

Help fight hunger by gardening

Written by
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Even though spring is off to a chilly start, gardeners are already planning their gardens.

The City of Minneapolis is encouraging gardeners to help fight hunger by planting an extra row of produce at home or in a community garden to donate to neighborhood food shelves. The Minneapolis Health Department's Healthy Food Shelf Network is seeking to unite gardeners with food shelves to help get healthy food into everyone's kitchens.

In 2013, more than 114 gardeners donated 730 pounds of produce to 17 Minneapolis food shelves. In 2011, there were more than 3 million visits to food shelves in Minnesota. People who rely on food shelves appreciate the same healthy eating options afforded to many, but healthy foods are often in short supply at many local food shelves. Instead, donations are often high in fat and calories and low in nutritional value, said a Minneapolis Health Department source.

According to the source, in Minneapolis, only 28 percent of low-income residents eat the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables each day. When people donate healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low-fat, low-sugar or low-sodium items, they help food shelf recipients eat healthier and prevent chronic health issues such as obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. According to the department, by making healthier foods available at food shelves, people are helping food shelf recipients eat better and become healthier in the process, which reduces demand for expensive health services.

Residents are encouraged to get involved by connecting with local food shelves about types of produce and gathering and planning seeds in the garden. Forty gardeners have already committed to planting an extra row this year.

Health Department staff will attend upcoming events sponsored by the Local Food Resource Hubs to encourage gardeners to plant an extra row for food shelf recipients. Anyone who commits to participating will receive a free pack of seeds and help connecting with his or her closest food shelf.

The Local Food Resource Hubs Network helps residents grow their own fresh produce. Hub members have access to free or low-cost classes, tools, volunteer opportunities and social

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events. The upcoming events are at 1 p.m. - 4 p.m., Saturday, May 17 at Grace Center for Community Life, 1500 Sixth St. NE; 9 a.m. - noon, Saturday, May 17 at Redeemer Center for Life, 1800 Glenwood Ave. N. and 9 a.m.- noon, Saturday, May 17 at the Minneapolis American Indian Center, 1530 E. Franklin Ave.

Non-gardeners are encouraged to donate purchased items such as fresh fruits and vegetables as well as monetary donation. It is also suggested that non-gardeners can host healthy food drives at schools, worksite or places of worship.

To learn more about donating fresh produce and other healthy foods to food shelves in Minneapolis, visit www.healthyfoodshelves.org.

Support for the Plant an Extra Row project is provided by the Minneapolis Health Department's Statewide Health Improvement Program with funding from the Minnesota Department of Health.