

July 28, 2010

Senior housing residents use herb garden in flavorful way

By AARON MORRISON
FLORHAM PARK HANOVER THIS WEEK

Tomato basil sauce over pasta.
Flounder steaks flavored with
parsley and oregano. Rice pilaf
with cilantro.

The residents at the Lester Senior
Housing community in Whippany
are eating good and healthily
thanks to three green thumb
wielding neighbors.

Doris Einsburch, in her late 80's,
along with Ida Bakalar, 90, and
Edythe Granick, 92, are
responsible for tending to a small
garden that produces herbs used by
dining director Mitchell Goldberg
to feed the community's 180
residents.



Ida Bakalar (left) and Edythe Granick (right) tend to
the Lester Senior Housing herb garden

Leaving their homes to benefit from the conveniences of assisted living meant giving up their own personal gardens. But the women are still reaping what they sow, fresh herbs to flavor dishes for seniors who typically require nearly salt-free diets.

"It's very exciting to see," Einsburch said. "With very little care, the plants grow in spite of us."

As the most active members of the Lester senior community's gardening club, the three tend to basil, cilantro, dill, oregano, parsley, mint and thyme plants in a raised garden bed located behind one of two residential towers.

"We don't have to remind them to get out there," said Lester housing director Alex Gross. The three women typically tend to the garden daily and pull weeds whenever they spot them, he said.

Bakalar was the main resident to ask for the gardening materials, and she recruited others to help.

Einsburg and Granica have been her most reliable recruits. The less able-bodied residents enjoy the garden from a far.

"It's real difficult to go out if you have a walker," she said. A long patch of grass separates the garden bed from a pathway behind the building.

The housing community, owned and operated by the Jewish Community Housing Corp., purchased the seeds, topsoil, fertilizer and other supplies.

"When the residents are in the dining room eating, they like knowing that some of the herbs that went in the soup were homegrown by some of the their fellow residents," Gross said.

Housing chef Goldberg, whom the women allow first pick of the produce, said using fresh herbs makes flavoring food much easier.

"Bringing garden fresh New Jersey produce brightens up everything," Goldberg said. "Fresh herbs have three times more flavor than dry herbs."



Doris Einsbruch (left), Ida Bakalar (middle) and Edythe Granick (right) take a brief break from gardening

The women said they most enjoy harvesting the mint for making their own peppermint tea. From Goldberg's kitchen, they favor baked oreganata fish and meatballs.

For Granick, gardening stopped being about supplementing her meals and more about pure fun in retired life.

"One of the things that I do is cut off the roots of some plants and I pot them and give them to people," she said. "That came from the idea of gardening club."

Bakalar also enjoys giving plants away.

"I'm going to bring down a big pot of aloe that has to be separated," she said. "And everybody likes aloe."

Above all, Gross said he is satisfied in knowing the women can find enjoyment is something that benefits others.

"It gives them a chance to reach back to the past," Gross said. "Even though they live in a community that some would dismiss as just another apartment building, they still have the joys of their gardening without the chore of maintaining a lawn."

Additional Facts

Tomato Basil Sauce for Pasta

Ingredients:

-8 pounds tomatoes, seeded and diced

-1/4 cup chopped fresh basil

-1 large onion, minced

-3 cloves of garlic, minced

-1/2 cup olive oil

-salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

1. In large saucepan, cook tomatoes and basil over medium-low heat until tomatoes are soft.
2. Meanwhile, in medium skillet, sauté onion and garlic in olive oil until onions are translucent.
3. Add onion mixture to tomato mixture and add salt and pepper. Let simmer on low heat for 2 hours or until thick.

*recipe used by Jewish Community Housing Corporation dining director Mitchell Goldberg