

For Immediate Release



EAT RIGHT MONTANA

A coalition promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles

www.eatrightmontana.org

CONTACT: Crystelle Fogle, MBA, RD 406-947-2344

MT Department of Public Health & Human Services

April 1, 2009

Gardening in Big Sky Country: From Backyards to Community Supported Agriculture

With a freshly dug garden on the White House lawn and Michelle Obama as the First Champion of local food, American families are going back to their roots - literally - in droves. Now that spring has arrived, the 2009 GYO (Grow Your Own) season is officially launched and everyone is predicting a banner year for the 21st century version of victory gardens.

"There is tremendous interest in the 'recession garden' idea," says Alice Burchak, MSU Extension agent in Toole County and community garden champion in Shelby. "Montana families are getting serious about gardening, both to reduce food costs and to enjoy fresher produce. When our committee began germinating the idea of a community garden in early 2008, we were surprised at how quickly plans grew and flourished. With land from the city of Shelby and numerous donations of labor, equipment, and supplies, we went from a bare lot to an amazingly productive garden in one short season."

The lush plots, raised beds, and wrought iron gate of the wheelchair-accessible Shelby Community Garden showcase just one example of the local gardening treasures sprouting across Montana. From Garden City Harvest's multiple programs in Missoula (www.gardencityharvest.org/) to the Growing Community Project (<http://helenagcp.wikidot.com/start>) in Helena, Montana families are reaping the health and economic benefits of a more locally based food system.

According to Green House Technician Manny Morales, the organic USDA Demonstration Garden on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation promotes healthier lifestyles in several ways. "Our success is the result of many programs, including MSU Extension, Tribal Health, Diabetes Prevention, and Indian Health Service, coming together to raise awareness and teach gardening skills. This is our 11th year and we are seeing more and more families putting in their own gardens, as well as participating in our tours, taste testing, recipe sharing, and 'We Dig You Pick' Norland Red potato harvest."

Montana gardens come in all sizes, shapes, varieties, and flavors. Here are some ways to get your family involved:

- **Grow your own at home:** Personal gardens can be planted in almost anything - from simple containers on a porch to elaborate raised beds in the yard. Get good advice, plant good seeds, take good care, and enjoy the good food!
- **Connect with a community garden:** For a minimal fee, you can use a plot, share facilities (sometimes tools), and get tips from experts. Since existing space is expected to go rapidly this year, consider starting one at a park, school, or church.
- **Join a Montana-grown CSA (Community Supported Agriculture):** In a CSA, you buy a share and receive a portion of the farm's harvest each week during the season. Although many Montana CSA shares are sold out for this year, you can link to some CSAs at www.aeromt.org/abundant/ and learn about others through your Farmer's Market this summer.

"Shelby's Community Garden is a place for gardeners of all ages to go green together," notes Alice Burchak. "It's exciting to see generations, from boomers to teens, working side-by-side to grow healthy produce for their families. We are also using the garden as a springboard for more education, such as compost workshops and training for Master Gardeners."

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at

www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrightthehealthyfamilies.htm

Going Green: Simple Steps for Healthy Families 2009