

2023 Annual Report

This report details activities at the Kleiner Park Community Garden and the pollinator projects at Kleiner and Heroes Parks. It shares just some of the exceptional work done and positive impact made by our 32 families.



“Inside every seed is the potential for an incredible harvest.” Farrah Gray

Meridian Co-Op Gardeners

Everyone should have access to healthy food. We grow real food for real people, for our families who work in the garden and for members in the community who are experiencing food insecurity.



A Bountiful Harvest

Reflecting on the 2023 gardening season brings to mind words like remarkable, stellar, successful, and completely different from 2022. The longer we garden, the more we realize that each new season builds on previous ones and the importance of lessons learned from our challenges and successes. Every year we learn something new!

We have wrapped up Year 12 with some rather amazing accomplishments and statistics, but it's more than just the numbers. The main focus is on growing organic fruit and vegetables for our families, and sharing our harvests generously with local food banks. The garden cultivates friendships, a shared love for gardening, learning more about environmental stewardship, pollinators, native habitat, and community engagement. We continue to deepen our understanding of horticulture, sustainability, and food insecurity to empower our gardeners.

This garden is a sanctuary and a place where our gardeners can step out of the pressures of everyday life. It allows us to step away from things like screens and scrolling, and to focus on simpler things like putting our hands in the dirt, connecting face to face with other gardeners, and watching a seed germinate or a flower bloom. We are excited to see a quail family running through the garden and baby killdeer playing Marco Polo with their parents. We see beautiful sunrises and

sunsets, and bright moons riding high up in the sky. It's a perfect place to engage with nature.

The garden provides an excellent opportunity to meet, interact and work with fellow gardeners (both new and seasoned). On a larger scale it allows us to interact with the City of Meridian whom we partner with, our local community through events that we host and provide education to, and with local food banks. We have a great opportunity to connect people and food, and to raise awareness regarding food security.

Life gets busy, yet our families make a commitment to this garden and continue to keep it a priority. We are a community and a family. It's what makes the Kleiner Park Community Garden and our group, Meridian Co-Op Gardeners successful.

With much appreciation and gratitude,

Juli Bokenkamp, President
Garden Director



Maintaining the Gardens

Planting and maintaining this garden is no easy task. However, with the help of 32 families and other volunteers, the work is manageable. We spend 3-4 hours each week in the garden, working together on Tuesdays and Saturdays. The help received from other volunteers allows us to accomplish even more.

The Ada County Sheriff's Alternative Sentencing Program provided 341 service hours with 62 clients.

Four employees and two family members from **ENEL X** helped us with major projects when taking down the garden contributing 12 service hours.

The garden has become popular for **students requiring service hours** for school. This year we had one student and her mom work 4 hours. They said working in the garden inspired them to grow a garden at their house.

More than 365 service hours were completed between the community garden and the pollinator gardens.

This garden is always evolving and changing. We continue to move toward more no till growing while maintaining the organic integrity of the garden as a whole. After 12 years of amending the soil as needed (adding mostly compost and mulch) the soil structure has improved. No till also has minimized the compaction of the soil, which helps with water movement and root growth.



Woodchips are used in the walkways, and a greater understanding and use of cover crops is starting to evolve as regular practice in the garden. It's important to keep the soil covered to help protect it from wind and water erosion. Cover crops also help trap nitrogen that will feed new plants in the spring.



The garden provides amazing opportunities to connect and learn from others. We work together to plan, plant, tend, and harvest the garden.



Feeding People

This year we donated 9,000+ pounds of food to local food banks, including the Meridian Food Bank and Community Ministries Center in Boise. Rising food prices and food insecurity continue to make it more difficult for people to access food. Our donations help put more fresh produce in the diets of families in need. We love the relationships developed with both of the food banks we serve. They are willing to work with us to make it easier for us to donate our harvests to them.

We continued our partnership with Aaron Lindemann, a local farmer. This year we grew cabbages, sweet potatoes, melon and winter squash, many that found their way to the food banks. We are looking forward to continuing this connection in 2024.



Junior and Lil' Gardeners

“A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all, it teaches entire trust.” Gertrude Jekyll

Everyone grows in the garden...and watching the children explore, learn and grow is one of the most rewarding aspects of this garden. We love sharing our love of gardening and showing them where their food comes from. They are curious and learn by watching and doing. They are developing skills that they will use for the rest of their lives. Fresh and delicious food is a powerful teaching tool.

This year our younger gardeners not only participated fully in all gardening activities, but were offered special hands-on activities to learn more about:

1. Pollinators and why they are important.
2. The parts of a flower with a dried flower project.
3. Caterpillars and metamorphosis
4. Pill Bugs (roly polies) and how great they are for the ecosystem and the soil.
5. Making flower arrangements
6. The importance of physical activity (they made their own walking sticks).

Seeds and education...

We provided seed packets to the **Meridian Library on Cherry Lane** to add to their seed library, to two different homeschool groups for educational and growing purposes, and to **Intermountain Hospital** for a new garden project that they received a grant for. They had a very successful gardening season that was helpful to their patients.

Seeds continued to be popular in the Little Free Library near the garden. Hundreds of seeds packets are given away. This is made possible by a very generous donation from D&B Supply in Meridian.



We had the opportunity to give a presentation on pollinators and plants to the **5th grade classrooms at Barbara Morgan Stem Academy in Meridian** and help with their garden.



We offered a number of hands-on workshops for our gardeners including a **tree pruning class** mid-winter. One of our gardeners and friends from Branch Out Custom Gardening and JPH Tree Service, LLC were kind to lead and teach this class.



Our gardeners learned about soil blocking and winter sowing techniques.



Flowers and art in the garden

Edward Forkner said “Always, always have flowers!” He reminds us that “they are beautiful, cheery, and hugely important to a fruit and vegetable garden.” We love that they help increase the pollination of plants around the garden. We also love how beautiful they are and love sharing them around our community. This year over 500 flower arrangements left the garden.



The garden is in full bloom most of the summer, with the dahlias joining us in July. They are a beautiful reminder to “stop and smell the roses”...although we don’t have roses, and dahlias don’t smell. However, the flowers remind us to appreciate the beauty all around us and enjoy their spectacular colors and forms.

One of our new gardeners this year said “the flowers are totally worth the time and space in our garden.” Dedicating space for the flowers does take away from space that could be growing food. It was Luther Burbank who said “Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul.” I think we have room for flowers.

Local artists joined us to enjoy the flowers. Some created flower arrangements and then painted them at home. Others used the garden as a plein air space...setting up their easels in the middle of the garden and busting out their paints.



This year we offered 4 public flower cutting events, and 1 private event for Chrysalis Women’s Transitional Living, and gave away marigolds for Dia De Los Muertos. During the public events, community members are invited to cut flowers and create their own original flower arrangement. In addition, we also offered public classes on making flower arrangements.



Pollinator Projects

The City of Meridian presented us with an Environmental Award for the work accomplished at both pollinator garden projects. These projects have focused on conserving habitat and planting native trees, shrubs, and flowers.

The Kleiner Park Pollinator Garden Project, established in 2019, continues to grow and blossom. It has become a key destination in the park. We see people frequently walking through this garden, making notes, and asking questions. Thanks to the City of Meridian for installing a separate water spigot near the garden making it easier for us to do hand watering when necessary.



The Heroes Park Pollinator Garden Project, established in 2021, grew in size this year with the City of Meridian Neighborhood Grant we received in 2022. The garden has expanded both to the north and the south of the original planting. Soil was amended with compost, additional shrubs, perennial plants and annuals were planted. . This no-spray pollinator habitat provides much needed benefits to our native pollinators.

Generous donations of plants from the City of Meridian, The Abundant Acre,

Ada County Soil and Conservation, Mountain View High School horticulture program, Lynn Chase (Perfect Landscaping), Jana Beranova, and Nellie Coleman allowed the project to grow above and beyond what we purchased with the grant money. Timbercreek Recycling donated compost which allowed us to continue to amend the soil. A total of 123 volunteers enabled us to plant hundreds of plants into this habitat. Our help came from Hewlett Packard employees, Ada County Sheriff's Labor Detail ,two different Girl Scout troops, local neighbors and community gardeners. On September 23 we had a group of 36 people who planted 130 plants in under 45 minutes! It was amazing!



Heroes Park

We plan to add to the garden where it has yet to be planted. Currently, we are growing a number of annuals and perennials that will be planted in the spring. Our hope is that neighbors will help maintain this garden, along with the help of the Ada County Sheriff's Labor Detail, and volunteers looking for projects with the City of Meridian. Our group will stay involved as necessary.



FFA building in the garden

Emily Lacy, a student at Mountain View High School and a member of FFA, applied for and received a "Living to Serve" grant from the National FFA Organization. The Living to Serve platform empowers students like Emily to make a positive impact in their community. Her focus was growing one's own food to reduce food insecurity in our community. Emily, her teacher Trish Stokes, and other FFA members, helped build two new 4'x8' raised beds, 6 large wooden trellises, taught an activity to our Junior and Lil' Gardeners, and held a canned food drive at the garden. This is an incredible gift which helps us increase our harvests and produce more food for local food banks.



FFA helping with cleanup

Seven local area FFA students assisted on our final day of Fall clean-up in the garden. They jumped right in and were ready to take directions and do whatever needed to be done to help us get the job done.. These students are hard workers and we definitely appreciated their help. The FFA Motto is: Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, and Living to Serve! These students help you believe in the future of agriculture! Yes, we even had some fun on a work day when everyone pulled out their glasses to view the solar eclipse.



The Western Idaho Fair

The Western Idaho Fair is one of the highlights of our growing season. For the second time we received the Blue Ribbon Award plaque. This award recognizes and honors groups providing outstanding support to the fair.

This year we entered 127 items and took home ribbons for 94 of them. Our vegetables received 66 ribbons (31 first, 15 second, 14 third and 6 fourth), including special ribbons for some biggest and best categories. Our flowers entries received 28 ribbons (12 first, 9 second, 5 third, and 2 honorable mentions). We also won two Best of Division for our amaranth and a collection of Queeny Lime Red zinnias.



Dropping off our entries at the fair.



Celebrating & Connecting

We are always looking for ways to stay connected with each other and the community. Whether we are celebrating the garden at the harvest potluck and watching Scentsy fireworks, taking a hike, learning together, watching the solar eclipse, going to a movie, working at another garden, or celebrating the upcoming birth of a new Lil' Gardener we find it incredibly important to stay connected. Even in the off season we look for ways to come together.





To be a successful gardener you have to fall in love with the process and not just the end product.

This garden continues to grow in community...where the roots of unity grow deeper with each new season. The garden brings us closer together. It is a place where collaboration and cooperation walk hand in hand and where we celebrate and develop new friendships with people we've met on this path.

Quotes from our Gardeners

"I love that the garden is family-oriented with deep roots and all characters are welcome." **Brek**

"This garden is just an amazing place to be, filled with amazing people that are grateful to be a part of it. I wanted to be a part of the garden to further understand what it takes to run a large community garden that has so much success, and to join a group that has the same passion I do. I love the conversations in the garden and the connections." **Julia S.**

"I love the garden and the gardeners. I walked by the garden forever and the signed up for the best time ever! I am a yard lover that has learned a lot this summer, plus I am enjoying the friendships." **Carolyn D.**

"The garden is an absolute blast! Not only has the food been amazing, the sense of belonging, the dialogue in the garden, and the dynamic personalities of everyone involves makes for a joyous time. I always look forward to garden days because it is at once consistent and steady, but also exciting and nuanced." **Dan**

"The garden is a calming place to have much needed fellowship time with great people! Every year I learn so much from other gardeners. They bring a lot of knowledge and are such hard workers keeping our garden beautiful and productive" **Debbie S.**

"The community garden is amazing. It is not only the gardening, but getting to know amazing people. It is a therapeutic experience, and of course, all of the incredible vegetables that words cannot express. " **Hokali**

"I think joining the garden was one of my best decisions. I love the community and giving back to the community. I was excited about the learning experiences and have received so much more: community, friendships, conversations, fruits of labor. I love the consistency of the days. Thank you for letting me be a part of something so much bigger and more meaningful than I have ever had before." **Nicholette**

"Being around the garden people is joyful! It is such a nice community made up of truly caring people." **Brodie**

"In our second year at the garden, we have grown some great friendships from last year into family. This truly is the greatest community I have experienced while living in Boise. While pregnant, I have received SO much support and help in the friendships and a lot of adoptive "mamas and grandmas" for our little one. More than what I could ever have asked and a gift to have this chosen family. I love working with the young gardeners and am amazed at their love of the soil, produce, and being a helping hand in our community." **Kelsey**

"I love working in the garden with everyone. It has been amazing and rewarding experience for me. I have learned a lot from every single person I worked with. The most amazing part was seeing that donation number going up every single time. The hard work of everyone paid off and gave away harvests that we shared with the community." **Ina**



Thank you to our partners!

We want to express our gratitude for your help and outpouring of support. You continue to make a lasting impact on our garden and make it possible for everything we do. Our community connections are incredibly important to us and ones that we do not take for granted. You are making a difference!

City of Meridian Parks and Recreation thank you for allowing us to do what we do. We appreciate the land and the water, and the gift of a new water spigot for the pollinator garden and the drip line irrigation to our raised beds. We appreciate the tickets to the INLA show at The Grove, a delivery of compost, and use of heavy equipment. You make this garden possible in so many ways. Your employees are outstanding and a huge help to us during the garden season making our jobs even simpler. A special thank you to Dave Cereghino, Joe Hoover, Wade Maisey, John Meuser, and Dan White for always helping when needed.

Other Partners Include:

- *The Abundant Acre
- *Ada County Sheriff's Labor Detail
- *Ada Soil and Conservation District
- *Jana Beranova
- *Karl and Juli Bokenkamp
- *Branch Out Custom Gardening
- *Capital High School/Violet Martin
- *Community Ministries Center
- *Gigi Crist
- *Nellie Coleman
- *Ian Compton
- *Lindarose Curtis
- *D&B Supply (Meridian)
- *Down and Dirty Tractor works
- *Edwards Nursery
- *Enel X
- *FFA Leadership team
- *Five Mile Farm and Greenhouses
- *Jan Haneke/Haneke Naturally
- *Vicki Hardin
- *Angelina Hetke
- *International Minute Press/Kim Fitzgibbons
- *JPH Tree Service LLC
- *Emily Lacy, FFA Living to Serve Grant
- *Meredith Lamb Lynch

- *Meridian Food Bank
- *Shauna Miller
- *Diane Alder Morley
- *Perfect Touch Landscaping/Lynn Chase
- *Mountain View High School Horticulture Class/Trish Stokes
- *Nutrition West
- *Lin Pyles
- *Tina Samsal
- *Snake River Seed Cooperative
- *Spyglass Gardens/Steve and Wendy Smith
- *Tanager Tree Service
- *Timbercreek Recycling/Mike Murgotio
- *Wild Bunch Blossoms/Carrie Bunch
- *Jack Wood and Growing Together Gardens (Fargo, ND)

A special shout out and thank you to The Abundant Acre, Gigi Crist, Vicki Hardin, and Spyglass Gardens for the hundreds of plants that they grew for our garden. It is a huge gift and your knowledge and experience has taught us so much.



Enel X employees volunteering.



Our gardeners share a commitment and dedication to this garden. WE are best when we are working together on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

Participants in October:

Kelsey and Brekk Bass, Karl and Juli Bokenkamp, Nicholette Borchardt, Hokali and Frank Borda, Daniel Campbell, Jennifer Caywod, Carolyn DeLuca, Kim Fitzgibbons, Jim Grunow, Suzanne Knorr, Stephanie Ludwig, Sheila Martindale, Jason and Zoe Martindale-Schmitz, Robert and Christina McClintock, Carol Menten, Leia Neely, Ryan and Yulia Nielson, Karen Odell, Lin Pyles, Christy and Adam Richesin, Dick Ross, Debbie Sanders, Julia and Brian Sanderson, Inna Smith, Julia Weeden, Brodie Whitlock, and Carrie Zummersch-Schultz

Although a few families left before October, we ended the garden season with 27 families and our roster for the 2024 season is full.



Our end of season, last day photo.