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## A treasure of a garden

*With support from the town of Windsor, Colorado Master Gardener (CMG) volunteers have turned a vacant field into a thriving community demonstration garden.*

### Situation

The unique growing conditions of the High Plains led to the creation of a demonstration garden in Windsor. Master Gardener volunteers in Weld County helped to establish this easily accessible venue.

### Extension's Response

In 2008, Windsor-based Colorado State University Extension CMG volunteers approached town officials about establishing a demonstration garden on town-owned land. The Windsor Parks, Recreation, and Culture Department approved the idea and proposed the use of a vacant field that was once farmed. The one-acre site is adjacent to the much-traveled Poudre River Trail and has good access to non-potable water.

Once the town of Windsor and Weld County Extension signed a formal partnership agreement, the Treasure Island Demonstration Garden was established. In addition to donating land, the town of Windsor provides and maintains the garden's water supply and irrigation infrastructure. It also provides wood mulch, top soil, trees, garden signage, and an annual budget up to \$1,000 for purchasing materials, equipment, and plants. CMG volunteers and other community volunteers (they collectively call themselves the DiGGers—Demonstration Garden Group) provide the vision, planning, labor, and expertise needed for cultivating and maintaining the garden.

In 2009, the garden became one of the nearly 90 Plant Select® demonstration gardens located throughout the Rocky Mountain and High Plains regions. Plant Select® is a nonprofit collaboration with Colorado State University, Denver Botanic Gardens, and partner growers. "The objective of Plant Select® is to come up with a palette of plants that do well growing in this climate," says DiGGER volunteer Bill Pratt. The program annually provides the Treasure Island Demonstration Garden with dozens of plants that are evaluated for durability, reliability, and cold hardiness. Plants are interspersed throughout the garden.

In five growing seasons, the garden has evolved far beyond the wildflowers, miscellaneous plant cuttings from volunteers' gardens, and dozens of pumpkin plants that the volunteer garden group originally established. Treasure Island now includes several flowering plant communities—unique varieties of annual and perennial ornamentals, low-water, xeric rock gardens, irises, and phlox and lavender gardens—as well as pathways, benches, and other landscaping materials and art donated by volunteers and local businesses.

Volunteers have also transformed the pumpkin patch into a large and thriving vegetable garden. This past year the vegetable garden received dozens of donated bedding plants and many packets of vegetable seeds. While many of these donations came from the Plant Select program and CMG home gardens, others were contributed by the community. The garden donates 100 percent of the food it grows to the Windsor Food Pantry—more than 2,300 pounds in 2011 alone.



### The Bottom Line

- The Treasure Island Demonstration Garden in the town of Windsor is a community asset that provides food, teaches the public about best gardening practices for the local climate, beautifies public spaces, and attracts a wide range of dedicated volunteers.
- The garden exists because of a strong partnership between the Town of Windsor, the Weld County Extension CMG volunteers, and the DiGGers volunteers.

### By the Numbers

- Approximate number of volunteers at the garden: 20 CMGs and 10 community volunteers
- Number of CMG volunteer hours in 2012: 1,140

## Results

Weld County Extension CMGs created a community asset by establishing the Treasure Island Demonstration Garden in partnership with the town of Windsor. Before the garden existed, the Poudre River Trail curved through an empty field that was farmed years before. Over the years, trail users have witnessed CMG and community volunteers transform the uncultivated land into a thriving garden that generates many community benefits, including public enjoyment, awareness, education, increased volunteerism, and beautification.

Demonstration gardens show people what they can grow in their own climate, under specific conditions, and how. The Weld County Extension CMGs have volunteered hundreds of hours developing different garden areas and beds that reflect the diversity of plant communities that can thrive in the High Plains. Volunteers who work in the vegetable garden conduct irrigation experiments to determine the best method for the highest yield. Volunteers share the lessons they learn with visitors through education classes and informal discussions in the garden. “We interact daily with cyclists and pedestrians who stop to read informational signs, observe the plants, and ask questions—mostly about their own gardens,” says Pratt.

Volunteers have also repurposed materials—decking lumber, wine bottles, horseshoes, bed frames, and more—to build bed borders, pathways, benches, sculptures, gates, and transition zones. These creative touches show visitors the limitless ways in which they can landscape and garden. “I was out here an hour and there were 30 people wandering around, taking their time, and pointing out what they like to each other,” said CMG volunteer Janene Willey.

Roughly one third of the Treasure Island Demonstration Garden volunteers are not CMGs. When Sunita Noronha saw an article in the local paper about getting involved with the demonstration garden, she called immediately and became a dedicated volunteer. According to Pratt, who has been at the forefront of the garden’s development, the garden offers everyone a chance to get their hands in the dirt, make new friends, work toward a common goal, and feel more connected to their community. “Volunteers come from all over,” Pratt says. “Kersey, Firestone, Greeley, Johnstown, Eaton. We all get something out of it.”

The town of Windsor has been an invaluable partner to the Weld County Extension CMG program. The town’s material and financial support has allowed volunteers to expand the garden’s boundary, make irrigation more efficient, and become a more self-sustaining entity. Each year DiGGers sell iris bulbs during an iris grab and pumpkins to local businesses. Revenues from these efforts are processed through the Community Foundation Serving Greeley and Weld County and then reinvested in the garden, which has become the town’s flagship horticultural project.

“They are so much behind us,” Willey says of the town officials who made the garden possible. “Treasure Island supports the town’s goal to help residents enjoy and develop an appreciation for open spaces, gardens, and parks.”

*“I love coming here to volunteer. I enjoy the quiet time that you spend with yourself and with your fingers in the ground, listening to the sounds of birds around you. It’s that feeling of being alone with nature.”*

– Sunita Noronha  
Treasure Island Demonstration Garden volunteer

*“We’re hot and sweaty (from working in the garden) and want to go home, but then somebody stops and says, “What a beautiful garden... I love coming by here... I stop here once a week.” After comments like that I’m good for another couple of hours. That’s what the reward is—hearing the appreciation from other people.”*

– Bill Pratt  
Weld County Extension CMG volunteer

## Visit the Garden

The Treasure Island Demonstration Garden is located off of South Seventh Street in Windsor, about a half mile south of the intersection of Seventh Street and Eastman Park Drive. Turn into the garden at Laku Lake Road.

Volunteer-led gardening classes are held the second Saturday of each month from April through September.

Volunteers actively work the garden on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from April through October. To volunteer call (970) 686-7319 or (970) 686-2999 or simply appear at the garden on a work day with gardening tools.

## Contact Information

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