

MIDDLETOWN

Garden will be rooted in nature

The community garden will act as an educational tool and provide veggies for food banks or other charities.

By **CHRIS ENGLISH**
STAFF WRITER

Environmentally responsible gardening will be front and center in Middletown soon, when the township starts a community garden at the township community center on Trenton Road.

Parks and Recreation Director Debby Lamanna said the plan is to plant the 48-foot by 48-foot garden May 2. It will be tended by members of the Middletown Seniors Association, which is housed at the community center, and other volunteers, she said.

The garden, to be planted in the back part of the community center property near a playground, will show people how to garden using various environmentally responsible methods, said Lamanna.

It will be planted with techniques taken from the book "Lasagna Gardening" by Patricia Lanza. Instead of breaking up the ground, like in traditional gardening, vegetables and flowers will be grown in planting material arranged in layers — like lasagna. The garden will have layers of peat moss, mulched leaves and other compost placed above the ground. Some plants also will be in raised wooden beds about a foot off the ground.

Using compost made from plant waste decreases the amount of trash going to the landfill, said Lamanna. Plus, she said, the raised beds are easier for seniors to tend.

As much as possible, the garden will be irrigated with water collected in rain barrels to conserve the public water supply, said Lamanna. Also, all plants will be grown organically — without chemicals, she added.

Township officials want the garden to be an educational aide for as many people as possible, said Lamanna, so the public will be welcome to stop by to learn about environmental gardening. Eventually, agricultural seminars will be held at the site. Children in the township's recreational program also will help with the garden, Lamanna said.

"This was originally the idea of our township Environmental Advisory Council, which wanted to show people how to be more environmentally conscious in their gardening," she said. "The intent is to keep it going every year, possibly make it bigger and maybe even someday have a greenhouse. We want it to become a real learning site."

The project is being coordinated within the parks and recreation department by program specialist Crystal Lecuyer, who has gotten gardening and landscape professionals and many others involved, said Lamanna.

"It will be a place where children can come to learn how to grow things, and where food comes from," said Lecuyer. "There will be classes and demonstrations for adults. We're hoping it's a place that helps bring the community together."

Volunteers already are growing tomatoes and other plants inside their houses with seeds donated by Burpee. The plants will be transferred to the community center May 2 to give the garden a good start, said Lamanna.

The garden will start with a "pizza" theme of tomatoes, onions, basil, peppers and other vegetables that can be put on a pizza. It eventually will yield all kinds of vegetables, which will be donated to food banks or other charities to be determined, said Lamanna.

To donate lumber for the raised beds, find out how to help in other ways or for more information, call 215-750-3890 or email .

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