

Cook County Sheriff's Garden

The Cook County Sheriff's Garden project is in its 19th year of operation. The 10,000 square foot garden produces 4000 to 6000 pounds of [vegetables](#) each year. Vegetables are given to senior centers, soup kitchens, food pantries and Southside churches. Each year 10-15 detainees from the jail's [Department of Community Supervision and Intervention](#) are selected to join the program and attend Master Gardener training at the jail. Over the years, 53 detainees have received Master Gardener certification. [Chicago Master Gardeners](#) provide hands-on technical assistance. The garden has received numerous awards and recognition including Best Vegetable Garden in the city from the Mayor's Landscape Award Contest.

Cook County Sheriff's Garden Photo Gallery

<http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/cook/photogallery369/>

2005 Tribune article: Inmates reap fruits of labor at Cook County Jail's garden

Most gardens are protected by a ring of string and sometimes a scarecrow.

But with razor wire, armed guards and closed-circuit cameras, the garden at the Cook County Jail is a bit more secure for keeping things out--and in.

The jail celebrated the largest harvest ever from its garden Tuesday, with certificates for the detainees who have toiled the soil and a meal prepared with the fruits of their labor.

The 12-year-old program is run for detainees that are part of the Sheriff's Department of Community Supervision and Intervention system, which largely consists of drug offenders.

Louie Johnson, 31, was all smiles at the ceremony, wearing an orange inmate cap that didn't exactly match the standard farmer straw hat.

"My grandmother had a garden, but I haven't worked it since I was a kid," Johnson said.

He said a group of about 12 detainees visited the garden every morning to pick weeds, hoe and pull crops for a few hours.

Jail officials said more than 30 detainees participated in the program this year, with some leaving as they were transferred out of the jail or released.

"We couldn't do it without teamwork," said a 40-year-old man who gave his name as Kenny.

While some vegetables were used to feed guests, detainees and guards Tuesday, most of the 6,000 pounds of food is being donated to two Chicago nursing homes, said Ron Wolford, an educator with the University of Illinois Extension program, which partners with the jail on the garden.

Detainees said the meal of roasted peppers, bean salad, hot dogs and much more was a nice break from the usual bologna sandwich and Kool-Aid.

Crops in the 10,000-square-foot garden include tomatoes, squash, four varieties of peppers, eggplant, cabbage and several others.

Pumpkins and their vines climb the fences surrounding the garden.

"They're trying to escape," joked Bill Wallace, the executive director of the community program at the jail.

Jokes aside, the detainees' experience bears little similarity to those of the maximum-security inmates, who are housed in buildings that loom over the garden.

Detainees live in dormitory settings with no bars on the windows, they said. And they are all awaiting trial or serving short sentences, Wallace said.

They also must have no previous felony convictions.

While most of the detainees were awarded certificates of appreciation, Victor Velez was the only one present Tuesday who was commended for completing the Master Gardener program, a 60-hour course given through the University of Illinois.

Velez, 35, said he'll use his skills to help his family on their farm in Puerto Rico, although he and others said the detainees were their family for now.

"That's my brother today," David Rodriguez, 39, said pointing at Velez, who nodded. Rodriguez said the garden experience allowed them to get to know their fellow detainees while giving them pride and peace.

"You get a little sense of freedom," he said. "It gives us our dignity back after we lost it in the madness."

Slumbuster's Community Garden

Since 1962, [Gerald and Lorean Earles](#) have been residents of the North Lawndale community, an economically depressed neighborhood three miles from downtown Chicago. The University of Illinois Extension Urban Horticulture staff first began working with Gerald Earles in 1986, when he set out to make some changes in his

neighborhood. He wanted to create a community garden on two vacant lots with the L running overhead on Trumbull Avenue a few doors down from his home

The garden was named the "Slumbusters" community garden by Earles and his neighbors and the group of gardeners soon became known as Slumbusters. The Slumbusters: a group made up of mostly senior citizens on fixed incomes - are cultivating 25 plots at the garden, growing everything from okra to pumpkins and sunflowers.

Their work in the garden spurred them to push for [clean-up and beautification efforts](#) at nearby Douglas and Garfield Parks. Mr. Earles traveled through North Lawndale with a camera and camcorder rooting out areas and businesses that needed renovation and clean-up.

In 1992 they received the President's Points of Light Award for their work in North Lawndale. They received their award from President Clinton at a White House ceremony.

This dynamic couple continues to this day through their Slumbusters organization and garden make Chicago a green city.

Chicago Urban Gardening Blog

<http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/cook/blogs/eb21/index.html>

Museum of Science and Industry/University of Illinois Extension

Smart Home Vegetable Garden

The [University of Illinois Extension](#) is partnering again with the [Museum of Science and Industry](#) to design, plant and maintain a sustainable [vegetable garden](#) as a part of the 2,500 square-foot sustainable "green" home exhibit: [Smart Home: Green + Wired](#).

Guests will be able to view the latest innovations in reusable resources; smart energy consumption; sustainable gardens and [green roofs](#); and clean, healthy-living environments in a contemporary setting.

University of Illinois Extension Cook County Urban Horticulture staff are responsible for the training, orientation, facilitation and coordination of over 110 Master Gardener volunteers from Chicago, Cook North, Cook South, Will County, Dupage County and McHenry County who are at the Garden every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 9a.m. to 3 p.m.- May-October to weed, water and to give tours of the garden.

New in the garden for 2009 will be the planting of vegetables in 80 [earthboxes](#) at the Smart Home site with by students from two nearby schools on Earth Day. The 2009 spring planting of the garden will occur in late April.

Smart Home Garden Blog

<http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/cook/blogs/eb150/index.html>

Chicago Master Gardener Blog

<http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/cook/blogs/eb6/index.html>