

One Tomato project makes appeal for youth volunteers

What started on a wing and a prayer just four years ago has now become one of Sarnia Lambton's favorite projects.

The One Tomato project was the brainchild of two young activists, Meaghan O'Neil and Darren Hakker, who wanted to encourage folks to plant just one tomato plant in their yard.

"We were hoping that families would start a vegetable garden, so people would appreciate the value and taste of home grown vegetables," says Hakker.

"Even if all they could do was plant a single tomato in a bucket garden on the balcony, we'd be happy, and if people grew a larger garden that would be fantastic," continued Hakker, "and if they grew more than they could handle, they could share their fresh produce with neighbours or bring it to the food Bank."

That was four years ago. Today, the One Tomato project has grown to include several community gardens including new gardens in both Forest and Petrolia. In Sarnia, in addition to the gardens already in place last year, new gardens include one at the First Christian Reformed church at the corner of Exmouth and Murphy roads,



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and a garden by the Rotary Club of Sarnia at the new office north of Pathways Health Centre. In addition, the garden at Davis St, north of the Post Office has been made nearly twice the size of last year's.

The One Tomato gardens are true community gardens, planted and maintained by volunteers. At harvest time, anyone in the community can partake.

Funding to enable the purchase of tools, compost and seeds has been provided in part by the Sarnia Community Foundation, Sun Life and several community contributors.

As of the end of April, much of the work in the gardens was complete. The soil has been turned up, and manure or compost has been added to improve the soils' fertility. Cold hardy seeds such as peas, lettuce, onion and radish have already been planted and after the danger of frost is past, around mid May, the beans, tomatoes, peppers

and sweet corn will be added.

Volunteers are always needed to plant, weed, water and maintain the gardens. Anyone wishing to volunteer should go to One Tomato's website or email darrenhakker@gmail.com. Alternatively, contact me at jdegroot@degroots.ca. One Tomato is making a special appeal for youth to volunteer.

An interesting sidebar to the garden at First Christian Reformed Church is a grass bench, created by Linda Weening, a member of the church. "We cut the sod off of the lawn area in order to build the garden, and rather than throw the sod away, we stacked and molded the sod into the shape of a couch" explained Weening.

As of today, the grass bench has been in place for three weeks and is surviving better than expected. Spring rains have kept the bench green, and in summer when heat and dry weather arrives, the bench will need supplemental watering. When grass grows it is cut with both a weed trimmer and grass shears.

Garden Clippings appears in The Observer on Saturdays. If you have a gardening question or a specific topic you would like addressed, e-mail johndegroot@degroots.ca