

Cape Charles garden club gives youth farm to table experience



Malissa Watterson, DelmarvaNow

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"They go in the grocery store and they think that's where it evolved and I wanted her to see it from the beginning to the end. And what better way?"



(Photo: Staff photo by Malissa Watterson)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- New Roots Youth Garden in Cape Charles holds its Summer Open-Garden Club on Thursdays.
- Youth harvest and sell the garden's organic produce at the New Roots farm stand.

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If you're visiting Cape Charles on a Thursday, there's an opportunity to buy the summer's bounty and help youth simultaneously.

Last week marked the fourth meeting of the Summer Open-Garden Club, sponsored by New Roots Youth Garden.

The annual summer club invites local and visiting children ages 5 to 13 to harvest and sell produce, such as eggplant, cucumbers and tomatoes.

All of the fruits and vegetables that are sold are growing in beds just yards from the New Roots farm stand and are never sprayed with pesticides or other chemicals.

- Kids ages 5 to 13 learn lessons relating to gardening, math and customer service at the weekly club.

"The main reason is we want to keep the garden completely organic so that we can know in selling our vegetables that we've done nothing to add to anything but their fresh, natural flavor of what they offer," said New Roots President Tammy Holloway last Thursday.

"And it teaches the children that they can grow things naturally as well," she added.

Every summer, fall and spring, the garden located at the corner of Fig Street and Randolph Avenue provides youth the opportunity to get their hands dirty and learn the many lessons that come with growing, harvesting and selling food.

Laurie Klingel, owner of Appleseed Nurseries in Eastville, developed the New Roots Youth Garden program as her thesis project while obtaining her Master's degree in horticulture from [Virginia Tech](#).

In 2011, Klingel and Holloway, who moved to Cape Charles that same year, teamed up to make New Roots a reality.



New Roots Youth Garden volunteer Enid Gast shows a participant in the Summer Open-Garden Club how much her harvest of cherry tomatoes weighs Thursday, July 23, 2015 in Cape Charles. The free club is sponsored by New Roots Youth Garden. (Photo: Staff photo by Malissa Watterson)

The town of Cape Charles donated the land for the garden at no cost and, by the first summer session, 22 kids had signed up to harvest food from the three beds Klingel, Holloway and other volunteers had built.

One of those participants was Kaylen Fitchett, 10, who learned of the program from her grandmother, Joanne Fitchett of Cheriton, and has attended the summer session ever year since.

"Children don't know where their food comes from first of all," Joanne Fitchett said of why she encouraged her granddaughter to attend.

"They go in the grocery store and they think that's where it evolved and I wanted her to see it from the beginning to the end. And what better way?" she asked.

Joanne Fitchett, who is now on the Board of Directors for New Roots, mentioned the program has also taught her things she never knew about gardening.

For instance, she never knew that by planting marigolds near vegetables the sweet scent wards off the bugs that like to prey on produce.

Another natural remedy to deterring bugs is planting rosemary near your vegetables, said Holloway.

When other issues arise, like the destructive squash bug that attacks squash and pumpkins, Holloway turns to Christina Murray, the 4H Extension Agent for Northampton County.

If there is ever an entomology problem, Murray contacts researchers at Virginia Tech's Eastern Shore Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Painter who can either help or direct Murray to someone else in "[Hokie nation](#)."



A participant in the Summer Open-Garden club smells sage from a butterfly and herb garden Thursday, July 23, 2015 in Cape Charles. The free club is sponsored by New Roots Youth Garden. (Photo: Staff photo by Malissa Watterson)

"Because we don't spray pesticides, they can give us advice on different alternative ways to deal with it and we can try it out and see if it works," she said.

In addition to being the liaison for local entomologists, Murray's role at New Roots is to promote experiential education, or "hands-on, boots on the ground learning" that cultivates the life-skill of gardening.

She also plays a role in showing kids where their food comes from and has taken New Roots participants to Eastern Shore farms, like Pickett's Harbor in Cape Charles.

Murray said she wants to emphasize the importance of volunteering to the children and makes a point before Thursday's activities to introduce all of the New Roots volunteers who have given their time in the garden.

"It's just that kind of thing to make sure that they realize they can be important in their communities as well," Murray said.

Many of the volunteers at New Roots are in the process of becoming a member of the Master Gardener Program, a national group that educates the public on horticulture and improves the quality of horticultural projects.

As a way to fulfill the required number of volunteer-service hours for the program, aspiring master gardeners help throughout the year at the New Roots garden.

Eastern Shore Master Gardener [Christine Williams](#) has volunteered with New Roots for the past two years and has been leading the kids in the farm stand this summer.

There kids learn important math skills like counting and subtracting when tallying up costs for customers without using a calculator.



New Roots Youth Garden volunteer Carol Selby helps Summer Open-Garden Club participants look for weeds in a tomato bed Thursday, July 23, 2015 in Cape Charles. The free club is sponsored by New Roots Youth Garden. (Photo: Staff photo by Malissa Watterson)

After pointing to the assortment of produce for sale and asking the children the name of each fruit and vegetable, Williams reminded the young sellers to always use their manners.

"What do you say when they come?" Williams asked a group of 7- and 8-year-olds last Thursday.

"May I help you ma'am? May I help you sir? And then you say thank you for shopping here," she told the young group.

In addition to teaching customer service skills, Williams said the farm stand reminds children to be patient when encountering a cashier who is busy in the store.

"Sometimes we have a line of customers here and they get stressed out so we tell them this is what it's like in the real world. When you're at a cash register and someone's new don't get upset with them if they're a little slow because they're learning," she said.

People can stop by the New Roots Youth Garden farm stand to purchase produce after 5 p.m. on Thursdays.

Children are invited to come to the garden from 4:30 to 6 p.m. to participate in the weekly gardening lesson that coincides with the harvesting, weighing and selling of produce from the garden.

Holloway said participants can come for one week or they can attend the remaining weeks for the Summer Open-Garden Club.

On Thursday, August 13, Amy Brandt of Amy B Catering will be teaching children how to make salsa from the fruits and vegetables in the garden. The final day for the summer session is Thursday, August 27.

For more information on New Roots Youth Garden, visit its Facebook page or website, www.nryg.webs.com.

To sign your child up for the Summer Open-Garden Club, email newrootseyouthgarden@gmail.com or call 757-414-7188.

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