

Demo veggie garden being cultivated in SLT

Publisher's note: *This is one in a random series of stories about gardening in Lake Tahoe.*

By Kathryn Reed

Getting one's hands dirty is not only a physical workout it is a mental recharger.

"There is a biological link between soil and people. We have lost that because we are no longer an agrarian society," De-Anne Hooper told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Hooper runs the South Lake Tahoe Family Resource Center and is the driving force behind a demonstration garden at the site that will break ground June 2.



The dirt to the right of the Family Resource Center will become a garden. Photo/LTN

Providing prevention and early intervention when it comes to mental health issues are two of the center's core objectives. The garden will be a component to help people cope.

"Not many people have the opportunity to get their hands dirty in South Lake Tahoe, especially kids. We thought this would be

a perfect match," Hooper said.

She is working in cooperation with Brian Hirdman, who teaches gardening classes through Lake Tahoe Community College's Connect Community Education. He has been trying to start a community garden for the last three years. And while this 30-foot-by-50-foot plot isn't big enough to feed a community, it will act as a way to show people what can grow in the basin and how to grow it.

Right now the growing area is raw dirt between the center and chain link fence for the ball field. First to be built is the fence that will enclose the growing area. This will be a joint project by the FRC and Lake Tahoe Unified School District, which owns the property.

Hirdman has some logs, boulders and planter boxes that will be used. The center has boxes already planted on the other side of the parking area that have herbs growing.

"This isn't a farm, so we are not going to have a super high volume of food, especially the first year. It will provide an opportunity for people to dig in the dirt and there is scientific evidence that it helps mental illness and that is the biggest part for me," Hooper said.

The goal is to have a summer program for the kids so they can be tending to the garden.

Hirdman will be teaching a four-part class through Connect Ed where the practical aspect is working at the demo garden. FRC students and their parents are expected to be the long-term caretakers.

The classes may be taken individually. The first one – Creating Healthy Soil – is May 31. July 12 is about which plants grow well here. It will include creating a hoop house to create a microclimate. July 19 focuses on advanced growing techniques. Permaculture and biodynamic growing principles are

part of this class. The July 26 class is about xeriscape, which is about being smart about water use.

“This summer I will have workshops with kids. I will teach them how to plant trees, plant vegetables and get in the dirt,” Hirdman told *Lake Tahoe News*. “My goal is to train a group of volunteer leaders who can go about and train kids.”

Hirdman would like to plant fruit trees that have been grafted to stand up to Tahoe’s climate. These could include apple, cherry, plum, apricot and pear.

Large shrubs like elderberries and smaller ones like raspberry, blueberries and currants grow well here.

Another lesson will be learning what annuals work in Tahoe versus perennials.

Hirdman envisions a salsa garden where tomatoes, peppers and cilantro are grown. He also wants to show how squash and corn can be cultivated in Tahoe.

“It will be just like your standard garden ... nothing too exotic,” Hirdman said.

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Notes:

- Information about the Connect Ed classes as well as how to register is online.
- Brian Hirdman may be reached at naturesgardener@hotmail.com.
- De-Anne Hooper is available at 530.542.0740.