

Master Gardeners Help School Garden

By Kathleen Cotta and Nikki Justino

For the past two years Alameda County Master Gardeners from the South County have been helping with gardening at Sorensdale Recreation Center garden in Hayward by providing seeds and offering advice about the growth and pruning of fruit trees. They noticed that the students and staff had to hand-water eighteen raised planting beds, constructed over a concrete yard, in which they grew vegetables and flowers. This required hauling heavy hoses from bed to bed and sometimes resulted in uneven watering.

Seeing the opportunity to reduce this burden and to offer instruction to the staff and students, a team of South County Master Gardeners, headed by June Wallace, spent a full day setting up an automated irrigation system for all of the raised beds. The recreation center provided the materials, and Master Gardeners provided technical and hands-on support.

Soaker hoses and timers have made a tremendous difference at Sorensdale. The regular and even watering helped produce a bumper crop of onions, squashes, beans, corn, tomatoes, chard, potatoes, beets, lettuces, and artichokes.

The Sorensdale facility primarily provides opportunities for developmentally disabled persons to participate in recreational, educational, and daily living skills and activities. The food they grow in the garden is used in the on-site kitchen for all who attend the school.

Recently the Master Gardener group donated a set of grow lights to the facility to enhance seed starting. Starting plants from seeds saves money and offers the opportunity to grow a wider variety of food plants than offered in the local nurseries. While seeds are sprouting, the planting beds are being readied for spring planting.

Contacts at Sorensdale Recreation Center for the Master Gardeners are Shelly Luchini, Recreation Coordinator, and Sim Mirande, Recreation Specialist and an instructor for many programs, including art, computer classes and the gardens.

Although Alameda County Master Gardeners seldom have the capacity to aid directly in projects such as this, they have put together a comprehensive listing of resources on School Gardening designed to assist parents, teachers and administrators to create successful school gardens at http://groups.ucanr.org/ACMG/School_and_Community_Gardening/School_Garden_Links.htm. You can also go to their home page and click on "Alameda County School and Community Gardening" on the left side. There you will find

information on getting started, developing a curriculum, and getting funding for your garden.

The Alameda Master Gardeners are part of the University of California Cooperative Extension. Contact them at <http://acmq.ucdavis.edu>, or call the Plant Doctor hot lines at 510-639-1371 or 925-960-9420. For more gardening information, go to the California Master Gardener Web site, <http://camastergardeners.ucdavis.edu>.

If you go:

Sorensdale Recreation Center garden is located at 275 Goodwin Street in Hayward.

Visitors should first call Shelly Luchini, Recreation Coordinator, at 510-881-6778 to arrange a visit.

Photos taken by Nikki Justino



Shelly Luchini, Recreation Coordinator, and Sim Mirande, Recreation Specialist (in foreground), June Wallace and Kathy Cotta (in background) discuss the Master Gardener irrigation workshop at its completion.



Shelly Luchini exhibits the large onions grown in the raised beds at Sorensdale.