

GARDENING AT LANSING CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

By Honey Barnekoff

Gardening in a prison isn't like any other kind of gardening you ever have or ever will do! In some ways, it's better. The inmates are the ingredient that makes it so special and they are the most polite and appreciative persons with whom we in Mo/Kan Region's Gardening from the Heart project, have ever worked. The Lansing Facility is in Kansas, near Kansas City.

We started three years ago in Minimum Security, which is about three quarters of a mile away from the main prison. We are fortunate to have a greenhouse with which to work. In the winter we start seeds, make cuttings and maintain some of the plants used in the offices. We also usually do our teaching in the greenhouse, though sometimes we have to go to a classroom.

The propagated plants and those brought in as bedding plants and perennials are used in grounds beautification in warmer weather.

Shortly after beginning the program, we asked and were granted permission to add a second program in Medium Security. There too we are fortunate to have a greenhouse. We are also pleased to have one of the officers, who runs that greenhouse and is generally in charge of the grounds, to aid us in teaching the inmates and the administration of the program.

The number of inmates varies: one never knows how many will show for a "call out", as those who attended the last time may have been moved to another facility, been released or "rolled" back to maximum security for some infraction of the myriad rules.

We have had as few as one inmate for a call out, or about fifteen or sixteen. However, in the course of a year, we seem to touch a lot of lives.

The gardening program provides an educational program that gives them something to do while incarcerated that is placid, provides research based information, can be practiced inside the walls or knowledge that can be taken with them when they are released. We have had three inmates released who actually went to work in the green industry.

The grounds beautification is aimed at making the grounds a beautiful place in which to live, but with an eye toward not creating places where inmates may hide or secret contraband or weapons. One mustn't create a screen as security personnel must be able to see all over the compound from their vantage points in the towers.

Many hundreds of vegetables are started in the greenhouse and later planted out in the vegetable gardens. The produce raised goes into the kitchen, so all the inmates benefit from what we are able to produce, to say nothing of the satisfaction that those in the gardening project obtain from their labors.

Once a year we are allowed a small "party" which is held in December. During this meeting, we present each inmate with a certificate of participation, have some sort of class gift, perhaps a reference book, and refreshments. The inmates love our party and seem to cherish the certificates.

Of course, no program is complete without funding. We have received GFTH funds from the national GFTH program and from Mo/Kan Region. Several thousand dollars have been expended over the years on seeds, plants, books and other printed materials, fertilizer and mulch. We are very grateful to both of these sources for their support of what we believe to be a worthwhile program.

Though this is a difficult program to administer, it is well worth whatever it costs in time and money, not only for what the inmates gain, but for what it does to those of us who participate. (See photos on page 2)



Entrance of Lansing Correctional Facility



Beautification of the facility grounds



Inmates gardening inside the facility



Gardening and Horticulture Therapy



Inmate planting in a facility flower bed



Big Sunflowers in this Kansas facility