

# Agriculture

## A growing concern

### County residents turn to gardening for relaxation, savings

Puttering in the backyard garden is becoming an increasingly popular pastime in Perquimans County. Young and old, veterans and newcomers, more and more people are taking up hoes and rakes to dig in the dirt.

Some are doing it to relax, some to save money, but it's a sure bet that more are doing it

than used to, and this time next year, still more will have taken up the habit.

"I'd say that 40 to 50 percent of the families in the county have home gardens," said county extension chairman Bill Jester.

"It's one way people are trying to tackle the problem of

poor quality produce they buy in the store and another way they are trying to tackle high priced vegetables in the store," said Jester.

He said that a survey done by Gallup for the National Association of Gardening, showed that most people start

their first garden with intentions of saving on their grocery bills, but after a few years, their motivations change.

"People who stay in gardening tend to be motivated more by the physical and mental benefits, in other words, it's a type of recreation."

involved depends on how much a person wants to spend.

Those interviewed said they were definitely seeing an increase in the number of persons raising backyard gardens.

T. Erie Haste, Jr., of Hertford Hardware, said the number of gardeners took a tremendous jump in 1974, and has been growing steadily since then.

He said the number of gardeners "doubled or tripled" as a result of the last serious recession. "Since then it's been a good, solid 11 to 15 percent every year," he said.

Rising fuel and grocery prices have sent area residents out in to the fertile fields of their back yards to try and do something about it, according to Haste's version.

"It's a savings," he said. "I saw an article that said if you work a garden effectively you'll make \$10 an hour."

FCX's Williams said that realizing a savings on gardening is dependent on planting a variety of vegetables that will keep grocery store purchases to a minimum.

Literature furnished by FCX asserts that the typical family of four can save \$288 per year on groceries through gardening, Williams said, adding that he considers the figure "a little low."

Haste's list of tools needed to begin a garden includes a tiller, which is expensive to purchase but can be rented or borrowed, a weeding hoe, a short pronged rake, and a garden spade to put plants in.

Seeds, plants, and fertilizer should run the average backyard gardener about \$10, said Haste.

On buying seed  
Sid Eley, of Pitt Hardware, issued a word of caution on buying seed.

Avoid pre-packaged seeds and buy in bulk, Eley said. As an example, Eley displayed a type of seed that costs \$1.20 a pound in bulk. The same seed costs \$7.59 per lb. pre-packaged.

Eley, too, felt that more people are gardening than at this time last year, and he is



Iron oxide treatment

Bruce Winslow applies iron oxide treatment (more commonly referred to as the

County enjoy a backyard garden, and that number is growing.

## Enjoy garden all year

Of course there's nothing like fresh vegetables out of the field, but to keep on enjoying homegrown vegetables right through the winter, freezing and canning are the answers.

Home economics agent Juanita Baily offers a few tips on storing vegetables to keep the grocery bill in check all year long.

Whether freezing or canning, Mrs. Baily said it is important to start with a quality product. There is no point in storing vegetables now that won't be worth unscrewing the lid on in the future.

In canning, standard jars that are made for the purpose are essential, not mayonnaise or coffee jars. These "once only" jars are prone to explode in the canning process, and do not come with the rings and seals necessary for a proper seal, Mrs. Baily said.

Make sure that there are no chips, nicks or cracks in the jars.

The extension service recommends pressure canning for certain types of vegetables and boiling water bath canning for others.

In pressure canning, the jars are placed in a pressure cooker for a certain length of time and under a certain pressure depending upon the product.

The boiling water bath process requires that the jars be placed in a large pot, with a rack in the bottom, and that the jars be covered with at least two inches of water.

Freezing is very simple, Mrs. Baily said. Just wash the product, blanch it, put it in a container or plastic freezer bag, label the package, date it, and tuck it away in your freezer.

Mrs. Baily said that if vegetables are frozen this summer, they should be used before next summer.

Blanching, she said, consists of dipping the vegetable in boiling water, then immediately dipping it in ice cold water, and putting it away to freeze.

This helps lock in flavor and color, and inactivates plant enzymes that can make the product tough, she said.

Either process makes for good vegetables, long after the garden has dried up and withered away, but some people prefer one process over the other.

"A lot of people say they like canned vegetables better," Mrs. Baily said, partly because they prefer the taste, and partly because the sterile, pre-cooked process makes preparation easier.

"In freezing you do have to worry about freezer burn," Mrs. Baily said. Careful, airtight packaging, however, can prevent freezer burn.

The extension service recommends boiling frozen foods for at least 10 minutes before serving.

Further information on canning specific varieties of vegetables can be obtained through the extension office. There is also a toll-free teletip line that offers extensive information on canning and freezing garden vegetables. Contact the extension service for details.

**Relaxation**  
Area gardeners appear to agree. "I use it for relaxation," said Howard Williams, manager of Hertford FCX. Williams has a large garden behind the store.

"I like to get out of here and mess with it," he said. "I'm an old farm boy. Sometimes I just like to go out and look at it."

Williams agreed that a person is as likely to raise a garden for the pure enjoyment of it as for the money he can save.

"Just like my daddy. He's retired and I think he spends all of his time in his garden."

Williams cans and freezes his own vegetables, including one unusual specialty, pickled snap beans.

H.W. Woodcock, manager of Pyrofax Gas, works a 50' by 75' garden behind the gas plant near Hertford on his lunch hour.

"I like to fiddle around with it. I like the vegetables too," he said.

Woodcock has two freezers he loads up with vegetables each fall.

Asked if he saves money on his garden, Woodcock responded, "Oh yeah, you better believe it. Last year Lima Beans were \$14 a bushel. I got about 67 bushels. Multiply that up — it runs in folding green."

He said he rarely buys any vegetables. Why should he, with the results he's getting from his garden?

"I've got the biggest radishes you ever saw," said Woodcock. "They're as big as a beet." As for the rest of his garden, "It's growing like a weed."

**Inexpensive hobby**  
Area merchants who deal in gardening supplies say it's not expensive to get a garden started. The amount of money

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