

## 2021 Annual Report

This report highlights the community garden season, the pollinator garden, and everything else in between.



# Meridian Co-Op Gardeners

## About Us

We are 32 families gardening together in a small corner of Kleiner Park in Meridian, Idaho. Instead of a typical community garden model where gardeners have their own plots, this garden connects people together around one large plot that we work communally. Our gardeners are children, youth and adults of all ages, backgrounds, cultures, and abilities who we empower to take part in every job at the garden. Everybody learns how to do everything, and has input on garden ideas and decision making. Being a part of this shared space gives people an opportunity to be inspired, solve problems, share humor, vent frustrations, and share achievements. Bringing together like-minded people nurtures a rewarding and engaging community. There's no limit to what we can accomplish!

We passionately maintain this community garden area that includes a no-till section, 4 raised beds, 13 fruit trees in the park, a compost area, a pollinator garden, and a shed for storage. We work side-by-side teaching and helping one another in the process of creating and growing high quality, organic, nutrient-dense food for our families and for those with food and nutrition insecurity.

## Growing Connections...

*in the garden and in our community...while growing vegetables for our families and for those in need.*

Every year I am amazed at what is accomplished in this garden and 2021 was no different. With continuing Covid-19 concerns, poor air quality from forest fires, and hot summer temperatures it was one of the most physically challenging and mentally exhausting seasons to date. In spite of our struggles the garden thrived.

This garden has become a powerful way for people to connect, work, and relax with others. It provides healthy and enriching experiences that create a more connected and generous community. Our gardeners love being a part of what we do and are deeply committed to the garden. They continue to show up week after week, starting in April and ending in October. You don't do that if you don't love it! We bring out the best in each other. When you depend on and assist one another it creates a sense of teamwork and belonging

it embraces character, spirit, pride, and shared goals. We matter to one another. You may not become friends with everyone, but you get to meet and know many people which is what community is all about. Building and growing relationships in the garden and around the community is intentional and necessary. Everything we do has a clear purpose and focus that brings all of us together around the garden.

I am grateful for the empowering partnership with the City of Meridian, the inspiring and dedicated gardeners who make a commitment to this garden, and for the uplifting support we receive from the community. I am excited to be planning my tenth year in the garden and looking forward to 2022.

With Gratitude,  
Juli Bokenkamp

# Planted and Maintained

*Our gardeners work together, April through October, to maintain the garden—this includes planting, watering, weeding, trellising, cultivating, and harvesting. This year we grew apples, artichokes, beans, beets, blueberries, cabbage, carrots, celery, chard, collards, cucumbers, eggplant, fennel, flowers, garlic, herbs, horseradish, jostaberries, kale, leeks, lettuces, melons, onions, peaches, peppers, potatoes, pumpkins, radishes, rhubarb, summer and winter squash, tomatoes, and watermelon.*

*8,362 pounds of organically grown produce was donated to those who are hungry and where there are food insecurity problems. Donations were made through the*

*Meridian Food Bank, Community Ministries Center, St. Mark's Community Food Bank, and Immanuel Lutheran Food Fellowship (that provides a meal to about 100 persons each week). Red and green tomatoes were given away in the community, potatoes gleaned from a farm in Middleton, and squash grown at Two Dogs and a Gopher Garden added a few hundred extra pounds toward our end total. We held an in-house peanut butter and jelly drive for Community Ministries Center to help fill their shelves and delivered apples, peppers and cabbages from Wagner Farms after the season was over. Sharing food helps build a stronger community.*



## Labor Detail

*The Ada County Sheriff's Alternative Sentencing program provided 148 service hours with the help of 27 clients.*

## ENEL X

*Four employees worked a total of eight hours helping to take down the garden at the end of the season.*



# Education in the Garden

*We cultivate a community of healthy, happy, and enthusiastic adults and young people by encouraging them to put their hands in the dirt, eat well, and learn the transformative power of growing their own food. The community garden and the pollinator habitats provide an engaging space and connects all of us to plants, soil, agriculture, nutrition and healthy food, sustainability, environmental stewardship, habitats, and nature. Everything we do is focused on food and education while providing unique opportunities to learn from one another.*

*This year 11 kindergarteners from WINGS, in Boise, toured the garden. We supplied them with green tomatoes to make green tomato pies for one of their food projects. Everyone loved them until they found out they were made with "green tomatoes". Cub Scout Pack # 95 and Girl Scout Troop #215 helped with pollinator garden projects. An Eagle Scout from Boy Scout Troop #78 installed bird nesting houses near the pollinator garden.*

Planting seeds and watching them grow is a magical experience for children and adults of all ages. It teaches important life skills. It is exciting to see how most food begins its journey in the ground. Planting a small carrot seed, watching the greens develop and then later pulling up an orange carrot from the ground never disappoints.



## One big family...

*"The garden provides for varying levels of companionship on any given garden day. It provides space for those who want to spend more time with their families, engage with the friends they have made in the garden, or for those who want to share the garden space with others while completing a more solitary task. When we are in the garden together, we are one big family knowing that each person may have a different need that day, and that is okay! I feel that each person is appreciated and each social need is embraced."*

*Brodie*

# Lil' and Junior Gardeners:

*The children who are a part of the garden have a unique opportunity to participate in various classes throughout the gardening season...along with helping in every aspect in and around the garden. It's important to us to keep the younger generations involved in garming and gardening.*



We were excited to bring back our Lil' Gardeners Program this year. Up to twenty children at a time participated in various activities led by adults within our garden community. Garden-based education classes included:

1. Growing and planting sunflowers
2. Habitats and building fairy gardens
3. Making flower arrangements
4. Pollinators and using butterfly nets
5. Seed saving and making pinecone birdfeeders

Gardening is a healthy and fun activity for children. They develop new skills and learn more about nature and science while growing food for their families. Children are often motivated to eat what they grow in the garden. They help plant seeds and seedlings, water, weed, harvest, and especially enjoy taking down the garden at the end of the season when they can use the wheelbarrows like the adults. This garden provides an environment in which children can observe,

discover, experiment, and learn. These real-life experiences help prepare them to be active participants in the garden.

## Through the Eyes of a Child:

*"I like to pick peppers and also play with my friend. I like to make all the fun crafts." Noah (6)*

*"I like cucamelons." Addison (6)*

*"I like playing with my friends, watering the plants and eating the carrots." Ryken (8)*

*"I like the celery and the sunflowers. I loved making the pinecone birdfeeders. I like to harvest cucamelons." LyleighAnna (8)*

*"I like tomatoes." DehkLynn (6)*

*"I like helping people and growing carrots." Everett (6)*

*"I like weeding, eating kale and cucamelons, and harvesting carrots." Forrest (2)*



# Dahlias and Other Flowers

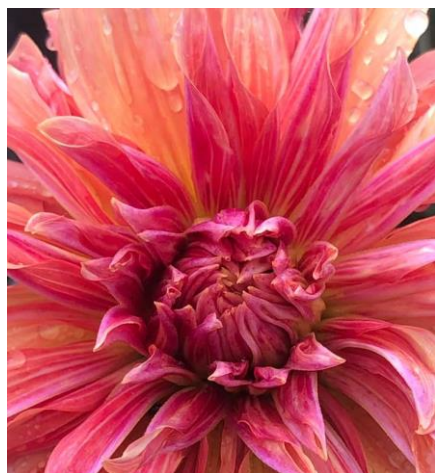
*This year, through generous donations, we added a variety of dahlias to the garden. They are beautiful, elegant and vividly colored flowers. Unlike the annuals and perennials we grow these are tuberous perennials (but considered annuals in our zone). They required staking and must be dug up in the fall. The tubers are stored over the winter in temperatures between 40-55 degrees. If they overwinter successfully we look forward to planting them again in the spring. They were a wonderful addition to our flower arrangements and one of the longest lasting cut flowers.*

*In addition to the dahlias, we added new varieties of other flowers to the garden as well.*

*Four free flower cutting events were held for the public. These events included educational sessions on creating flower arrangements. 260 flower arrangements were created in total (116 more than 2021) and shared with families, friends, neighbors, and strangers to help brighten our community. We hope they show kindness and bring encouragement and joy to the people around us.*

*Another special flower cutting event included the Junior and*

*Lil' Gardeners. They received a lesson on flower selection, conditioning, design basics, and most of all were encouraged to have fun! Their flower arrangements were amazing. Rochelle Adams and The Free Flower Project donated additional flowers for this event.*



# Other 2021 Updates

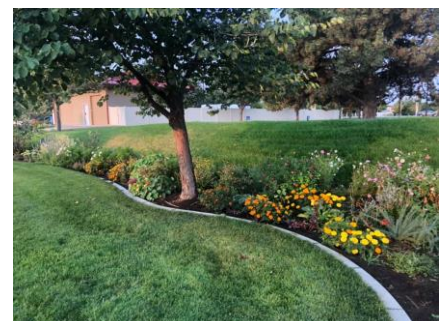
## Kleiner Park Pollinator Garden and Fruit Trees

The pollinator garden is a great example of native plants. It attracts native pollinators, and quite a few people too. A new group, Friends of the Pollinator Garden, helped with cleanup activities in the spring. Girl Scout Troop #215 planted milkweed and also built four butterfly and pollinator habitat boxes for the garden. Eight bird nesting houses were installed as part of an Eagle Scout project. Thirteen fruit trees planted in the park grew well. The city arborist and one of our gardeners held a tree pruning class for our group in February. We harvested a few apples and some peaches, however, peaches and apples from two trees were harvested without permission.



## Heroes Park Pollinator Planting Project

In partnership with the City of Meridian, we identified areas at Heroes Park that were ideal to create more pollinator habitat. Drip irrigation was already in place but plants were needed. Two trays of annuals and perennials identified as beneficial for native pollinators were donated through The Ada Soil and Water Conservation District who sponsored the Treasure Valley Pollinator Project. Mountain View High School donated annuals, our garden group contributed annuals and perennials, and the City purchased additional plants to make this project possible. A few of our gardeners and nearby neighbors (7 adults and 3 children) helped to plant more than 400 plants. This area bloomed throughout the summer and received compliments from those walking by. The pollinators seemed quite happy with this addition. Boy Scout Pack #95 helped with end of season clean up by weeding and removing spent annuals. The clean-up was scheduled through the Parks and Recreation Volunteer Coordinator, Chelsea Cantrell.



We hope to continue planting and expanding the pollinator planting at Heroes Park as time and funding permits.

## Western Idaho Fair: WE WON!

*It was exciting to be a part of the Western Idaho Fair again. Some of our favorite and best flowers and vegetables were selected for entries. We won a Blue Ribbon Vegetable plaque for 2021. The cucumber, eggplant, and melon took Best of the Best sponsored by Reggies Veggies. We won 18 first place, 11 second place, 8 third place, 1 fourth place, and one honorable mention. Plus four entries ribbons for the largest in category. The flowers won 14 first place, 7 second place, 5 third place, 2 honorable mentions, and the Akita dahlia took Best of Division.*



## In the News...

*Idaho News Channel 6 (KIVI TV) did a feature story on our efforts at the garden and how we donate produce to local food banks. Black Badger Media has also taken photos, video, and did a personal interview.*

## Little Free Library and Free Seeds

*A Little Free Library, built and installed by our gardeners, is now located at the entrance to the community garden and maintenance yard of Kleiner Park. It is filled with books and seeds to share with the community. The outside is designed and painted by Rachel Sulik (Boise) with 31 different pollinators and fun whimsical flowers on all four sides. When you visit try to find all 31!*



## Dominifarm Animal Sanctuary, Inc.

*Dominifarm, located in Kuna, Idaho is an animal sanctuary. We were able to donate oversized and less than perfect produce to help feed their animals. They have horses, cows, goats, chickens, cows, pigs, turkeys, ducks, emus, and*

*domestic geese. Hundreds of pounds from our garden and Two Dogs and a Gopher Garden were collected and delivered. We also connected with two neighborhoods and collected more than 500 pumpkins and 7 bales of straw.*



## D & B Seed Donations

*For the past three years D & B in Meridian has donated the end of season Livingston vegetable, herb, and flower seeds to our group. The quantity is HUGE. We use these seeds in our garden and share them with the community. Hundreds of seed packets were bundled for porch pick ups in the spring... and shared with backyard gardeners, homesteaders, and small farmers. We shared not only seeds but plants we grew. These were shared with Idaho State Correctional Institution (Boise), Women's and Children's Alliance (Boise), City Light Home for Women (Boise), Barbara Morgan Elementary School (Meridian) and an I Heart Treasure Valley project on the Blue Cross garden site (Meridian) to help their gardening programs. Mountain View High School Horticulture program provided tomatoes and peppers for the I Heart garden.*

# Additional Details about 2021

*“According to the National Weather Service, the summer of 2021 was the hottest on record. It was 100 degrees or hotter for 12 days in a row in July, and the lowest high temperature was 91 degrees.” (Idaho Statesman, Jan Max Stevenson, 9-02-2021). The high temperatures and smoke from regional forest fires created challenges in working and enjoying the garden. Rain was minimal causing drought conditions around the area. We were incredibly thankful that our garden irrigation continued to flow through the end of our season. Unfortunately, many community gardens in the area lost their water a month early.*



*A number of improvements were made this year including entry way flower baskets. One of our gardeners used round concrete forms spray painted black to cover the old gate posts. Flower baskets were placed on the top. The same gardener also created a wonderful watering system that attaches to a hose spigot allowing multiple children to fill their watering cans easier and at the same time. At the end of the season our tool and equipment shed was painted to match the maintenance yard building.*



*Juli stayed connected to the Treasure Valley Community Garden Cooperative and attended a number of field trips to other gardens including: Canyon Springs Garden Outreach (Middleton), Harvest Heroes Veteran’s Garden (Nampa), The Gift International Garden (Ontario), and Ed Keener’s Garden (Boise). It is a great opportunity to see what other gardeners are doing, share resources, and bring ideas to use in this garden.*



*We try to make the time in our off season to stay connected with each other. This year we held a wreath making class*



*This year Juli was nominated to be the Grand Marshal for the Meridian Winter Parade. A number of our gardeners joined in the fun. It was exciting to be recognized for the work we do in the community.*

## **Goals: moving forward we will continue to...**

*grow fresh and organic produce for our families, share our harvest with those who struggle with food security in and around our community, grow flowers to be enjoyed and shared, maintain the pollinator garden spaces, and provide education to our gardeners and the community.*

*During 2022 we intend to focus on the quality of the food we provide to the food bank. This will include selection, presentation and labeling of food delivered. To the food banks. We want to make sure the food banks need and can use the selection of produce we provide.*

*Other goals include: (1) adding a fourth dahlia row; (2) offering a fruit tree pruning class that the public can be invited to; (3) cutting down potato boxes to make smaller raised beds that will be added to Zone 5; (4) having gardeners teach gardeners what they know by hosting special classes taught at the end of our workday sessions; (5) finding ways to protect our fruit trees from public harvesting; (6) connecting with Friends of the Pollinator Garden group at least twice each year; (7) creating an informational brochure to place in the Little Library; (8) and continuing discussions with the City of Meridian about adding a shade structure.*

*"I have loved being a part of the garden. The incredible quality of people that are a part of this community bring so much joy to me every time I come to work. I have learned so much about the types of veggies available to grow in Idaho and my world of tomatoes will never be the same. I am completely spoiled! Thank you and thanks to everyone who makes this possible, as an outreach and a generous learning and gardening experience." Celeste*

*"The community garden fills me up in so many ways. I love spending time getting to know people, serving the community, getting some exercise, and being outdoors. I am amazed at what all gets accomplished and how much we can help with food bank donations. It's been fun hearing Levi and Laurel talk to other people about the garden and what it's about. Chrissy*

*"I'm grateful to have been a part of the co-op garden this year. It was wonderful meeting people from all walks of life as we gathered together twice a week working in different areas to learn about the process it takes to grow our own food. I loved that it was a natural way to add this to our personal homeschooling process as well." Christina*

*"The garden is such a special place for all of us to work together to create something amazing that serves so many people in our community. The garden is a peaceful place to be in a very hectic world. Looking forward to 2022!" Kristin*

*"It was a very enjoyable first year for me. I learned a lot about varieties of veggies I had never even heard of let alone eaten. Folks were friendly and welcoming. I am very impressed with the garden leadership. I am impressed with the "ownership" of the garden by its members. Folks rightly consider it "their" garden and behave accordingly. It was a joy to work together with so many folks who love digging in the dirt, tending the growing plants, and enjoying the fruits of their labor." Jim*

*"Participating in the community garden has been the highlight of my summer. I've so enjoyed getting to know so many people who I might otherwise never encounter. Working in a group has always been my preference, so why not apply that to gardening? Being a part of the garden has fulfilled my desire to have a beautiful garden while working with others and I've learned a lot while doing it. I've gained so much pleasure by being able to share flowers with so many too. Thank you, community, for being the delight that you are; in welcoming new friendships, celebrating old and working together through it all." Kim*

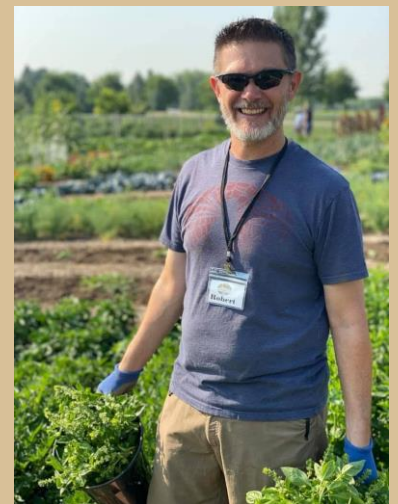
*"Being a member of MCG has been an educational and fun experience for our family. I love that more experienced gardeners help newer gardeners learn new skills. My kids have learned how to spot squash bugs, harvest chard, and plant vegetables properly." Tianna*

*"I'm looking forward to another garden season. I always enjoy the growing, weeding & all the "interaction"." Dick*

*"I just finished my 3<sup>rd</sup> year in the garden and each year I am amazed by how much I learn and how wonderful the people are. This community is top notch. The commitment to the garden by so many members I think is the best experience about the garden! The garden always looks so well maintained and the produce is A++. I love this community garden." Debbie*

*"I can't express how much joy I get from being a part of this group!!! I do recognize that much of that joy is because of Juli's commitment and leadership. She has created a wonderful place for garden enthusiasts and friendship loving/sense of belonging people to participate. It has been a great pleasure to be a part of this garden." Brodie*

*"It was great to be a part of a community to learn more about gardening and a variety of plants. It was good to know what we were producing was not only helping our families but also helping the community as we provided food to the food banks." Robert*



## Quotes from our gardeners



# Thank You

*We strive to create connections with community partners and are grateful for the outpouring of support. Your donations of time, money, seeds, plants, products, volunteer hours and discounts make a difference in what we are able to do. You are making a difference! Together we are teaching people how to grow their own food and feeding those in need.*

Our partnership with the City of Meridian Parks and Recreation Department makes this garden possible. The location in the Julius M. Kleiner Park is beautiful, amazing, and conveniently located inside the maintenance yard of the park. The city provides the land and water, along with an area for composting. Park employees help with a variety of projects from turning the compost pile with heavy equipment, tree care, and troubleshooting and repairing the irrigation system. A large trash receptacle is provided at the end of the year for when we take down the garden. We also utilized the City of Meridian Volunteer Coordinator to help with a project at Heroes Park.

## Community Partners

- \*Ada County Sheriff's Alternative Sentencing Detail
- \*Ada Soil and Water Conservation District
- \*Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds
- \*Bob Bartholomew/Leah Juarros
- \*Black Badger Media/Chance Owen and Ian Compton
- \*Boise Urban Garden School BUGS
- \*Karl and Juli Bokenkamp
- \*Sherri Brenner
- \*Jim Brown/Tree Service
- \*Shawanda Brown
- \*BSA Pack #95
- \*Annie Campbell
- \*D&B Supply/Shannon Alcott

- \*Down and Dirty Tractor Works, LLC /Chris Verkerk
- \*ENEL X
- \*The Free Flower Project/Rochelle Adams
- \*Kristin Friend
- \*Landra Girard
- \*Girl Scout Troop #215
- \*Bronwen Godfrey
- \*Haneke Naturally/Jan Hanecke
- \*Home Depot
- \*KIVI TV Idaho News 6/Karen Lehr
- \*Living Tree Greenhouse/Linda Cowan
- \*Andrea Long
- \*Meredith Lamb Lynch
- \*Linda Matthews
- \*Randy Miller
- \*Shauna Miller and Two Dogs and a Gopher Garden
- \*Salvatore and Jenn Miran
- \*Sam Moore, BSA Troop #78
- \*Mountain View High School/ Horticulture Class/Trish Stokes
- \*Dee Oldham
- \*Mary Brada Pera
- \*Perfect Touch Landscaping/Lynn Chase
- \*Deb and Ken Priebe
- \*Kimberly and Brandon Ramm
- \*Dick Ross
- \*Jackie Schultz-Barkley
- \*Snake River Seeds Cooperative
- \*Spyglass Gardens/Steve and Wendy Smith
- \*Rachel Sulik
- \*Timbercreek Recycling/Mike Murgotio
- \*Katie Tuck
- \*Wagner Farms/Rod and Debbie Wagner
- \*Walmart/James Miller
- \*Wild Bunch Blossoms/Carrie Bunch
- \*Sherwin Williams (Meridian)



## Participants in October:

Denise Adkins, Katie Allison, Celeste Anderson, Prakash and Sikha Bhusal, Karl and Juli Bokenkamp, Annie Campbell, Jennifer Caywood, Ashley and Josh Durham, Sue Ferguson, Kim Fitzgibbons, Kristin Friend, Jim Grunow, Tianna and Logan Hagglund-Lyman, Abby Harris, Serif Karabegovic, Suzanne Knorr, Stephanie Ludwig, Zoe and Jason Martindale-Schmitz, Christina and Robert McClintock, Carol Menten, Leia Neely, Ryan and Yulia Nielson, Nathan and Mariah Nunes, Karen Odell, Lin Pyles, Dick Ross, Debbie Sanders, Chrissy Starcher, Brodie Whitlock, April Wood and Daniel Parker, and Carrie Zummersch Schultz

We ended the garden with 30 families, nearly a full roster (32). A few of our gardeners are unable to return next summer so we will have a total of four openings for new gardeners to join us. We currently have 28 names on our waiting list.

