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## Community Gardens 'an oasis' in Darien

Megan Spicer Published 11:25 pm EDT, Sunday, July 27, 2014



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Jim Brewer tends to his garden at the Cherry Lawn Community Gardens.

DARIEN -- **Jim Brewer** is giving up on eggplant.

"Everything eats eggplant," Brewer said. "I have a terrible problem with flea beetles."

### RECOMMENDED VIDEO

It's his second year trying to grow the purple fruit and he'd found that the effort

needed to keep the bugs at bay outweighs his desire to eat it.

sn't really like eggplant."

at the Cherry Lawn Community Gardens,

kside Road have offered Darien residents the chance to grow and tend to their own plot of growing space.

"You get to meet people from all over town that aren't your neighbors," **Dorothy Shergalis**, the community gardens director, said. "You get a chance to get acquainted with someone with a common interest."

Shergalis has had a plot for 20 years full of all kinds of vegetables. In her spot, which she opts to not fence off like some of the other gardeners, are five tea rose bushes -- one for each grandchild. Her husband is allergic to roses, though, so she cannot grow them at home or bring them into the house.

"But I cut them and leave them on my deck or my screened porch or I bring them to my kids," Shergalis, who spends several hours during the week at her garden, said.

During the summer, Shergalis, a retired school teacher, will bring her grandchildren to the plot to pick the fresh strawberries she grows.

Shergalis stood at the edge of her plot, which is along the front fence, and described the scene in front of her as being similar to a **Norman Rockwell** painting. To her right are the baseball fields and directly ahead of her is the **Darien Nature Center**. Off to her left, children use the town playground while their parents watch them from the perimeter of the playscape.

"It's like an oasis," Shergalis said.

The gardens were created after the **Cherry Lawn School** that once occupied the space was torn

down in 1972 and the **Darien Community Association** garden club expressed interest in preserving the space, Shergalis said.

"Over time, things have been improved," Shergalis said. Deer fencing and water lines with hoses were installed, and the plots were established.

One common plant among the majority of gardeners is tomato.

"Every plot has tomatoes because you cannot buy tomatoes in the grocery store that taste like this," Brewer said. "There's nothing like a perfectly ripened, fresh tomato that has flavor. One of the motivating factors for this garden was because my wife wanted fresh tomatoes. We've grown tomatoes at our house, but had limited space."

Brewer has three Labradors that make maintaining the garden difficult, and his wife tends to her own flower garden at their home, which is a 10-minute walk from the community gardens.

Though this is Brewer's second year with his particular plot, he is no stranger to the community gardens. He had a plot 10 years prior, but was unable to maintain the space and gave it up. But in order to get back in, he had to wait five years. The wait list for a plot is currently two to three years, according to Shergalis.

Each plot at the gardens is unique.

"Every one has a different personality and that really shines through with what they planted and how they planned (their gardens)," Shergalis said.

**Rosie Trompeter**, who spent time Saturday pruning, has a plot because she knows that chemicals aren't sprayed and for the most part, the gardens are organic.

"You can't really control what runs off the neighbors' yards," Trompeter said.

Trompeter's mother was a gardener.

"I've been doing it my whole life. I just like eating healthy stuff," Trompeter said. In her garden, she grows a variety -- tomatoes, lettuce, squash, kale and arugula, among other vegetables.

For Shergalis, the desire to have a vegetable garden, but being unable to do so at her house, was a driving factor for her

"All my inspiration comes from my garden," Shergalis said. "It's very relaxing. Even though it looks tedious to weed, it's a very rewarding and relaxing thing because you see the results immediately."

None of the gardeners grows the vegetables and fruits to sell, Shergalis said. Most will take their produce home to share with neighbors and family. However, one gardener, **John Crowley**, the chairman of the coordinating committee, has a large plot in the back corner and gives a lot of what he grows to St. Luke's Church for its Thursday night dinners, Shergalis said.

"It's very rewarding to see something you planted has grown," Shergalis said.

But the process to reaping those rewards can come at a price.

"I tell everyone, you want to have fresh vegetables join a (community-supported agriculture program), it's cheaper," Brewer said. "But gardening gives you emotional satisfaction."

Brewer uses raised beds for his garden to avoid soil compaction, which can make gardening difficult. His garden is full of peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, Brussel sprouts, string beans and cauliflower.

"You put a lot of your time and energy and soul into this," Brewer said.

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