

WCCG by the Numbers And The Joys of Beekeeping

By Mary Reilly-Kliss, WCCG Coordinator, Novice Beekeeper

The Washington County Community Garden (WCCG) program has wrapped up a very successful season-again.

Here we are, by the numbers:

- 1:** Bee hive at the WCCG.
- 4:** OMG interns who helped with the program.
- 21:** Gardeners new to the program.
- 30:** Pounds of honey from our first harvest.
- 76:** Plots in production.
- 155:** Approximate number of active gardeners.
- 425:** Approximate number of hours given back to the program by the gardeners and OMG volunteers.
- 10,030:** Pounds of produce recorded. This is the first time that we have passed the 10,000 pound mark.
- \$20,000:** Market value of recorded produce.
- 10,000:** Approximate number of active bees.

I like to say that at the WCCG we “Build community by gardening together”. Each year there are unifying components, things which bring people out of their plots and into the paths to talk with one another. This year, it was the bees.

This was our second attempt at establishing an active hive because in 2016 the bees absconded in mid-July, leaving an empty hive and disappointed gardeners. In mid-May this year, our bees were delivered by Dave Poethke, our “bee whisperer”. The process of putting the bees in the hive drew the first crowd, the most fascinating part being the installation of the queen. She comes in a separate vial to keep her isolated from the rest of the bees and to prevent her from flying away, in which case the other bees would take off as well. The cork which keeps her in the vial is carefully removed, and a marshmallow is put in its place. Then, the entire vial goes into the hive and the

cover goes on. The bees then eat the marshmallow away, eventually releasing the queen. Who knew?

Because proper care of the hive necessitated some extra help, a group of volunteer “bee tenders” was formed. They added sugar water to the feeder as needed, weeded the plot, and planted pollinator-friendly annuals and perennials. One enthusiastic gardener began a journal where the volunteers recorded their observations and task completion. Another new gardener and his wife are native and pollinator experts, and so they planted their plot entirely with bee-friendly plants.

Over the course of the gardening season, gardeners made it a part of their routine to stop by and see what was happening at the hive. They marveled at how docile and busy the bees were, and chatted about which plants they seemed to favor.

In mid-September we removed the honey-laden frames, and took them to person who owned a honey extractor—basically a centrifuge for the frames. Once the machine started to spin, we opened the spigot at the bottom and filled a bucket with 30 pounds of beautiful, sweet, golden honey. I took the bucket home, strained the honey twice to remove debris such as bee wings, and bottled it up for the gardeners, each of whom received a jar of honey.

More than one excited gardener commented on having a role in creating the crop of honey. By growing pollinator-friendly plants and carefully watching or curtailing the use of insecticides, the gardeners of the WCCG surely did have a part in our first honey harvest—and built community while gardening together.

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