

Cultivating a cure for cancer

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Harry Hicks, a junior Psychology student, and Dylan Delamotte, a senior majoring in Sustainable Plant Systems Horticulture, plant broccoli in the JamesCare for Life Garden of Hope at the Waterman Farm. Fresh produce is available all summer for cancer survivors who register for the program.

By Christina Drain

Glen Mills is busy these days. It's planting season and the manager of the Waterman Farm Agricultural and Natural Resources Laboratory fields phone calls from researchers while planting vegetables amid worry about a hard freeze in a few days.

But a high priority at the moment is to sow seeds in the Garden of Hope so cancer patients in the JamesCare for Life program have vegetables to pick throughout the summer. More than 80 people already have attended orientations to enroll in the community garden project, in its second year at the farm.

Mills distributed tomato, lettuce, pepper, broccoli and other seedlings at the orientation to those who wanted to try their hand at home gardening. The rest will be planted in the Garden of Hope.

"When people don't think about the trials and tribulations they're going through in life and they're just worried about 'how can I grow this at my house' and 'what can I do differently to be successful' and 'when can we come pick tomatoes,' it's a complete escape," Mills said. "It's the nutrition part but it's also the cleansing to get away from the situation that they're in."

Mills planted peas two weeks ago and direct seeded romaine lettuce, spinach, kale, leaf lettuce, three different kinds of onions and cabbage in the last week. As the ground dried from a recent rain, he planned an afternoon of planting cauliflower, broccoli and kohlrabi. He also will plant an herb garden this year.

Garden of Hope

Ohio State's Waterman Farm
2490 Carmack Road
Corner of Lane Avenue and Kenny Road

The Garden of Hope is a community garden available free of charge for cancer survivors. This year's garden will feature a new herb garden and a wide variety of vegetables rotating throughout the summer.

Each participant will receive a special harvest bag for collecting fresh produce during weekly picking times. During these scheduled times, Ohio State horticulture, dietetics and nutrition students will be available to answer questions and lend assistance. JamesCare for Life volunteers and staff also will be on hand to provide orientation to new participants.

Next Orientation: 6-8 p.m. June 17

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"There's probably 500 heads of romaine and 1,000 heads of green cabbage," he said. "The kohlrabi was a request from last year. Some people wanted it so I'm giving it a whirl."

Mills maintains the gardens without herbicides; he lines the rows with mulch to reduce weeds and to provide a dry area for the patients to walk after a rain or irrigation. He fertilizes with free manure courtesy of the dairy cows on the farm, but doesn't spread any after December. Cold weather will kill off any E. coli present in the manure.

"A lot of people are immunosuppressed and I don't want to take any chances," he said.

The project emerged from brainstorming among the James Cancer Hospital and the College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences about a way to engage cancer survivors in healthy dietary practices, according to Steven Clinton, professor of Oncology in the Department of Internal Medicine.

"I think it's a great collaboration," Clinton said. "I think it shows the commitment of our agricultural college to this effort to fight cancer, and I think it's the kind of thing that you can do at a university like this where you have that rare combination of a Comprehensive Cancer Center and a world class agricultural school all on the same campus. So it really reflects something that OSU can do to help people."

Clinton, who is a renowned researcher in cancer-fighting foods, says that up to 80 percent of Americans are not eating the recommended amount of fruits, vegetables and grains for cancer prevention.

"We have to get people to start thinking about a plate of food at dinner that is initially composed of fruits, vegetables and grain with the meat being a deck of cards and not a giant steak that extends two inches over each side of a plate," Clinton said. "This is about changing people's thought process about how they compose and orchestrate their diet. We're talking about selecting a healthy anticancer pattern of foods."

Clinton says the cancer survivors also derive some benefits from the group activities.

"There are other people out there that have been through this and people share their stories," he said. "I think there's a lot of value that comes about from doing this endeavor as a shared experience with others that have suffered through this process. It's all part of recovery."

Like many, Mills has a personal story concerning cancer. His brother, an emergency room doctor, died at 57 of pancreatic cancer.

"The great thing about this project is that we are approaching it as one university," Mills said. "We're not just the medical center, we're not just Waterman Farms or the agriculture department. We're combining to do one thing and that's to find a cure for cancer. And if we can't, at least make it bearable."

at the Waterman Farm. Register at cancer.osu.edu/go/support. Mini-orientations available on harvest days.

Harvest Schedule: June, July and August
Mondays, 6-8 p.m.
Thursdays, 8-10 a.m.
Saturdays, 8-10 a.m.

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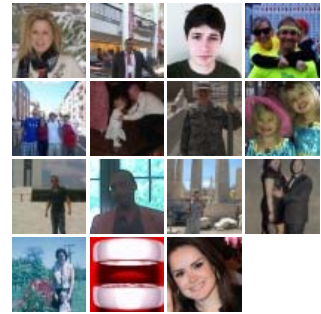
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