

# Putting Down Roots

By ANDI DIEHN

The Upper Valley is home to many gardeners. You can tell by walking down any of our village roads; lush flower beds line fences while overeager asparagus, zucchini and tomatoes peek around the corner from the backyard vegetable plot. Or visit one of the dozens of nursery centers or farm stands to find people of all ages clad in dirt-stained dungarees gently placing flats in their shopping carts or, more likely, red wagons. The soil is rich, the air is clement, and the urge to grow one's own food is strong.

But what if you live in an apartment? What if your own yard lies deep within a patch of forest, beautiful yet shady? What if you're a beginner gardener and the Internet just isn't enough help? Give the Co-op Food Stores in Hanover and Lebanon, N.H., a call. The Co-op offers members a chance to join the Co-op Community Garden, located in Norwich, Vt., where for a modest fee (around \$25) you can lease a plot about 20 square



Coralia Picardo tends to her plot at the Co-op Community Garden in Norwich, Vt.

feet in size in which to grow vegetables, flowers, herbs — whatever you like. Garden side by side with a master gardener, learn from your fellow gardeners (some of whom have been hoeing this spot for more than 20 years), and enjoy the fruits (and vegetables) of your labors.

## HISTORY

“There are some people who started out 35 years ago who are still gardening today,” says Rosemary Fifield, director of education and member services at the Co-op.

The Co-op Community Garden project began under the direction of Harrison Drinkwater in 1974; the Co-op bought the land on Route 5 in Norwich in 1973 and, by the next summer, gardeners were tilling the ground. Self-sufficiency, independence, the touch of cool soil — “People at the time seemed to need this,” says Fifield.

Today, we are no strangers to that urge toward self-sufficiency and sustainability. Growing a garden is one of the most accessible and immediate ways of promoting independence from corporate food systems and interdependence with the local ecology and community.

Community gardens have their roots in the Victory Gardens that sprang

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You, too, can grow veggies and flowers.

**Co-op Community Garden** *continued from PAGE 49* up during the first and second World Wars. Citizens in England and America grew food on their own plots of land or on allotments to supplement the stressed food supply. Today's community gardens are often not only for food production, but also meant to promote involvement in volunteering, lowered crime rate, the beautification of a down-at-the-heels neighborhood, and old-fashioned neighborly relationships. While Norwich is hardly down-at-the-heels or steeped in crime, any community can benefit from more conversations over the garden fence.

The Co-op Community Garden has changed somewhat since its inception in 1974. Now gardeners can get water from a faucet, water that is pumped from nearby wetlands using solar power. A shed on the premises stores communal gardening tools and supplies. There's probably a bit less tie-dye, but the same enthusiasm that fed the start of the gardens still flourishes today.

**THE GIVING GARDEN**

At the heart of the Co-op Community Garden beats the Giving Garden, a double plot maintained by a master gardener. The produce is donated to The

Upper Valley Haven, a private, non-profit organization providing emergency shelter, food, clothing and educational programming to those in need. In years past, hundreds of pounds of produce have been donated to local support programs like LISTEN, Headrest and Outreach House.

Hanover resident Margaret Bragg has been part of the Co-op gardening community for more than 20 years. She took a break to tend her own backyard garden in the early 1990s but has returned to act as co-coordinator for the 2010 growing season. In her own plot Bragg grows onions, leeks, beets, paste tomatoes, sweet corn and popcorn. "Vegetables that do not grow well in my somewhat shady and hard-to-defend-from-deer home garden," she says.

"When I took the New Hampshire Master Gardener training program in 2000, my volunteer project was working with Elizabeth Ferry [former Community Outreach Coordinator at the Co-op] on the Harvest Partners portion of the garden," says Bragg. The Harvest Partners Garden was taken care of by volunteers who generally didn't have a personal plot as well. They were growing

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**A Plot to Call Your Own** 📌

Looking for a place to garden? Grab a spade and check out these community gardens in the Upper Valley.

**Canillas Community Garden**

Lebanon, N.H.

Located at the Carter Community Building Association (CCBA), this organic garden offers 17 raised beds and a spiral children's garden.

Contact: Pat McGovern at [mcgovern.patricia@gmail.com](mailto:mcgovern.patricia@gmail.com)

**Hanover Community Garden**

Hanover, N.H.

This garden, located on Reservoir Road in Hanover, N.H., began as a victory garden on Valley Road in the 1940s. It was moved to its current location in the 1990s and continues to thrive. In 2009, 23 families were working the soil; some of them have been planting this garden since its inception.

Contact: Joanna Whitcomb at (603) 643-8804

Web: [www.hanovergardens.org](http://www.hanovergardens.org)



Putting in corner posts for the deer fence at the Hanover Community Garden

**Hartland Community Garden**

Hartland, Vt.

Located at Foster Meadows next to the library, the goal of the Hartland Community Garden is to "encourage the cultivation of healthy, local food and meaningful interaction in the community." Some of the 20 plots are reserved for the Hartland Recreation Department and the Farm-to-School program. Web: <http://hartlandgarden.org/>

**Shaker Community Gardens**

Enfield, N.H.

2010 marks the first season for this new community garden at the Shaker Village on Route 4A.

Contact: The Shaker Museum at (603) 632-4346



Hanover Community Garden members



The peace pole at the Co-op Community Garden in Norwich, Vt.



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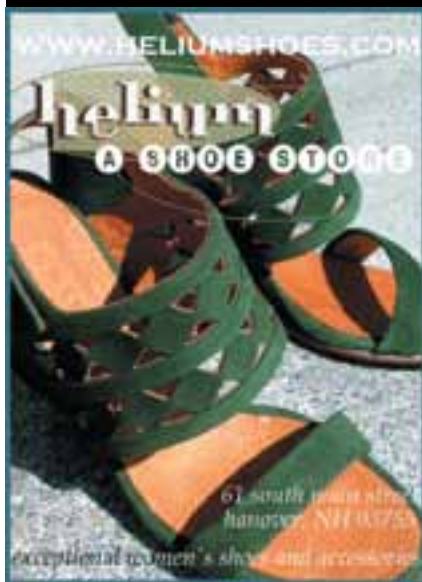
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Sunflowers line the border of the Co-op Community Garden.

**Co-op Community Garden** *continued from PAGE 50* only to donate the produce. The Harvest Partners Garden was the precursor to the current Giving Garden; now gardeners who have their own plot volunteer some of their time and energy to the Giving Garden, and donate food from their own gardens as well. “Although the Harvest Partners Garden no longer exists, per se, the Giving Garden flourishes in the center of the community garden.”

Even gardeners who are growing for their own consumption tend to donate food whenever they have a little extra. Who can use all the zucchini that tends to thrive here?

#### THE COMMUNITY

“I didn’t have any idea how to garden in a strange place. I belong to a sunny and warm climate — I moved from Peru to this country at the end of April 2006,” says Coralía Picardo. Picardo and her husband, Michael, joined the Co-op Community Garden in 2007 to escape the confines of their small apartment in Lebanon and benefit from the experience of other gardeners. “I didn’t realize I was caring for all the weeds. I can recognize the weeds from my country but these were completely different for me. So I got a good gourmet

of lettuce and weeds.” Not only did Picardo learn how to garden (she is now co-coordinator for the 2010 growing season), but she was able to practice her English language skills at the same time. Her vocabulary grew even faster than her lettuce and weeds.

“It’s a real community,” says Fifield. “The Co-op offers gardening classes, but out at the garden it’s just a lot of sharing.”

The Co-op Community Garden is strictly organic, which makes it an attractive way to shrink your carbon footprint. “If we grow our own produce, we’re not buying produce that has been trucked to our area, which uses fossil fuels,” says Norwich resident Barb Tolman. She has been a part of the Co-op Community Garden for four years, serving as coordinator for the 2009 season. When asked what she grows there, she rattles off a long list: “Green beans, broccoli, tomatoes, snow peas, pumpkin, acorn squash, melon, tomatillos, carrots, kale, lettuce, to name a few...”

The rules are fairly simple: Plant your garden in a timely manner. Pull your weeds. Help keep the whole garden neat and thriving. Be good to your plants. Be good to your fellow gardeners. **UVL**