



Huge crowds show up for first Edible Flint Food Garden Tour

Posted by Elizabeth Shaw | The Flint Journal September 01, 2009 20:44PM

FLINT, Michigan -- They came, they saw...and they ate the cherry tomatoes.

More than 160 people showed up at the Flint Farmers' Market Tuesday night to pack a caravan of buses for a free tour of Flint's booming urban agriculture movement.

Not even the organizers expected so much interest and enthusiasm for the first Edible Flint Food Garden Tour.

Flint Journal extras Applewood Initiative for Gardening and Community Free Urban Gardening Class Application deadline: Sept. 9 Call: (810) 233-3835. E-mail: cmach@rmfdn.org or fpleasant@rmfdn.org Website: www.RuthMott.org. Details: 5:30-7:30 p.m. each Tuesday Fall 2009-Spring 2010 Topics include: Plant science, grant writing, flowers, soil and composting, dealing with local government, etc. Participants must provide 15 hours of volunteer community service with a local project to complete the program. Graduates can participate in ongoing monthly workshops on indepth topics such as gardening for wildlife and intergenerational gardening.

"We were planning on maybe 40 or 50. We ended up doubling the number of buses and we still turned away 100 people," said Erin Caudell of the Applewood initiative for Garden and Community, one of the Edible Flint collaborators.

Garden enthusiasts and community activists came from all over Genesee County and as far away as Oakland and Saginaw counties, to see firsthand what Flint's urban farming pioneers are doing to transform the city's vacant lots into healthy food and economic opportunities.

"What they're doing here is beautiful but on our own many of us would never have come to this part of town to see it," said Sue Hudson of Grand Blanc, as she marvelled at raised flower beds built above the rocky soil at the Urban Youth Community Outreach's Andrew Lilly Garden, where one of the city's first hoop greenhouses was erected after years of zoning battles.

Denny and Marilyn Nichols of Clio and Diane and Hilliard Shackford of Davison, all recent graduates of the MSU Extension Master Gardener program, were hoping to identify a community service project.

"There's a lot of volunteer work you can do out there, but this is what we wanted to get involved in," said Denny Nichols.

Down the street at the Mission of Hope Universal Life's Garden of Love, the tourists listened intently as

Bobby Jackson explained how the day shelter's homeless residents tend the plants as their regular morning ritual.

"The chlorine in the city water will wilt the tops of the tomatoes so you have to water them down low," Jackson explained. "That's a lesson we learned this year."

Flint Journal extras

Edible Flint partners:

Applewood Initiative

East Piper Street Block Club

Flint Farmers' Market

Genesee County Land Bank

Happy Family Farms

Home Ave. Neighborhood Vegetable Demonstration and Teaching Garden

Keep Genesee County Beautiful

MSU Extension

Mission of Hope Universal Life

Salem Housing Community Development Corp.

Urban Community Youth Outreach

Youth Karate Ka Assc.

Individual community volunteers

It seemed everyone on the Edible Flint tour -- hosts and visitors alike -- shared a common passion that was as tangible as the scent of fresh-grown jalapenos in the air. At every tour stop, they poured off the buses to swarm the garden rows -- busily identifying plant varieties, quizzing growers on weed barrier techniques, swapping business cards as they plucked a tomato or pepper.

"I'm really amazed how many people have the same thoughts I do. We need this kind of community training in our area," said Marian Kassin, 70, an avid Davison Township gardener. "Having these gardens will get us to communicate again as neighbors. Gardening gives you a reason to talk. If nothing else, you can complain about the weather."

Next year Caudell said they hope to expand the tour to include other parts of the city, and maybe even a bike tour route. Meanwhile, the Edible Flint group is working on a variety of fronts to help connect new gardeners to resources, education, tools and land.

One example is an urban gardening program sponsored by Applewood, that offers 15-18 hours of training in urban gardening and neighborhood development, in exchange for equal hours of community service.

"The only thing I would change is they should do it in the spring," said Hudson, as she stuffed a few string bean samples in her bag. "Then everyone would get off the bus and go home and start digging."

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