



Cultivating Zero Waste

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By Frank Ruggiero, Watauga Democrat

It's a grass roots effort in, perhaps, the most literal sense.

For Jasmine ShoShanna, Gardens for Humanity and Zero Waste aren't merely efforts, but rather responsibilities.

Her devotion to both is based on the notion that vegetable gardens not only promote self-sufficiency, but they also "reconnect people to the land, get them interested in caring for our natural resources and teach children where food comes from," ShoShanna said.

"Having one's own food supply reduces fossil fuel and energy consumption. In this time of global warming, it is essential we reconnect with the earth – gardens are innately healing; they create healthy environments for people, animals, plants and the planet."

She believes an essential component of this healthy state involves zero waste through an efficient use of compost. ShoShanna explained that 60 to 90 percent of trash can be easily composted and used in gardens as fertilizer.

"In terms of waste, we don't think about it," she said. "We throw things away, but where is 'away?'"

For Watauga County, ShoShanna said "away" is the regional landfill in Johnson City, Tenn.

Composting, she said, is surprisingly simple – merely separate trash from synthetics (plastics, Styrofoam), place it in a composting bin and wait.

Through that practice alone, ShoShanna has dramatically reduced her output of garbage from two bags a week to one a month.

Through gardening, she's saved well over \$1,500 on food alone.



From left, Jasmine ShoShanna helps Sugar Grove preschool students Jonah Yates, 5; Brandon Arnold, 4; Savanna Johnson, 4; and Joey Hopkins, 4, with their gardening. The youngsters are growing a pumpkin patch for the preschool's autumn fundraiser. Photo by Frank Ruggiero

Since last year, ShoShanna has been spreading the word and, through a grant of \$2,500

from the Helen Clabough Foundation and \$500 in private donations, has started a project that has already spawned six gardens in the High Country.

The first garden was established in the Bethel community on the farm of Joe and Cindy Pacileo, who share the garden with three other area families.

ShoShanna said she not only enjoys the process of gardening, but the reconnection to nature, which she hopes to share with others in the community. "It's wonderful; it's really wonderful," she said. "It's important for people to get back in touch with nature, from one end of the county to the other."

Joe Pacileo, who has limited mobility, has started his own experiment – growing tomatoes in a raised bed consisting of straw and soil.

The Pacileos must also deal with a persistent gopher that makes short work of kale grown there. However, ShoShanna said it's common for most gardens to face some sort of challenge.

"So, here we go on a new adventure," Cindy Pacileo said.

One garden is located in the Wild Cat area off Old 421, where it's maintained by a family of four. The family's children became staggeringly interested, she explained, with one of them even planting a "secret garden" by his tree house.

Another is located on Hardin Road outside of Boone, where a resident became so involved in the project he couldn't help but want to give more. ShoShanna accommodated his wish, and he now helps out with the other gardens.

The fourth garden is in Vilas, where a resident took it on as his own pet project. At first, he was using regular fertilizer, but ShoShanna encouraged him to use natural and organic compost.

"You'll taste the difference in your food and feel it in your body," she said. "And that's what the compost does."

The fifth garden consists of two-and-a-half feet high garden beds at the Western Watauga Community Center, with the sixth just down the road at the Sugar Grove Preschool, where the students actively participate in its cultivation.

The preschoolers are also growing a pumpkin patch for a fundraiser for the school, and are learning firsthand the importance of zero waste.

Under the guidance of assistant director Tawnya Tester, the students have been learning how to plant vegetables and help them thrive.

For instance, Brandon Arnold, 4, was told talking to plants can help them flourish. Arnold took it to the next level and now sings songs to them.

The kids have been working on the garden for a couple months and are eager to see what grows. Jonah Yates, 5, is particularly interested to see what comes of the "potato monsters," a nickname the kids have attributed to potatoes with roots.

ShoShanna said a lot of people were involved in the planning process, including a number of Boy Scouts who built the community center's garden beds as their Eagle Scout project. Students from Appalachian State University have also pitched in, volunteering to plant vegetables, pull weeds and generally maintain the gardens.

Jay Carter, owner of Rockwater Farms, has donated \$400 worth of soil, and continues to serve as the purveyor of organic and nutrient-rich soil. ShoShanna usually buys plants from the Watauga County Farmers' Market, and is pleased with the community's response to the project.

"It's magic," she said. "It's just magical to be there. It's not income-related, because our goal is to have a relationship with nature and everyone needs to have that."

Rather than an established non-profit organization, Gardens for Humanity and Zero Waste falls under the category of social venture, ShoShanna said, meaning the organization is less restricted politically.

It falls under the umbrella of the Appalachian Coalition of Just and Sustainable Societies, and ShoShanna is eager to find additional grants waiting for a project like Gardens for Humanity and Zero Waste.

All the same, the service is practically free to those interested, with the exception of soil. However, if the price can pose a problem, funds raised for the project will go towards the purchase of soil.

To start a garden or to volunteer, simply contact ShoShanna at (828) 297-4677.

<http://www.wataugadems.com/1news/zerowaste.html>