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Once-vacant lots in Mapleton-Fall Creek will bear fruit and more

Fall Creek Gardens, a 1,700-square-foot community garden, is a place where residents come together to learn about gardening and grow food

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Written by **Barb Berangoetz**

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Clumpy wet soil, dusted with a light snow, fills the 12 newly built, wood-framed raised garden beds dotting the landscape of the budding Fall Creek Gardens.

Two beds are tall enough for gardeners to use while standing up. Two others, adjacent to a small, roofed patio, are designed for those who need to sit. A rainwater catchment system will collect water for the garden from the roofs of the patio and the adjacent Unleavened Bread Cafe.

Spindly fruit- and nut-bearing saplings and shrubs hint at the fresh produce to come.

For now, the once-vacant lots are quiet, deserted. But not for long.



Fall Creek Gardens has raised beds and a newly planted orchard of 23 saplings, shrubs and more. The 1,700-square-foot garden near 30th Street and Central Avenue will be ready in the spring for people to get their hands dirty. / Danese Kenon / The Star



Maggie Goegelein, (left) lead project manager of Fall Creek Gardens, and Joyce Moore, head of the Urban Patch, are trying to create and promote urban development and community gardening at the Fall Creek Gardens. Danese Kenon/The Star

Winter gardening workshops

Starting Seeds for the Garden: 10 a.m. March 3, Indy Winter Farmers Market west wing, Downtown City Market. Urban farmer Tyler Henderson of Growing Places Indy (www.growingplacesindy.org) teaches the basics of starting your garden from seeds.

Spring Cover Crops: 1 p.m. March 3, Fall Creek Gardens community garden space, Central Avenue, just north of 30th Street (next to Unleavened Bread Cafe). Urban farmer Matthew Jose of Big City Farms talks about using the power of plants to improve soil fertility, learn how and why to use cover crops in your garden.

How to Start a Community Garden: 9:30 a.m. March 24, Purdue Extension, Indiana State Fairgrounds, 1202 E. 38th St.

Fall Creek Gardens

Location: Seven lots just north of 30th Street and Central Avenue, adjacent to Unleavened Bread Cafe, 3001 Central Ave.

Raised beds: 1,700 square feet in 12 wood-framed, raised beds built by Gardens of Growth landscaping architecture firm of Indianapolis. Two beds, 4 feet by 24 feet, 40 inches tall, for standing; two beds, 2 feet by 12 feet, 2 feet tall, with a ledge for sitting; eight beds, 8 feet by 24 feet, 1 foot tall.

Within a few months, this 1,700-square-foot community garden just north of 30th Street and Central Avenue will start turning green and come alive as a neighborhood gathering place, where residents will come to grow food, learn about gardening and spend time together.

"In my view, it's really a community hub, a place where many different people can interact," said Doressa Breitfield, economic development coordinator for the Mapleton-Fall Creek Development Corp., a group involved in the initiative.

It's all about creatively reusing vacant or underused property and, at the same time, helping residents improve their diets, use sustainable practices and work together, say organizers.

"We want to educate people to think differently about how they live," said Maggie Goegelein, part-time project manager for Fall Creek Gardens. "There's such a direct link between health and diet."

The garden is a key element of a neighborhood-led plan that includes pocket parks, connecting trail ways and commercial and residential development, much along Central Avenue and nearby streets in the 2900 to 3100 blocks.

It's fitting that the garden abuts the Unleavened Bread Cafe, a nonprofit business run by Eleese Womack. The popular faith-based eatery serves good food, but also is a refuge for people in need and for neighborhood gatherings.

Over the next several years, the Mapleton-Fall Creek Development Corp. will use \$5 million in federal neighborhood stabilization funds to create three pocket parks on Park Avenue, Ruckle and New Jersey streets and connectivity trails -- one running through Fall Creek Gardens. The pocket parks, a growing urban trend, are small green spaces designed to give residents nearby areas to

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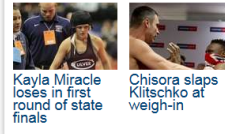
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Gardeners' organizational meeting: 6:30 p.m. Feb. 28 at Unleavened Bread Cafe.

Information: Visit Fall Creek Gardens/Urban Growers Resource Center, www.fallcreekgardens.org, call (317) 644-8286, P. O. Box 88321, Indianapolis IN 46208.

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gather, get physical activity and enjoy the outdoors.

Goeglein said organizers want to provide information on everything from vegetable gardening and planting fruit trees to raising chickens and bees, cooking and food preservation and even using plants like dandelions.

"We want to look at this in a holistic way," she said.

An organizational meeting of those interesting in gardening will be at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 28 at the cafe, 3001 Central Ave. Residents will discuss garden rules, water sources, tool storage and potential rental costs.

Typically, residents who use community gardens pay a fee to cover costs of water

and tools.

Indianapolis has an increasing number of community gardens, thanks in part to a city program allowing groups to make use of vacant land.

At Fall Creek Gardens, users will determine how they want to operate. They'll be sharing the beds, most of which are 24 feet long by 8 feet wide. The entire property is about three-quarters of an acre, so there's room to grow.

"We want to make sure anyone who wants to garden can do so," said Goeglein, who said a small garden was initiated there last summer.

A majestic oak tree on the property will be the site of an "outdoor classroom" for neighborhood residents and others wanting to learn more about sustainability and gardening.

The garden grew out of an initiative launched in 2005 by Broadway United Methodist Church and others that found residents were interested in gardening and growing projects.

As a result, an organization called Fall Creek Gardens/Urban Growers Resource Center was started to create garden space and provide related resources.

The potential impact on this mixed-income neighborhood with million-dollar mansions and public housing is great. About 30 percent of residents live below the poverty level.

"What excites me most is that it gives us a reason to step out of our yards and into a shared space," said Breitfield. "It gives us reason to interact, share experiences and build bridges."

Mapleton-Fall Creek Development Corp. is in the process of buying the seven plots of land from the Indianapolis Land Bank. When Fall Creek Gardens becomes a nonprofit group, it will buy or lease the land.

Lots of groups, businesses and individuals are making it happen.

One of them is Urban Patch, a project based in midtown neighborhoods with a goal of contributing to inner-city recovery. Joyce Moore said the project was started by her family to continue the legacy of Albert Moore, her late father-in-law, who operated the gardening program in the 1950s at Flanner House, a local nonprofit social service agency.

She and Goeglein are developing plans for a "Stone Soup Garden," a project named after the fable about collaboration and altruism. They intend to use Fall Creek Gardens to teach participants how to garden, preserve, freeze and can food and generally make wise use of resources.

"There could be a tremendous cascade of good things that can result from all of this," said Moore, whose Urban Patch is financially contributing to Fall Creek Gardens. "We're really excited about getting this going and watching it grow."

The Etroymson Family Foundation, a philanthropic fund of Central Indiana Community Foundation, gave \$37,500 and another \$4,000 in matching funds for staff and annual and capital expenses, including the beds.

United Water Co. gave a Green Infrastructure Grant of \$15,250 for the rainwater catch system. It will capture rain from the patio and cafe roofs in a 3,000-gallon cistern to be used on the garden.

Keep Indianapolis Beautiful Inc., a not-for-profit organization that works to transform public spaces, donated 23 fruit- and nut-bearing saplings and shrubs and more traditional orchard specimens, including apple, nectarine and a peach tree.

Beyond the garden itself, Goeglein said a building with office space, indoor classrooms and a tool storage area may be constructed. In the meantime, they may use an existing building elsewhere with kitchen space. Eventually, they may have a farmers market on site.

"Those are our big dreams," she said.

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