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Upcoming Open House for Unique Urban Community Garden

The City of Perris will unveil a one-of-kind community garden that employs an assortment of high-yield, low-cost and water-wise growing techniques April 23 during its annual Health Fair.

Perris officials are partnering with Eastern Municipal Water District, the Riverside County Department of Public Health, local nurseries and gardening-supply companies, residents and non-profits on its "Green City Farm Program," the official name for the 85-feet by 120-feet urban garden at the City Hall Campus.

In addition to a variety of 21st Century growing techniques, the garden also features an outdoor classroom where Perris officials envision holding nutrition-education classes and demonstrations.

The garden even includes artwork from Perris elementary, middle and high-schoolers celebrating the new commitment to locally grown produce.

Perris elected officials, municipal staff and a group of green-thumb enthusiasts got a sneak peak at the project March 31, when about 40 City residents helped plant the first batch of crops, which will be ready for harvest at the health fair.



Perris Public Works employee Isauro Castillo assembles a vertical tower at the Green City Farm Program's community garden on the City Hall Campus.

Praise from partner agencies

Gayle Hoxter, a nutrition expert at the Riverside County Department of Public Health, said Perris' collaboration with so many agencies, businesses and private citizens to form a community farm project is unlike anything else in the country.

The project continues the City's hugely successful Live Well Perris healthy eating active living initiative which has touched the lives of thousands of residents through a series of community workouts, hikes, bicycle rides, a chef-in-the-classroom education program, a community aquatics day and a prom for senior citizens.

The first crops include lettuce, tomatoes, kale, cilantro, basil and an assortment of peppers—red, green, yellow and jalapeno.

"You're building a demonstration garden on city property that is sustainable, employs alternative growing methods, incorporates the efforts of volunteers and continues the outstanding success of the Live Well Perris program," Hoxter said. "You're helping Perris residents become water wise, gain access to healthy foods and improve the overall health of the community. You've got a great City."

Melanie Nieman, EMWD's director of inter-agency cooperation, said the utility partnered with Perris because the Green City Farm Program represents innovative growing techniques, water-wise conservation, sustainability and quality-of-life improvements.

Similar community gardens have resulted in as much as a 90-percent reduction in water usage, she said.

Nieman praised the City's ongoing Live Well Perris program, which includes the ongoing "Chef in the Classroom" demonstration and hands-on education component, which has reached hundreds of Perris elementary school students. Nieman said EMWD hopes to build upon the success of the Green City Farm Program to forge further developments in the future.

"The City of Perris' Live Well program is very progressive, very successful and very respected," she said.

Upcoming open house

Perris officials will open the green-city farm to the public during an open house from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on April 23 during the City's fourth annual health fair.

At that time, residents will get up-close looks at several of the most innovative growing techniques currently available.

Those include vertical and horizontal growing systems, such as hydroponic towers that employ water to irrigate roots, aeroponic towers that mist plant roots to facilitate growth, aquaponic towers that make use of nutrients from fish to fertilize the plants. Also on display will be traditional raised garden beds.

Cost of the garden is about \$75,000, almost all coming from grants, in-kind contributions and outright donations from agencies and organizations supporting the City's effort.

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Project manager Isabel Carlos, the City's assistant director of Administrative Services, said the demonstration garden grew out of a strategic planning session of Perris elected officials and senior administrators.

From there, City staff developed the community garden, not just as a place to grow fruits and vegetables but also as an urban classroom where residents from grade school to senior citizens to learn about ways to grow healthy food.

The City is accepting [applications](#) from interested people who want a plot at the garden. Carlos said community gardeners will keep most of the produce they harvest with the rest possibly going to local food pantries or being sold through a local produce stand or elsewhere.

Carlos said educating the community—particularly school-age children and young adults constitutes a major part of the garden. One of the community partners in the project is the Boys & Girls Club of Perris.



Workers from the California Family Life Center Youth Ecology group assemble planter boxes for later installation at the community garden, which will be unveiled to the public April 23 during the annual health fair.

Young adults from the California Family Life Center in Hemet—which employs at-risk workers from 16 to 24 years of age—helped construct planter boxes for the garden.

A team of workers between 18 and 24 years of age from the Youth Ecology Corps Program, which provides jobs to young adults interested in working in the water industry and related fields, pitched in during the March 31 initial planting.

"If you can encourage young people to participate in growing fruits and vegetables, the more likely they are to eat them," she said. "I'm excited about this project. Developing this program from a concept to completion has been very rewarding. It's about inspiring healthy lifestyles—because health matters!"

Partners and Sponsors

Partners for this project include Eastern Municipal Water District(EMWD), County of Riverside Department of Public Health, Future Growing, Boys and Girls Club, Kaiser Permanente, Smooth Transition, Master Gardeners, Junior Master Gardeners and City of Perris Senior Center.

Current sponsors for this project are Western Riverside Council of Governments, EMWD, Kaiser Permanente, Ganahl Lumber, Ahern Rentals, ACE Hardware, Tuff Shed and Village Nurseries.

Media Contact

Joe Vargo
Public Information Officer
951-943-6100
jvargo@cityofperris.org



Perris City Hall
101 N. D Street
Perris, CA 92570

Hours: Mon. - Fri. 8 am - 6pm

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