

GARDENING IN THE CITY



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Above: Earnest Doss directs Jacob Barrett as he levels out topsoil for a garden at the Barham Neighborhood Center, 711 S. Mechanic St. Top right: Tom Mijal, coordinator of the community garden, speaks with Anna Ball while taking a break from pulling weeds.

Urban Gardening program could sprout gardens in vacant lots

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As summer approaches, the city of Jackson hopes to encourage those with a green thumb to utilize some vacant city lots.

Leaders approved an Urban Gardening program, allowing residents to enter into a lease agreement with the city to use vacant property to start a garden.

Volunteers in Partnership Park kicked off the program Saturday by starting a garden at the Barham

Neighborhood Resource Center, 711 S. Mechanic St.

Officials hope they can recruit volunteers — particularly those handy in the garden — to help get the program off the ground, Community Development Director Carol Konieczki said. Those interested, can contact the city's Community Development Department.

Gardeners would be responsible for cleanup, maintenance and gardening. A \$30 deposit required on the

See VACANT, on A2

How to get involved

■ Program members hope to recruit more volunteers to launch the city's Urban Gardening program. The next meeting is at 10 a.m. May 11 at the Together We Can Make A Difference house, 224 W. Wilkins St.

■ Those interested in leasing a plot of land from the city can call the Community Development department at 788-4060. The city hopes to start signing up gardeners Monday and has between 60 and 70 properties available for gardening.



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Robyn Soltis pulls weeds in the new community garden at the Barham Neighborhood Center. "Oh, this is beautiful," Soltis said. "Every community needs this."

Vacant lots targets for gardens

Continued from A1

front end would be returned at the end of the summer as long as the lot is cleaned, Konieczki said.

People interested in gardening may also be responsible for lead testing of the property. Konieczki said she believes the cost would be less than \$20, but she is still working on details.

Gardeners can grow anything, as long as it isn't illegal, and they can keep the produce for their own personal use or donate it to the community, she said.

"I would like to see a group over the summer become so

cohesive, they become a non-profit and move to another level of the gardening program," Konieczki said. "If they wanted, they could apply for CDBG funding to assist their program in the future."

Tom Mijal, a volunteer of the Partnership Park Neighborhood Association, said he'd like to see a third of what's grown go to a food bank.

Children in the Partnership Park Afterschool Program started growing tomatoes, peppers, onions, cabbage, basil, broccoli and parsley indoors, and will have their own section of the garden, Mijal said.

"I think it should start with the kids. Kids are amazed by plants, they are able to plant a seed and watch it grow," he said. "It teaches them to eat healthier. They are more apt to eating broccoli they grew themselves, rather than something plopped on their plate."

City Councilman Andrew Frounfelker said the program could get the community engaged in trying to make sure people have food.

"People living in the neighborhoods will be able to get fresh produce," Frounfelker said. "It could also give people down there some work skills to maintain the garden."