



FEATURES

**Every day is Earth Day at community garden**

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*Weinfelds increase space for tenants who want to grow their own vegetables and flowers*

**By Frank Mortimer**

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First Lady Michelle Obama has nothing on Dianne Weinfeld when it comes to encouraging home vegetable gardening.

For years, Kevin and Dianne Weinfeld, owners of Mayfair Realty in Foxboro, have provided their residents with community garden spots behind the Pine Tree Gardens complex off Chestnut Street.

But with the tough economy and the resurgence of backyard farming, the Weinfelds this spring have seen a record crop of locals eager to grapple with the old sod. She received 27 requests for only 15 available plots.

"This year we had an unprecedented number of gardeners," Dianne Weinfeld said.

"We didn't have enough land. People were calling and calling."

In response to the rush of requests from tenants wishing to get a bit of earth under their fingernails - and some luscious tomatoes and home-picked greens on their table this summer -- the Weinfelds hired Foxboro landscaper Kevin Guerrini to come in and clear more back land for gardens.

"I think it's great. It's right here, and it's free," said Joyce Chiang, whose apartment in Pine Tree Gardens overlooks the expanded garden plots, through a border of pine and hardwood trees.

Last year, Joyce and her husband Eric Chiang, an engineer, began to work the plot which the late Robert Girardin, the town's long-time representative on the Southeastern Regional School Committee, had lovingly tended well into his 90s.

Joining Girardin among Mayfair's star gardeners was the late Al Truax. The retired Foxboro highway superintendent raised not just veggies but eyebrows by wiring a car battery to his section of fence, to keep out groundhogs.

Foresight

About 10 years ago, with the encouragement of Dianne's father, Alex Spier, the Weinfelds bought an acre of the former Rockwood farm. Most of the old farm was used by another developer to build a multi-family housing complex, which faces Mechanic Street, opposite the Ahern Middle School entrance.

The back acre purchased by the Weinfelds abuts the rear of Pine Tree Gardens. And so Mayfair's community garden could grow.



Eric and Joyce Chiang, who grow their own tomatoes, peppers, chives and other vegetables in the community gardens provided to tenants by Mayfair Realty, admire a neighbor's daffodils this week. (Photo by Frank Mortimer)

"So many people that are living in our apartments are going to grow their own vegetables." Weinfeld said.

She couldn't be happier.

"I think the local growing movement gets us away from rampant consumerism and instills an appreciation of what we eat and what it takes to sustain us," she said.

The garden also brings together tenants young and old -- neighbor meeting neighbor not just across the fence, but across the generations.

David Watts said Girardin, his neighbor, kept dropping off vegetables at his apartment and encouraged him to start his own garden.

Watts now tends a 12-by-16-foot patch, planted with flowers on one side, vegetables on the other. His bulbs started blooming in mid-March.

"On sunny days I would sit and watch the bees on the snow drops and crocus," Watts said. By mid April the hyacinths and jonquils were blooming and I was able to cut flowers for our dining room table." He plans to plant yellow beans and cherry tomatoes in the vegetable patch.

At about this time each year, Dianne Weinfeld schedules a meeting of growers in the garden. Plots are selected and other practical matters are discussed: segregating areas for organic versus conventional farming; deciding whether the gardeners want compost; insect and pest control; introducing inexperienced gardeners to seasoned growers. "It's an opportunity to foster mentoring and networking," she said.

The annual kickoff was set for yesterday, coinciding with Earth Day.

As in past years, Ray McKay of Sunlight Farm on South Street, who is a judge at the Marshfield Fair, will be invited to judge a garden contest at Pine Tree Gardens.

Organic Obama

Weinfeld said seed sales at companies such as Burpee have soared: evidence of a home gardening movement.

Still more interest was generated in March, when Michelle Obama began digging up a patch of the South Lawn of the White House to plant a vegetable garden, the first at the White House since Eleanor Roosevelt's victory garden during World War II.

Victory gardens were food crops planted at residences in the U.S. and in some other countries during the first and second world wars. The gardens helped the wartime food supply and boosted morale.

Obama's organic garden will provide food for the first family's meals and formal dinners, Weinfeld noted in an e-mail. Its most important role, as Michelle Obama sees it, will be to teach kids about healthful, locally grown fruit and vegetables at a time when obesity and diabetes have become a national concern.

Weinfeld said Mayfair prides itself on providing residents with a sense of community and believes in doing its part to preserve the environment.

Apartments at Pine Tree Gardens, Putnam Village and Hillcrest Village are carved into the woods, and "care is taken to use resources wisely." Full recycling is offered at all three communities, energy efficient heating and lighting systems are in place, and decisions have been made to replace washing machines with energy efficient units.

"We are pleased to offer our residents community gardening which provides social connections and a unique connection to the environment," she said.

Ashley Courtemanche and Joseph Monty, embarking on their fourth season of planting in Mayfair's community plots, said they are excited by the "overwhelming interest" they now see among their

neighbors.

"Farming has been a lifelong passion for me for growing plants-especially fruit and vegetables," said Kaarthy Madhan, who recently moved into a Mayfair apartment from Providence, R.I. "There is also the health aspect resulting from lots of exercise and, of course, a chance to get out and enjoy the sunshine and fresh air.

"The seasons become clearer and the senses are certainly sharpened by the ever-changing colors, aromas and sounds. With the experts around to give us tips on farming I guess this would be one of the memorable summers for us."

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