



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

## Farm Connection

by

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Farm & Nature Guide & Board of Trustees

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### **GARLIC AND GIVING GARDEN AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER**

Tuesdays, especially the second Tuesday of the month, at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road, continue to be the busiest day of the week. The parking is full. The Herb Group members arrive by 9:30 am. to ensure they can park close to the herb beds beside the gazebo. They carry their own tools to maintain and harvest the herbs. Afterwards the women retire to the cool library to listen to a speaker. This week's topic was garlic. Its uses and benefits appear endless, and there are plenty of books and garlic festivals to enlighten a beginner.

Stratford grows hardneck garlic near the Giving Garden. Single cloves are planted in the fall, and by May the tops are long and green. The highest part, known as a scape, is cut off to prevent the formation of a flower head. The scapes are set out in the kitchen for anyone to eat raw or cooked. The energy saved by not allowing the flower to form is absorbed by the underground maturing white bulb, which contains a new supply of cloves. In June the bulbs are harvested, the leaves cut off, and they are air dried on a raised wire rack in the machine shed. Once dry some are kept for seed and the rest available for sale. Like most fruits and vegetables, buying a local source of garlic is usually best for quality.

There are currently four raised beds in the Giving Garden containing potatoes, beans, sugar baby water melons, peppers and squash. The harvest, along with plenty from the Children's Garden and the vegetable field, are donated weekly to People In Need In Delaware. Over the years Stratford's Education Coordinator April Hoy and PIN's former Executive Director, the late Kevin James Crawley, developed a strong relationship. They found ways to share produce, recipes and potted tomato plants, to enable families to learn and grow their own.

At a recent Lunch Club, when members of the community are invited to eat and tour the farm, the new Executive Director of PIN, Randy Bournique, and Jim Lewis, a PIN Board member, were present. A sign was unveiled stating that our Giving Garden is dedicated to the legacy of Mr. Crawley, whose enthusiasm and passion to serve others was an inspiration to us all. The new sign has been attached below the Giving Garden mosaic where the full beautiful text can be read by all.

Thankfully the first of this season's hay from fields 2 and 3 is stacked in the loft, the corn is planted in field 1 and the east end of the North Pasture, and 400 vegetable plants, namely tomatoes, peppers, egg plants, and zucchini are in neat rows in field 3. The agriculture interns Brooke and Paige and volunteer Alexis are to be commended for their efforts to accomplish this extensive planting in unseasonably wet and hot weather.

Farmer Jeff needed to leave town for a few days on June 7. The weather allowed him to cut and turn the hay, but not to bale it. Farmhand Randy came to the rescue and volunteered to operate the baler, and a last-minute call was made for help to collect the bales. David Hoy, Stratford's Development Director, born and raised on a farm in Coshocton, Ohio checked over the baler, and connected it to the tractor. He hooked the Kubota tractor to the hay wagon and Brooke and Paige stepped in to drive and stack the bales on the wagon. An unusual occurrence for women at Stratford!

Stratford is an education farm, and the interns quickly learned there is an art to stacking bales to ensure the least lifting and to balance the load. They drove the load into the machine shed to keep dry until the hay loft could be swept out, and the remaining few bales from last year re-stacked beside the railings ready to feed first. As always there was great fulfillment bringing in the first cutting of hay.

Whilst standing in the lane at Stratford catching a glimpse of white buckwheat and surrounded by vibrant growth, the colorful group of cattle munching grass and continually swishing their tails was a bucolic scene. The effect was enhanced when out of the barn marched the ewes and their nearly full-grown lambs heading for the same pasture. A lone calf emerged after them and bellowed as it made its way to join the herd, none of whom took the slightest notice. It seemed at that moment, at least here at Stratford, all is right with the world.

Classes and events continue to be offered during the summer and details can be found on our web site. Finding, fixing and eating food will be very much in evidence at the children's Garden Tea Party on July 17. Kids Cooking Classes with Christine are slated for July 11, 18 and 25. An opportunity for kids to build a Pinhole Camera will happen on July 19. Our elegant major fundraiser "Enchanted Evening" will take place at the Columbus Zoo's Africa Event Center on August 9, featuring retiring Board member and retired Columbus Dispatch columnist John Switzer.

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