Youth set goal to build vegetable, butterfly garden in Goodland

Project pairs kids with Kansas Master Gardeners

** By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – The last days of school are winding down for many Kansas kids, but one group in northwest Kansas is gearing up for what’s coming soon.

Summer school, anyone?

Karen Nelson, a 4-H Youth Development agent in K-State Research and Extension’s Sunflower District, said an ambitious group of youth in Goodland are planning to plant vegetable and butterfly gardens that they hope will become a centerpiece for the community.

“We don’t have a lot of outdoor spaces with flowers where people can just sit and enjoy the scenery,” Nelson said. “We want to build awareness of this garden space and bring the community into it. And, it’s fun for the kids to see the value of what they’ve done to help their community.”

Nelson said that K-State Research and Extension and local Master Gardeners have formed a partnership with the Goodland Unified School District to construct a garden on the grounds of North Elementary.

“During the first four weeks of summer, students will plant the garden and care for it,” Nelson said. The garden was initially tilled four years ago, she added.

“They realized that they weren’t planting the whole garden space…so we started talking about making this an outdoor classroom and butterfly garden,” Nelson said.

In Fall 2021, students hatched caterpillars into monarch butterflies, which will now pollinate milkweed planted in the garden. Nelson said the group plans to hatch more caterpillars in the coming year, expanding to 15 classrooms in the Goodland area.
The addition of a butterfly garden will now expand the plot to a sizable 35 feet by 75 feet, according to Nelson.

“We’ll also plant more vegetables and implement better care (practices) this summer,” Nelson said. “When the produce is able to be picked, we will host a sale on Fridays, managed by the kids.”

Nelson said Kansas Master Gardeners will assist in the project. Among the crops being grown in the garden are beans, potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, squash, pumpkins, summer squash, beets, arugula and lettuce.

“I anticipate a wide variety of vegetables,” Nelson said. “The garden is big enough to plant any type of vegetable that will grow in this area.”

“This will also help us to teach garden to table lessons with the students,” Nelson said. “We think that when the students taste vegetables that they have grown, they will be more likely to eat them. So there is a nutrition component to this gardening project, as well.”

More information about the program is available by contacting Nelson at 785-890-4880, or karennelson@ksu.edu.

More information about opportunities available through Kansas 4-H is available online, or by contacting local extension offices in Kansas.

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
Kansas 4-H Youth Development, www.kansas4-h.org
K-State Research and Extension Sunflower District, www.sunflower.k-State.edu
Kansas Master Gardeners, https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/master-gardeners
K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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