

The Ochs Garden: A Blended Community Garden

The Ochs (pronounced “oaks”) Garden goal is a connected and diverse community teaching garden. Diversity can reflect culture, age, race, life experiences, and more. The Ochs Garden blends three groups: 4-H, Master Gardeners, and community members. The mission of the Ochs Garden is to provide fun, innovative urban agriculture education to Tampa Bay residents of all ages, backgrounds, and cultures while fostering a community built on teamwork, trust, and integrity. This program could be replicated anywhere appropriate for a community garden or an existing community garden.

OBJECTIVES: Objectives of this program include building a community garden for the surrounding neighborhood, blending youth and adult gardeners, and utilizing Master Gardeners, extension faculty, and staff to educate. **METHODS:** An existing 4-H garden was reconfigured to create three spaces, an in-ground community garden for residents, a raised bed Master Gardener demonstration garden, and a container garden for 4-H education. Regular classes and tours are held for all ages, most open to the community at large. Extension faculty and staff visit weekly to teach and observe. **RESULTS:** Extension faculty, staff and volunteers learned the social challenges of building a community garden. Leadership, conflict resolution, and communication skills are learned each growing season. Community gardeners have learned recommended gardening techniques demonstrated through observed behavior change. 70% of educational observations in 2021 have included behavior changes like proper pest control, weed identification, and proper watering. **CONCLUSIONS:** Blending a diversity of people into a community is complicated and often difficult but the positive outcomes outweigh the challenges.

Theresa Badurek

Theresa Badurek is the University of Florida/IFAS Urban Horticulture Extension Agent/Master Gardener Coordinator in Pinellas County. Her program provides Pinellas County citizens with research-based, environmentally-friendly information on horticulture and landscape design. As the Master Gardener Coordinator she works with the volunteer team to inspire, educate, and motivate existing and new Master Gardener volunteers.

Ms. Badurek’s educational background began with a bachelor’s degree in biology from the University of Central Florida. Her studies there were concentrated on botany and Florida ecosystems. She then earned a master’s degree in landscape architecture at the University of Florida, where she focused on the use of sustainable design. Ms. Badurek is also a certified arborist.