

LAURA E. MATTER



The first seeds of Seattle's Community Gardening Program were sown at the Picardo Farm P-Patch, shown here. The Picardo family, which had farmed the land for generations, sold it to the city in 1973.

SEATTLE, WA

GREENING COMMUNITIES

IN THEIR DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOODS OFFICE, Sandy Pernitz and Rich Macdonald are surrounded by photographs taken in Seattle's community gardens, or "P-Patches" as these small pieces of publicly managed land are known locally. The photos show a children's garden with pinwheels and kid-safe tools from one P-Patch, beekeeping boxes and worm bins from another, and a new fence with panels depicting a neighborhood's connection to jazz music from a third.

"Each garden has its own character," says Macdonald, supervisor of Seattle's Community Gardening Program, which oversees the patches. "I love walking through a P-Patch and seeing what the gardeners have done to make their P-Patch their own little piece of green heaven."

Starting with one large garden in the city's Wedgwood neighborhood 40 years ago (the first *P* in *P-Patch* comes from Picardo, the surname of the family that originally farmed the land), the program now includes more than 75 gardens and more than 4,400 participating gardeners. "It is one of the only municipally funded community gardening programs in the nation," says Pernitz, one of five program coordinators. Pernitz, who started out as a volunteer in a P-Patch close to 20 years ago, now does everything from negotiating land deals for development to reminding gardeners when it's time to overwinter their crops.

Most P-Patches are developed by neighbors seeking to beautify a dead-end street closure or derelict property; others are built by the city on land belonging to the Parks Department or other divisions. There are unconventional sites, too: Last year, Pernitz and co-worker Laura Raymond teamed with community members and landscape architects to build a 100-plot garden on the roof of a parking garage. And creating more space is important. The wait for a plot is up to four years in some neighborhoods, though it is a matter of months in others. Plots typically range in size from 40 to 400 square feet.

Community gardeners who secure a plot must agree to maintain their patch's communal areas. Most gardens also make space for social purposes. Many hold potlucks or exchanges of fruits and flowers. And in recent years, P-Patch gardeners have donated more than 20,000 pounds of produce annually to local food banks. Low-income residents can apply through a pilot program for larger-than-normal garden plots from which they can sell produce. Some immigrant communities are growing types of produce that grow in residents' native countries. And youth groups are introducing children to healthy foods and the business of farming.

"We view gardening as a recreational activity just like soccer or softball," says Pernitz. "But I don't see the P-Patches as being about the gardening as much as I see them being about community. It's not about how much kale you grew this year, or whether your tomatoes were bigger than your neighbor's. It's a means for people who wouldn't normally engage with each other to learn something about each other."

Want to see the gardens in action? Seattle's P-Patches are open to the public. For more information, visit www.cityofseattle.net/neighborhoods. —Margot Case

FAIRBANKS, AK

A Long Winter's Nap

Wood frogs are Interior Alaska's only native amphibians. To survive in winter, up to 65 percent of their body water freezes, leaving vital cells undamaged. They thaw again in spring. Many other animals of the Interior have developed fascinating strategies for surviving winter months. They have also inspired nearly 30 years of research at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

This year, the University of Alaska Museum of the North is sharing these findings in the exhibition "Hibernation and the Science of Cold," open to the public through May 15. Visitors can explore a variety of survival strategies through a range of interactive experiences—such as playing a video game in which they control a vole as it forages for food, observing live arctic ground squirrels hibernating in a cold chamber, and viewing research footage of bears during the hibernation process. Informational displays and audiovisual presentations by expert scientists round out the wide-ranging representations of winter adaptations by Alaska's animals. For more information, call 907-474-7505 or visit www.uaf.edu/museum. —Amy Vance



Visitors to the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Museum of the North learn strategies animals use to survive the cold.