

Madison County Extension Demonstration Vegetable Garden Debuts in 2013

Campbell Cultivates Extension Research Garden

In 2013, **Max Campbell** turned a barren plot of land behind the Madison County Extension Office into a cornucopia of vegetables that were shared by many, including CASA, the Care Assurance System for the Aging.

The 110 feet wide by 50 feet deep urban garden is surrounded by parking lots and is almost the width of the Extension Office on Cook Avenue. According to Regional Extension Agent **Ken Creel**, the long-term plan for the garden

is to provide the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and Auburn University with another location to research plants in an urban environment.

Max, a seasoned gardener who has grown vegetables all his life, has been a Master Gardener since taking the Winter 2003 class. He was the 2005 MGNA Master Gardener of the Year. He's served as an officer on the MGNA Board, and he is a favorite on the workshop circuit on various topics including growing vegetables, fall and winter gardens, and irrigation.

Helping Max crack the red Alabama soil back in March was **Jeff Reynolds** (F'05), who donated his time and his backhoe. Max also used his own rototiller he would carry over there in his pickup truck.

Boy Scout Troop 364, sponsored by Latham United Method-



In June, the hot peppers are starting to show. In the background are the rattlesnake beans. Photos: Andria Cummings

ist Church, reached out to Max to help a scout work toward his Eagle Scout Badge. Jay Bogardus chose the Gardening Merit Badge

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Master Gardener Max Campbell and Boy Scout Jay Bogardus take a break from their work in the Madison County Extension Office demonstration vegetable garden on Cook Avenue.

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Willow leaf butter beans, tomatoes and pink-eyed purple hull peas are thriving in June. Above and right, photos: Andria Cummings



By August, the willow leaf butter beans are 5.5 feet high and the okra is fully grown at 12 feet tall. Photo: Max Campbell

and the demonstration vegetable garden behind the Extension Office as his Eagle Scout project.

“I never realized how much work is put into such a garden,” he said. The sophomore at Grissom High School has 15 of the 21 badges needed to become an Eagle Scout.

Jay said this experience has been invaluable in learning about insect control, about all the vegetables in general, and about what it takes to have a productive garden.

For example, tomatoes need to be staked, squash is close to the ground, and corn grows on stalks, all with their own growing characteristics, Max said.

One of the many benefits of having Max as a mentor is his penchant for tasting the freshest vegetables, right there in the garden.

“I never ate raw corn before this morning,” Jay said on the day of the interview.

Two main challenges Max faced are tall trees to the south creating shade, and the poor quality of the soil.

Even so, a variety of vegetables flourished under his care. Vegetables grown in the Extension demonstration vegetable garden in 2013 include: heirloom beans and peas, corn, cucumbers, greens, okra, onions, peppers, Malabar spinach, squash, and tomatoes.

In addition, the Fall 2013 Master Gardener class was held at the Extension office, and the Interns were able to see the many vegetables growing in the garden in September.

Max works about four gardens every year:

two in Gadsden and at least two in Huntsville. To volunteer with Max at the Extension demonstration vegetable garden and with the research plants, contact him at 256-883-5704. ■



Max did research on the better growing environment — in ground, in a hay bale or in buckets. The latter two choices are for people with a patio or driveway to grow their vegetables.



Vegetables grew best in the ground. The other two alternatives needed more water. Tomatoes and peppers were in the buckets. Peppers were in the hay bale.

To help Max Campbell with the Madison County Extension System research and demonstration vegetable garden, contact him at 256-883-5704.