

Americans who grow their own food can expect to save an average of \$500 a year.



From Garden to Table project helps Natrona County residents slash food costs and eat healthier

Situation:

Vegetable gardening is becoming more appealing as people try to save money at the grocery store during tough economic times. Some gardeners are focused on food safety and believe the food they grow is safer, which is related to the growing interest in organically grown food.

A National Gardening Association survey predicted the percentage of households growing their own food would jump from 10 percent to 19 percent in 2009. The association also reports Americans who grow their own food can expect to save an average of \$500 a year, taking into account the costs of gardening compared to buying fresh produce. Saving money on food is the foundation of the University of Wyoming's Cent\$ible Nutrition Program (CNP). CNP educators in Natrona County decided to develop a gardening project using the community garden at the Agricultural Resource and Learning Center, in which the Natrona County office of the UW Cooperative Extension Service (UW CES) is housed. Classes met for 90 minutes a week for six weeks during the summer. The goal was to teach students gardening but also to teach how to harvest and cook fresh produce while demonstrating how much money could be saved.

With the assistance of the Master Gardeners and the county UW CES horticulturist, 26 varieties of vegetables and herbs were planted. Highlights added to the curriculum included information about gardening in Wyoming, growing seasons, how to get started, container gardening, when to harvest, and how to take care of fresh garden produce to reduce waste and maximize benefits.

Impacts:

Fourteen students completed the course. Exit surveys revealed eight of the students increased their consumption of vegetables, and seven are cooking more from scratch using fresh vegetables and herbs. One student commented on her exit survey,

- "I loved the use of the garden produce. Next year, I'm definitely trying container gardening!"

Produce harvested from the garden was used in recipes for each class session. As one student commented,

- “I learned how to harvest beets and cook them – I’d never had them before, but now I love them!”

Students used the information to make healthy lifestyle changes and to make plans for next season:

- “I improved my cooking skills by learning how to use fresh garden veggies and herbs.”
- “I was always intimidated by the whole gardening process thinking it would be too hard for me to stick with. Now I know what to do, and I can’t wait until next season so I can try it.”

Program representatives were invited by the City of Casper Downtown Farmer’s Market Committee at the end of the course to be “Chef of the Market” using local produce to demonstrate recipes for those attending the market.

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