

April Showers Bring May Flowers (and Vegetables) in Lawrenceville

By Christopher Cussat



The Lawrenceville
Organic Community

GARDENABLE

in Allegheny Cemetery



Photo illustration by Bill Bingham

Spring is definitely in the air throughout Lawrenceville! This is nowhere more evident than in the Lawrenceville Organic Community Garden in Allegheny Cemetery and at the recent Lawrenceville Blossom Tour.

The Lawrenceville Organic Community Garden was started three years ago by Allegheny Valley Bank when one of its employees who had a passion for gardening reached out to Allegheny Cemetery and inquired about forming a partnership. The cemetery soon donated the land and water, and the bank's board donated \$5,000 to erect a fence and help get the garden going.

In its first year, the garden was maintained only by bank employees, who would donate the grown produce to some community food banks. During the second year of the garden, Cleo Zell and Lawrenceville United became involved in the garden. This expanded the core group of volunteers to include community members and residents in addition to the original garden volunteers.

Last year, when Lawrenceville United was not able to continue its role with the Community Garden, Zell approached Deirdre Kane to work with the garden; she jumped at the opportunity. The two were able to secure funding from Grow Pittsburgh, which afforded them the ability to build a shed and purchase all of the Community Garden's seeds, starts, tools, and general-needs items.

Kane decided to be involved with the Lawrenceville Organic Community

Garden because as a lifelong resident of Lawrenceville, she quickly realized how important a garden like this could be for the community. She explains, "Community gardens are a benefit to local people and they are important for many reasons. First and foremost, in a neighborhood like Lawrenceville, there is a lack of really fresh vegetables. In addition, gardens like this allow people to share in communally grown food. I believe that this breeds a sense of community within the neighborhood—gardening together as neighbors and sharing the harvest connects people."

Zell agrees and adds that this garden also provides physical exercise and good nutrition for its participants, as well as being really empowering. "In addition, I love being part of the Lawrenceville Organic Community Garden because it helps to create such opportunities and exposes kids to growing their own food for themselves and their families," says Zell, who decided to become involved with the garden after Lawrenceville recently lost one of its grocery stores. She explains, "Many of our neighbors and their kids have health issues like asthma—good nutrition and a healthy diet can help many health-related issues. So we needed a good source of produce, and the more neighbors we can involve in the garden, the more we can educate people about nutrition and health."

Now run by Green Lawrenceville (a group of community volunteers

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Lawrenceville OSSOM Tour



May Flowers in Lawrenceville

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dedicated to a healthy, sustainable, and green neighborhood), the Lawrenceville Organic Community Garden also recently partnered with Career Connections Charter High School and its LIFT Program (Girls Scouts) to create an ongoing youth gardening project.

The Community Garden measures 40 feet by 40 feet, and although it is mostly planted with vegetables, there are also sunflowers, daisies, and some other beneficial flowers. “We have three raised beds down the center of the garden, but the rest of it is planted directly into the ground. We also have a beautiful shed that was built by the husband of a former Lawrenceville resident—inside of which we store all of our tools, equipment, and a small library of donated books and magazines,” Kane notes.

Each workday at the Community Garden is really an educational opportunity. However, organizers also sponsor special events such as instructing people how to build rain barrels, teaching about container gardening, as well as information sharing about the garden’s ongoing compost system.

Currently the Lawrenceville Organic Community Garden is open to anyone



Community Garden

who wishes to visit, work, and learn. “We have a core group of about ten volunteers, comprised of mostly Lawrenceville residents or folks that work in the neighborhood,” Kane notes. No one has individual plots—volunteers simply work together as a community during work hours and share in any harvest at the end of the day.

For more information on the Garden, please visit its Facebook page or simply

search “Lawrenceville Organic Community Garden” online.

Another undeniable reminder that spring is in the air in Lawrenceville was the 2011 Lawrenceville Blossom Tour, which took place May 7 and 8. The first Blossom Tour began about ten years ago



Blossom Tour

as a spring event that would attract people into the local shops, restaurants, and cafes of Lawrenceville. It was decided that merchants participating in the tour would hand out seed packets to shoppers.

This year’s Blossom Tour coordinator was Rebecca Morris, and through her business (WildCard) she has been participating in Lawrenceville events such as this tour and the Joy of Cookies Tour since she opened her store in October 2009. “The tour’s organizers asked for help, so my employees and I stepped forward,” she adds.

There were 24 businesses in Lawrenceville that participated in the Blossom Tour this year. Each of these businesses distributed free seed packets to customers: the packets included herbs, flowers, and vegetables. “There were also special sales, a bee keeping demo, and other craft demos,” Morris notes.

In addition, the Blossom Tour supports and encourages sustainability for the local community. Morris explains, “The free seed packets that shoppers can collect at each Blossom Tour stop are the perfect way for people to start their own home gardens. These seeds are also responsibly and sustainably grown—

and the selection is specially designed for our climate.”

Morris also believes that this event is very important for the Lawrenceville community, its residents, and local visitors. “The Blossom Tour is a great way to introduce people to Lawrenceville and its vibrant business district. Many people who attend the tours have not been to the neighborhood before, and after taking the tour, end up coming back to shop in our stores, eat in our restaurants, and might even end up moving here!”

The Lawrenceville Corporation’s Patrick Bowman adds, “We were very excited to support an event like this through the Mainstreets Community Event Microgrants Program, which provides attendees with a great tour of Lawrenceville’s thriving business district. It was also an opportunity to learn about innovative gardening practices.”

Always a successful event, participating merchants report that, on average, between 300 and 400 people visit their shops during the tour. Anyone interested in learning more about or helping with future Lawrenceville Blossom Tours can email info@wild-cardpgh.com. 📍

Christopher Cussat is a freelance writer who planted his roots in Pittsburgh over 20 years ago. You can read more of his work at www.cussat.com.

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KC Lapaina

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