



Cornell University Cooperative Extension Washington County

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4-H Leaders Learn About Heritage Vegetables, Starting Plants, and Container Gardening

The 4-H Leader's Association was seeking involvement from more new and established leaders, so they created a quarterly "fun fair." The programs display activities that can easily be done in a club setting. This effort began on April 5 with Spring Garden Fling.

The Spring Garden Fling featured three activities: Heritage Horticulture, Creative Container Gardens, and Starting Seeds. The programs could be used independently, or they could be used to build on one another.

Dale Prouty, long-term member of the Leader's Association, of Kingsbury presented the "Creative Container Garden." Using a colorful display and numerous personal containers Dale has developed, he challenged the leaders to think outside the bog. Creative containers might include anything from an old boot to a old child's toy. Dale displayed an older, plastic dump truck, where the bed was being used as a container. The truck had the added feature of a long handle that allows you to move the plant to where you want it. Dale pointed out that some of the key points, be sure the container has drainage, that you match plants to the location of the container (shade tolerant, etc.), and fill in unused space in a large container with inexpensive fillers like other containers rather than trying to fill it with soil.

Thelma Hack, a Master Gardener volunteer, was present to discuss the basics of starting your seeds in small pots or planting flats. She explained that many plants can and should be

started from seeds and can be transplanted either into a bed or another container. Thelma also pointed out that certain plants can't or should not be started in pots, as they do not transplant well. Each interested leader was provided with a started decorative amaranth plant to take home.

John Bowe, 4-H Educator, spoke about Heritage Horticulture. There are many historical varieties of garden and crop plants that are still open pollinated and non- genetically modified. Many of these varieties have tremendous cultural & social significance. Take the Hebron Beauty or Gold Coins for example, both of which were grown widely here in Washington County. The Beauty variety was even developed here in Washington County. While the program focuses on growing a heritage variety and tracking the performance of the variety, leaders were told to encourage youth to explore the project through their strengths. Some of them may choose to follow the history of the variety through their family tree; others may choose to photograph or paint the fruit or flowers of the variety. Additionally, any performance information collected can also be submitted to a website run by Cornell University that tracks vegetable varieties, thus making the youth Citizen Scientists. Leaders were provided with seed saving information and a table that charts many of the nation's seed catalogs for heritage varieties.

These programs are often no-cost or low-cost and easily done with 4-H clubs. Recycling materials for these programs is strongly recommended when possible. Leaders are encouraged to adapt the programs to meet the needs of their club. The Washington County Leader's Association is open to any leader, volunteer, or parent who is interested in creating a greater experience for their 4-H youth. Membership is free and you need just show up at a Leader's Association meeting or event to join.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday June 7th at Firehouse #2 by the hamlet of Kingsbury, just off Route 4. The theme of the program will be outdoor education and should include programs on outdoor cooking, GPS use, and at least one other activity. Come on in and bring a friend! For more information or to register for the June event, please call John Bowe or Chrys Nestle at 746-2560.

Photo 1: Dale Prouty shows off some of the many types of creative containers you might put vegetable, herb or flowers in. Be limitless, use your imagination! Photo by John Bowe.

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