



NRCS Partners with Local Organizations on the Urban Terrace People's Garden Project

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On what would otherwise be a neglected patch of soil bordering the asphalt parking lot of a high rise apartment building in downtown Harrisburg, a lovingly tended garden overflows with wild sesame, garland chrysanthemum, bell flower, and other Asian vegetables along with the usual squash, peppers, spinach and more familiar garden plants. This urban area transformed into small-scale subsistence farm is tended by



Korean-American residents of the Linden Terrace apartment building. The garden will comprise the center of the Urban Terrace People's Garden Project, one of over 400 People's Garden projects that USDA employees are involved with across the country and the ninth one in Pennsylvania. Susan Parry, NRCS Natural Resource Specialist, who is a point-of-contact for Pennsylvania's People's Garden Initiative, has been working with a Harrisburg-based community organization called Jump Street as well as the Capital RC&D Area Council to fund and support this particular venture that combines outreach, gardening, artistic projects, and activities for at-risk youth.

The People's Garden Initiative is an effort by USDA to encourage its employees to create gardens that benefit the community by demonstrating collaboration, incorporating sustainable practices, promoting health and wellness, enabling social and cultural connections, and fostering pride. On all counts, the Urban Terrace project in Harrisburg fits this bill. Jump Street is a private, nonprofit organization that supports community and economic development through art. Deni Boger and Christine Glover of Jump Street said they will oversee the construction of two raised bed structures called Keyhole gardens and will work with local at-risk youth to create a mural wall at the site. One keyhole bed made of mountain stone and shaped like a kidney has already been installed. The bed raises the soil level several feet and the odd shape allows a wheelchair-bound person to easily tend the plants, a design that the organizers hope will

encourage handicapped apartment residents to participate. NRCS provided resources to hire a Korean language translator so that Jump Street Urban Terrace garden coordinator, Christine Quimby, could communicate the project's design and ideas to local residents, Mr. Moo Kwan Lee and Mrs. Bong Soon Kim. Mr. Lee and Mrs. Kim, along with another Korean-American resident who has since moved away, began this organic garden several years ago. Although elderly, both are quite energetic and spry. They welcome the People's Garden Project and hope that it will entice other apartment residents to cultivate a patch for themselves.

Other plans for the project include building a garden shed and installing a rain barrel irrigation system. Currently, Mr. Lee and Mrs. Kim hand carry plastic gallon jugs, one at a time, from the building or their apartment to water the plants. Quimby will enlist local volunteers, including USDA/NRCS employees, to help the residents with the construction and garden maintenance and the building owner will pay for needed materials.

Meanwhile, Mr. Lee said through the translator that he and Mrs. Kim would be happy to tend the new keyhole beds and will continue to experiment with a variety of vegetables. As they pressed bags of freshly harvested exotic leaves and roots into our hands they said, "We enjoy watching things grow."