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(VIDEOS) Forget the winter, community garden in Budd Lake is blooming

By PHIL GARBER Managing Editor May 28, 2018



Joe Frommelt is getting his plot ready for planting at the community garden in Budd Lake.

Photo by Phil Garber

MOUNT OLIVE TWP. – Willie Nelson was on the radio, the sun was brilliant and Joe Frommelt was taking it all in while he weeded and prepared his plot at the community garden off Wolfe Road in Budd Lake.

It's the third year that Frommelt has bought space at the garden, which is run by the Land Conservancy of N.J. He started with one plot, had two last year and now has expanded to three plots.

A retired railroad conductor with the Port Authority of N.Y. and N.J., Frommelt, 74, said on Thursday, May 24, that he hopes to yield strawberries, spinach, radicchio, Swiss chard, escarole, beets, tomatoes and string beans. The garlic bulbs he planted last year are coming up.

"I'm retired and this is relaxing to me," Frommelt said. "And most gardeners are good people."

The community garden is located on a quarter-acre on the westbound side of Wolfe Road, near the intersection with Route 46 East. Danielle Wolfrum, development director for the conservancy, said 135 out of 145 plots have been sold.

An open house is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., on Saturday, June 2, National Trails Day. There will be guided hikes through the preserve and presentations by gardeners and non-profit groups along with refreshments.

The garden is surrounded by fencing, to keep out deer and rodents, including rabbits and groundhogs. A shed is located on site, which houses some gardening supplies. Gardeners are encouraged to bring their own gardening tools and only organic gardening practices are allowed.

There is a volunteer garden committee that gardeners may join and programs and information is provided throughout the year to support and help educate the garden members about gardening and organic gardening practices. Pot-luck dinners and other social events may be

held during the summer months for members of the community garden and their families.

The 10-foot by 10-foot plots and are available on a first come, first served basis. Annual membership rates for residents and members of the Land Conservancy are \$35 per plot and gardeners are able to select their individual plot. There is a one-time irrigation fee of \$30. Water is provided by individual spigots located through the garden. The fee for non-residents is \$45 a year plus the \$30 one time irrigation fee.

Mulch, compost and manure are available at no charge as is advice from professional and amateur gardeners.

Indian Vegetables

Not far from Frommelt, Jay Desai of Mount Olive was busy tending to his two plots where he will plant tomatoes, peppers, long beans and Indian squash and red malabar spinach, both native to his homeland of India. The garlic he planted last year also is coming up well.

Desai, 64, has been growing vegetables at the community garden since it formed in 2014.

A third gardener was Lori Rosania of Mount Olive. It's her first year and she was busy pulling the jungle of weeds from her two plots. She has a garden at home but it hasn't been going well.

"We have groundhogs in my backyard and they eat my vegetables," Rosania said. "I like growing vegetables so I wanted to try it here."

Her yield, hopefully, will include tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchini, kale, green beans, lettuce beets and herbs. But first she had to remove the weeds from one plot. She'll return another day to clean the other plot and hoped to finish planting by next week.

"It's wonderful," said Rosania, a Realtor for Weichert. "There is such a sense of community here."

Aaron Rosado, 25, of Newton, is a summer intern. He cuts the grass, clears and maintains the trails, plants in the garden, offers advice to gardeners and was helping to install 1,600 feet of fencing that will confine five goats and two sheep. Their job starting early next month will be to naturally rid the area of invasive plants, as part of "Operation Chew."

The goats will eat most anything including bark, shrubs and thorns while the sheep tend to graze. The animals, provided by the Antler Ridge Wildlife Sanctuary in Newton, will stay at night in a shed that is being built for the preserve.

"It's better than using chemicals," said Rosado.

Rosado started on April 3 and the frost and snow did not portend well for the gardens. But the weather turned and now there are "strawberries all over the place" while garlic is coming up and marigolds and irises are peeking out.

Rosado is a graduate of Sussex County Community College and hopes to one day work in a state or national park and have his own farm.

"It's important to know where the food is coming from." said Rosado, who served for a year with the Americorps volunteer program in the midwest.

Wolfrum said City Green, a non-profit urban farm and garden organization based in Clifton, will be farming about 12 acres owned by the land conservancy across from the community garden. The organization grows vegetables which it then provides at low cost to low-income people in Paterson.

Corporate volunteers are also again helping out through the conservancy's "Partners for Parks" program. Volunteers help spread wood chips on paths, overturn land for gardens and more. The latest corporate volunteers are from REI of East Hanover and Investors Savings Bank.

The garden is part of the South Branch Preserve, which totals more than 200 acres. Preserved by the Land Conservancy and its partners including Mount Olive Township, the land was purchased to protect the headwaters of the South Branch of the Raritan River, a drinking water supply source for more than 1.5 million New Jersey residents.

The garden is open from April 1 through Nov. 30.

For additional information, to reserve a plot, or volunteer, call Barbara McCloskey at (973) 541-1010, extension 14, or email gardenmanager@tlc-nj.org.



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