



Neighborhood Network

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT INFORMATION:

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Community Action Gardens Workshops Set

Rockford - Residents interested in working with others to grow fresh, affordable food for their neighborhood and for others who may not have access to nutritional food are invited to participate in the 2014 Community Action Gardens project. Upcoming workshops will be held to discuss available grant funding (introducing new funding changes from previous years), application details, education and training plans, and the basics of planning and planting a community garden. Master gardeners will also be available to speak with individuals about their proposals.

Two opportunities to attend a workshop include:

- Thursday, February 20 6:00pm - 7:30pm
Bethesda Covenant Church, 2101 East State Street (basement)
- Monday, February 24 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm
City Plaza, 555 North Court St., Room 115 (basement)

Community Action Gardens can be located within Winnebago or Boone Counties. A representative of any group interesting in applying for a Community Action Garden grant should plan on attending one of two sessions. The following groups are invited to apply:

- Neighborhoods, schools, faith-based organizations or other groups that are interesting in learning gardening skills and are willing to help their community by donating a portion of the produce to area pantries and other organizations serving those in need
- Organizations that collaborate and include in their program education, nutrition, or expanded involvement and outreach to groups such as children, seniors, and veterans

- Neighborhoods and other types of groups that will use the gardens as part of an effort to increase neighborhood and community vitality or unity
- Neighborhood groups that are interested in participating in Farmer's Markets and using proceeds to support neighborhood based activities such as block parties and cleanups that benefit the entire neighborhood

Applications will be available at the workshops or can be obtained beforehand by contacting Cyndie Hall at 815-967-4034, cyndie.hall@rockfordil.gov or Christopher Greenwood at 815-967-4039, christopher.greenwood@rockfordil.gov. Applications must be submitted by March 10th.

"I am excited that the Community Action Gardens will again allow people the opportunity to work together to grow healthy food for themselves and others, and help improve neighborhoods," said Cyndie Hall, Executor Director of Neighborhood Network.

In addition to raising inexpensive and fresh food, gardens also promote healthier lifestyles, increase neighborhood vitality and community pride, and encourage environmental stewardship. The project will also connect, educate, and encourage entrepreneurial projects. Participating gardeners can share in produce grown, but at least a portion of the produce should be given to area hungry. The preferred method is by donation to Lifescape Community Services Meals on Wheels for Seniors and/or "Plant a Row for the Hungry".

A green thumb is not required to be a part of the community gardens as a major focus of the program is learning. "You don't have to be an expert gardener. Extension staff and our Master Gardeners will work with participants to make their gardening experience positive," stated Margaret Larson, County Director, University of Illinois Extension. "We are excited to be able to provide technical expertise and educational workshops, and we have master gardeners and other volunteers ready to help from planning through basic food preservation." The U of I Extension staff would like to expand their work with youth in the community gardens and is interested in meeting with neighborhood groups wanting to explore garden-related youth education and training.

In 2013, 2,687 youth and adult volunteers donated over 4,124 hours in 23 Community Action Gardens. All gardens contributed at least a portion of their produce to Plant A Row for the Hungry or to area food pantries, for a total donation of more than 5,900 pounds of vegetables.

Community Action Gardens are funded by the City of Rockford Human Services Department, a Community Action Agency, through Community Services Block Grant funds. Community Action Gardens should not be confused with the rental garden plots available through the Rockford Park District.

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