

Community-grown Wellness

JOANN DARLING - GOOD FOOD GOOD MEDICINE



Food Justice Educator Joann Darling brings garden and nutrition education to Highgate Housing and Green Acres Apartments--two affordable housing communities in Barre, Vermont. Her program, Good Food Good Medicine, includes winter and summer cooking classes, a winter wellness series that has a strong herbal focus, garden plots for residents, and a children's garden and cooking classes with the support of Vermont Community Garden Network's Gardens for Learning program. Together these programs reach more than 50 adults and children throughout the year. The year-round cooking classes for adults in the community coincide with food bank deliveries, utilizing donated food and garden produce in the cooking lessons. This gives residents inspiration to cook healthy and tasty food, and familiarizes them with new foods and different ways to prepare those foods. Joann explains, "We found that at some of the sites there's extra food. For example, we get a lot of cabbage; but there are many ways to use cabbage." Joann and other program staff use this bounty to help fill in the gaps in community knowledge around food preservation and processing. This is just one example of how Joann works with residents to meet their unique needs and learning goals, to make sure they get the most out of the programs offered to them.

Joann works cooperatively in the gardens, leading as a garden liaison more than an organizer. "I try to always guide, because we don't work from a top-down system. We like to sit in a circle and share ideas," she says. This approach helps gardeners take ownership of their own garden plots and the garden as a whole. Gardeners have worked together to come up with rules everyone is comfortable with, from what will be planted in the communal plots to who is allowed in the garden when it is unattended.

Joann loves teaching others and getting them excited about growing their own food. "I love to teach and I have gardened all my life, it's been my thing," she said. "This felt like the best place I had to share." Joann sees gardens and cooking education as powerful ways to put the control back into people's own hands, particularly when working with marginalized communities. In addition to her work at Good Food Good Medicine, Joann is a practicing herbalist and teaches at the Vermont Center for Integrative Herbalism, a school that provides education for aspiring clinical herbalists, with the mission of making herbal knowledge common once again and increasing the autonomy and individual's role in one's own health. Joann sees the individual's ability to grow food and medicine for her or himself as a way towards personal empowerment to resolve both food and health care access issues common in the communities where she works.



Images and profiles for the "Garden Organizers: Leaders for a New Season" series were created in summer 2017 by Claire Londagin for the Vermont Community Garden Network. This series features three community and school garden leaders as they prepare for a new season in the garden, providing fresh produce, teaching life skills, and strengthening local communities. These gardeners and their stories provide snapshots of the great impact Vermont garden leaders make in their communities and in the nearly 400 gardens they oversee across the state.

For more about the Vermont Community Garden Network, visit www.vcgn.org.