

## Neighborhood community garden provides much more than vegetables

By **SUSAN JONAS**

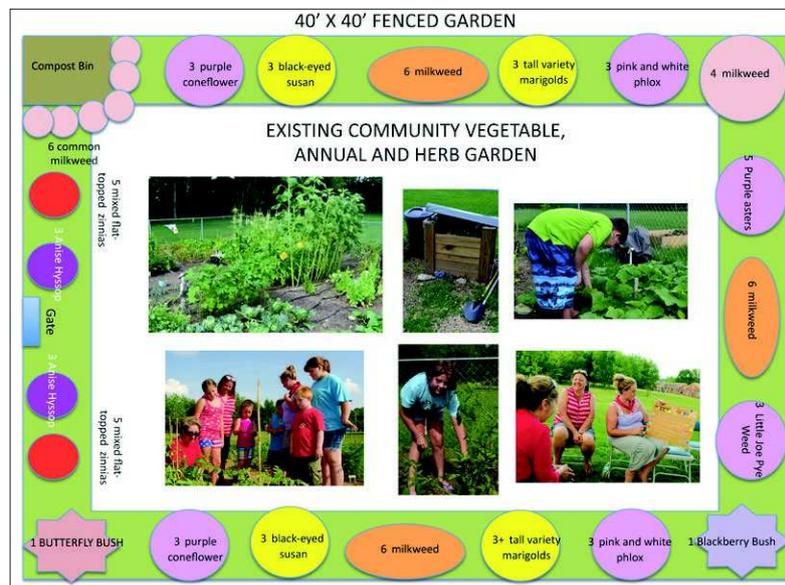
Garden Club of Danville

*"All my hurts,  
my garden spade can heal."*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Sometimes all it takes is one inspired person to change a community. Ashley Accord is the single mother of a 7-year-old son with special needs. Ashley and her son, Lukas Jones, live in a small apartment at Batewood Homes, the public housing community on South Second Street. Life can be a struggle for single women trying to support their children, and there are many of them at Batewood Homes. Often they feel bored and isolated, staying in their apartments without a social life or friends. That was before Ashley decided to pull herself out of social withdrawal and depression and bring her neighbors with her.

Her sister, Holly Accord, convinced Ashley to get outside and plant something to keep herself busy. She started in her own dooryard. All of the apartments at Batewood are neat and tidy, but few are as colorful as Ashley's, except maybe those of her neighbors, Lee Ann Russell and Isabelle Wright. Flowers spill out of pots and brighten the ground around their doors, but Ashley had her eyes on an empty 40 by 40-foot



fenced area nearby. Last year she presented an idea to the Danville Housing Authority. Could we have a community garden for all the residents?

Officials at the Housing Authority enthusiastically donated the unused playground and contributed \$60 start-up money. "They saw how hard we worked," Ashley said, "so this year they added a water spigot to the nearest building and they pay our water bills." The Boyle County Extension Office donated seeds, and Ashley's sister contributed hoses and a sprinkler system. Lee Ann Russell convinced local nurseries to donate starter plants. The women talked a tree service into giving them a pile of wood mulch and they carried stones from a nearby creek to edge their planting beds.

### Photos by David Seidel

Then James Ross from the Garden Club of Danville got involved. He tilled the garden, donated seeds, planted a bed of strawberries, and brought a truck-load of goat manure and an extra compost bin from the community garden at Jennie Rogers School.

"We're all low income," said Ashley, "so it's hard for us to buy the things we need for the garden. We work with what is donated. James is one of the best resources we have," she added. "I don't think he realizes how much we appreciate him." Ross taught them everything they know about gardening.

With all the pieces in place, Ashley went door to door inviting her neighbors to the garden. Then she visited the Big Brothers Big Sisters Club at Batewood and recruited eager children. The kids are the most inspiring part of this story, learning healthy and positive ways to burn off energy and contribute to their community. They come to the garden happily to plant and weed, but their favorite activities are watering, harvesting and eating. They also help the adults pack baskets, which the children deliver to elderly and handicapped residents.

"We give stuff away to anyone who comes to the garden, whether they work or not," said Ashley. Last year, the harvest was so bountiful that she learned to can, giving away tomato juice and 56 jars of squash relish. Now, even in winter Ashley stays in touch with her neighbors.

What's in the future? Ashley wants to involve more kids. She feels the more children she has working, the better crops she has. Maybe it's the extra help, or maybe it's their youthful enthusiasm. She also wants to try



**Ashley Accord** fought loneliness and depression by making it her mission to start a community garden at Batewood Homes in Danville. The garden has given her confidence and a new purpose in life.

new vegetables, like the okra they planted for the first time this year. Soon, there will be a new butterfly garden sponsored by the Garden Club of Danville.

Want to help? First on the wish list is a secure storage shed for tools and supplies. The gardeners also need large plastic storage tubs with lids. Right now they have one shovel, one rake and one hoe, which Ashley found at yard sales. Good new or used tools would be welcome, some in smaller sizes for the children. They can always use seeds and starter plants, and would like some organic pesticides and fungicides. If you want to make a much appreciated donation of money or supplies, call Rachel White at the Danville Housing Authority, (859) 236-6116.

### Ashley's Squash Relish

(Makes 8 quarts)  
1 cup bell peppers, red, yellow, green – chopped  
2 cups chopped onions  
8 cups chopped yellow squash  
1 tablespoon salt  
Mix all ingredients and let sit for 2 hours. Drain off liquid.  
In a separate container combine:  
2 cups apple cider vinegar  
3 1/2 cups sugar



**Linda Porter** and James Ross of the Garden Club of Danville plan a new butterfly garden for Batewood Homes.

1 teaspoon celery seed  
1 teaspoon mustard seed  
1/4 teaspoon turmeric  
Pour over vegetables, stir.  
Put in canning jars leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Remove air bubbles by running a rubber spatula down inside jars. Secure lids.

Place jars in pot large enough to cover jars with water, heat water to boiling and boil until lids seal, about 10 minutes.

Carefully remove jars, place on towels and let sit while cooling until lids pop.

**Editor's note:** Always follow approved safe canning methods, available from canner and canning jar manufacturers and other resources, such as USDA and pickyourown.org



**Kelcie Russell**, daughter of Lee Ann Russell, and **Lukas Jones**, son of Ashley Accord, love being outside and helping in the garden.