

## **History of the Sierra Vista Community Gardens, Inc., by Rebecca Hillebrand**

The initial planning meeting for the community garden was held on July 18, 2011, attended by 18 people. We even got a write up in the paper. The second meeting with the purpose of gathering ideas from the community was held on August 1, 2011 at the Sierra Vista Food Co-op. The next step was to start forming committees to address issues such as how to organize, costs and resources. From these meetings a core group was formed that made this dream a reality.

The Sierra Vista Community Gardens vision included wild and cultivated native plants as a means to create sustainable gardening in the high desert of Arizona. We used native plants to increase total yields from the gardens and to add to the aesthetics. Prickly pear and mesquite harvesting were emphasized. Educational programs have included best practices for sustainability and healthy production.

January 31, 2012 we announced that water had been established and that a fence would be up soon. The Sierra Vista Community Gardens was started. We had plants in our first beds by April of 2012. At that time we had a lot of ground and not much else. Two years later we had 9 raised beds, 5 growing towers, 3 in-ground beds and one straw bale bed. We received a grant from Punch Woods to build 5 additional 3-block high raised beds. We planted a manure crop where 5 additional in-ground beds would be lined out in time for the summer planting season of 2014. That brought our total of rentable beds to 28. At that time we had only 3 beds available and needed the new beds for the busy growing season.

In addition to space for gardens we built a shade ramada for education classes and outdoor gatherings. The Gardens also contains a 200 square foot locked storage shed, a rainwater harvesting system, multiple fruit trees and bushes and a lending library.

By the time of our fifth annual Breakfast in the Gardens we had nearly filled our garden space with 5 towers, 5 raised beds, 16 cement block beds, 3 in ground beds, a communal artichoke bed and blackberry patch.

This has been made possible due to the hard work and generous support of many members of this community. This is truly a community garden and all members of the community are welcome and needed to keep this effort moving forward.

We have gardeners from all socioeconomic levels. The towers and 3-block high cement beds are great for anyone with mobility problems, the raised beds are good for those with no or mild mobility issues and the in-ground beds are for those who can get down to the ground to work their gardens. We have older gardeners who have experienced growing in this high desert climate and brand new gardeners who have never picked their own food before.

We have instituted a mentoring program to help anyone who has the desire (but no experience) to produce some of their own food. We also have a sponsorship program. We understand that not all members of our community can take \$90 (6 months fee) from their current budget to pay for a bed rental. If you or someone you know would like to garden but do not have the space or funds for the rental fee we will find a sponsor to link with you to cover the fee. We do expect sponsored gardeners to volunteer additional time to help maintain the communal areas of the garden. We want to emphasize the education function we hope to provide.

This could not have been possible without the support of the entire community. We would like to thank the following groups, organizations and individuals.

- Park Professional 2700 who made the land available to us.
- Baja Arizona Sustainable Agriculture (BASA) for being our sponsoring 501 (c) (3) organization before we became a 501(c)(3) on our own
- The Sierra Vista Herald for a discount and Pat Wick for a donation towards our articles of incorporation publication. The Sierra Vista Herald has given us much needed coverage to get the word out about our garden.
- Stan's Fence who gave us the materials at cost and did not charge for the labor for such a wonderful fence.
- The Sierra Vista Garden Club for a generous donation that helped pay for the fencing materials
- Col/Ret and Henrietta Huisking for sponsoring the water establishment and help with fencing materials.
- Virginia Erickson, Sierra Flooring, Steve Fletcher, Donna Boe and Rebecca Hillebrand for individual donations for fencing materials.
- The Wick Family Foundation and the Cochise County Master Gardeners for generous grants that payed for the materials for the Eagle Scout projects of 5 raised beds and 5 growing towers.
- Charles Woods for his fund raising and work on the water pipes for our garden. This is his Eagle Scout project.
- Douglas (DJ) Scofield for his Eagle Scout project of building 5 growing towers for the garden.
- Jacob Reichert for his Eagle Scout project of building 5 - 3 foot by 20 foot raised beds for the garden.
- Eric Fast the Eagle Scout leader for his supervision, support and help with these Eagle Scout projects.
- De Lewis for his planning, supervision and hard work designing and installing the water system to supply the garden beds with an easy-to-access water source.
- Sierra Vista Builders Supply for stepping up and getting us the best price for the materials and storing the materials and delivering them for free when needed.
- The Sierra Vista Food Co-op for sponsoring several fund raising raffles.
- Lowe's of Sierra Vista for the materials and labor to build the storage shed, plus plants and tools for common use.
- The Upper San Pedro Partnership/Water Wise, and the Cochise Water Project for assistance with the rainwater harvesting installation.