago, church volunteers were just beginning the hard work of removing sod, rototilling, and applying compost at the sunny, breezy site. That work has paid off in soil so productive that each week there are extra vegetables to donate to the Hinesburg Food Shelf—a total so far of over 175#.

A sign at the garden gate proclaims its name: Growing Together Community Garden. Members aim to spend Thursday evenings gardening together, sharing information, tools, and veggies. They can compare notes with Garden Coordinator Sahra Aschenbach or ask questions of Extension Master Gardener Jean Kiedaisch or EMG Interns Laura Killian and David Morgan. David is also lead carpenter on a project to build a compost bin. Fifteen plots, each with two 4'x12' beds, have been planted by individual gardeners; the sixteenth is a community squash and pumpkin bed interspersed with dahlias donated by American Meadows in Williston.

Gardeners had the option of attending free gardening classes from January to May this year, but for the most part are learning by doing. The sign at Rose Dauerer's plot says "Rose's First Garden." Other gardeners, for example Dave Fontaine, have lots of experience. But as Dave notes, "This was a first time for lots of things, with a steep learning curve--building beds, figuring out water." A recent scare over possible late blight on tomatoes introduced the group to the Diagnostic Clinic at UVM (which found no late blight!).

Some gardeners bring their children along to be part of "growing together." A side benefit, notes Laura Hoopes, is that "This has opened up new food ventures for Windsor. He'll now eat virtually anything we're growing in the garden, including raw spinach!"

Garden plots for next year's gardening season will become available in September. Gardener Grace Link sums it all up in this way: "It's been a lot of fun. Next year we'll

know more. We're learning together.”