

Youngest Market Gardener



Meet Grow Your Own's youngest market gardener! This 10 year old boy seen above has worked diligently in his garden with the hopes of one day becoming a market gardener. They reside in beautiful Bristol, Tennessee. His mother, shared this testimonial on her time with the Grow Your Own program:

As a single parent making minimum wage, food security is always on the forefront of my mind. Appalachian Sustainable Development's GYO has enabled me and my son to produce a good amount of the fresh produce we need allowing us to put healthy vegetables back for the winter months. Not only are we growing food for ourselves, but we have been able to feed family members. While we have always grown a small garden the extra resources, both in shared knowledge and goods, have put us way ahead. My ten-year-old son has dedicated many hours this year into the garden and has developed a sense of pride. Thanks to the dedication of the staff at ASD, this will also be the first year we will be making extra income from our garden. We will be selling heirloom bean seeds and donating some to my son's school garden. Appalachian Sustainable Development and Grow Your Own has our thanks!

Rachel W., Bristol, TN.



A Healthier Way



Meet Trish, who has been a part of Grow Your Own for the past two years. Trish is a native of Marion, Virginia. This season, we were fortunate enough to have her mother Mrs. Smith partake in the program as well. Together these two incredible women have shared more information with ASD staff and to the group at large including foraging practices, canning, and fermenting. This is what Trish had to say about her time with Grow Your Own:

What GYO has meant to me is learning a better way of gardening, and a healthier alternative to poisonous chemicals. I have been doing traditional gardening for over 30 years using traditional pest control and disease control. In my 2 years with GYO, I have learned how to do organic gardening, what are the proper chemicals to use for different pests and diseases, how to identify certain pests and diseases. I have learned how to grow a few vegetables that I have never had success with in the past such as garlic and carrots, and brassicas.

I think more communities need programs such as these, with the rising cost of groceries and the amount of junk food that American children eat, we need to introduce them to healthy foods grown organically to control the amount of toxins that go into our bodies. We need to teach more families how to grow their own healthy foods, I have also enjoyed the recipes on how to prepare some of the veggies that we grow.

I also can and preserve the foods that I have extra and give to family members and neighbors, I grow enough food for a variety of different vegetables all winter. I found out that my soil was in poor shape and have been working towards improving it and have learned what I need to add to my soil to do so. I love watching my 10 year old niece try different veggies that she has never tasted before, she now likes to snack right from my garden on spinach, lettuce, peas, etc. I hope this program is allowed to continue and even expand.

Trish F., Marion, VA

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Meet Tom, who is a first year home gardener with the Grow Your Own program. Tom started this season with soil pH of 5.6 which explained why his garden had struggled since he started it years ago. Once we were able to apply lime and get it tilled under, things began to look up for him and his garden located in Abingdon, Virginia. This is what Tom had to say about his experience with Grow Your Own:

The first and foremost is the great flavor of the fruits and vegetables that we grow, nothing beats the fresh flavor of a tomato or green pepper just picked out of the garden. I love it when my sons will help me and they grab a big green bell pepper and eat it like an apple. Because I control the chemicals that are put on our garden what we produce is much healthier and better because I try to use the absolute minimum of chemicals and if I do use something I try to use the safest options.

Since we have the opportunity to determine what we grow so we are more inclined to eat more vegetables because we like what we grow and may try some things that we wouldn't buy from the grocery store because of cost. Another benefit is we can save some of our produce for the winter. Nothing is better than opening a couple of quarts of canned tomatoes and frozen green peppers and make a wonderful home grown pasta dinner with our produce in January.

I have learned a lot from the program, especially for paying attention to the soil and properly amending it to make it better and this knowledge will help me to grow even more vegetables in the future. I have been able to put into practice some of the techniques, especially caging my tomatoes by using t-posts and agriculture twine which is much quicker to keep them tied up as opposed to individual posts for each tomato. I am so glad that I was able to participate in this program and I have talked it up to several others, shared what I have learned and hope they will have the opportunity to participate in this great program.

Tom B., Abingdon, VA

"The Garden Gals" and Community



Meet Della of Bristol, Virginia. Together with other single mothers and friends, she developed a community garden, in her backyard and called it, "The Garden Gals". She also works two jobs and cares for her son as well as many neighbors, stray cats, and stray dogs. Della shares her experience with Grow Your Own below:

Being a part of this program has given me the confidence I never had before about my ability to keep plants alive. I had always been forced in the container gardening with little or no success. Now I have a yard I can garden so I'm grateful for the help. This program has provided me the tools to be a successful gardener, and not just the knowledge tools, but actual gardening tools and plants I couldn't have afforded without help. In the past few months, I have grown as a gardener and as a person through my participation in this program.

I'm grateful to have the opportunity to provide food to more than 30 low-income residents in my neighborhood. Some of these neighbors are elderly, some are single parent households, and some are households with multiple generations living under the same roof. I live in one of the poorest, neighborhoods in Bristol (with a reputation for being a little bit dangerous), but my experience as a community gardener has taught me that my neighborhood is a rich cultural tapestry, filled with wonderful families who have benefited from access to fresh produce. I am grateful for the opportunity my surplus has provided in meeting new neighbors and how delighted they are when I bring them some of my harvest.

My own family has grown closer by having a shared activity we all enjoy and we all benefit from. I have been able to integrate gardening into our homeschool instruction covering nearly every subject area in a way that is practical and applied. My son has learned the connection between himself and his food in a way that other children may not have experienced. He is learning to cook so the supplemental classes on nutrition and food preparation have also been really helpful for us. I think this program is critical in teaching skills for self-sustainability, healthy eating habits, and community interactions. This program has been a wonderful treat for myself, my family, and my neighbors. I hope to continue participating in the future and even recruiting other participants from the area who would benefit as well.

Della M., Bristol, VA

Harvest of Plenty, Lessons of Many



Nancy, a first year Grow Your Own home gardener from Abingdon, VA, is a testament to caring for yourself and vitality in age. She has volunteered over 10 hours throughout the season through seed sorting, chemical separation, and helping folks tote things to their cars. She is a role model. See below for her testimonial on the Grow Your Own program (She prefers to not share photos of herself, so the photo above is of our first workshop in March):

I am 73 and was raised in rural Appalachia in a mining community where we lived above the ordinary norm because my parents owned enough land to plant a family garden. We were taught to plant, harvest, preserve and share with others. I have carried on this tradition during my adult years, but have been employing the principles I learned as a youth. I have learned so much through this program. I had never heard of crop rotation, cover crops, how to make a mulch pile, identification of various predator insects and an organic method of controlling them, organic methods of enriching soil instead of using commercial fertilizers, fermentation necessity in preserving seed, nor tried varieties of vegetables I was not raised knowing. I have learned the tremendous time and effort savings in using the stirrup hoe rather than the back breaking task of the old method, using straw as a weed barrier as well as accommodating the growth, the use of specific sprays (organic) to combat specific predators, using twine to make a tomato trellis (works great), how to prolong growing season and protect from predators by use of hoops and protective covering.

By using the information which has been so generously offered, I have grown more generous crops of vegetables that I have never tried, had plenty to share with friends, can and freeze for future utilization, as well as share this valuable information with friends and acquaintances. I had one friend who joined and participated in this years program and have any number who wish to participate next year because of my testimonials and results.

Thank you for the way you have impacted my lifestyle and that of everyone who has had the honor of participating in this program.

God Bless You and the selfless love of the people who make all this possible.

Nancy C., Abingdon, VA

Bridge to Success



The Moorman's family has been an extreme joy to have in the program this season. When I asked for folks to share their experiences with the Grow Your Own program, the Moorman's exceeded my expectations (like they always do) and sent not one but three testimonials. The words below are of the mother of the family, Andrea.

I would say that being a part of the GYO program was one of the best things we've done together as a family. I have a passion for gardening and have tried many times in the past, but because I was learning myself as I went and making lots of mistakes in the process, I had a hard time getting my family excited about it. I either made the garden too big or tried to tackle too much and ended up burning us out. I wasn't able to make gardening fun and seem worth the effort we were putting into it.

Being a part of the GYO program helped me to just focus on the important things and not get sidetracked. Our biggest dilemma when we signed up was that we didn't have any garden beds prepared because we were on a new property. Tilling wasn't really an option because we live on the other side of a pedestrian swinging bridge which makes bringing equipment over a big challenge. But because we had a schedule to stick to and we were given plants regularly, we had the impetus we needed to get the beds made. We decided to try the "no-till" method to make it easier on us. We have lots of soil available to us on our land, so we built up. In some cases, we were just piling soil on grass as we received plants. We did our best to keep up and make the soil the best we could, but again we were limited in what we could haul across a swinging bridge. It helped so much to be told what plants to plant when and how to use supports and organic fertilizers. Given how unprepared we were when we started we have been pleasantly surprised at the harvest we have gotten. We have so much that even after canning and feeding some to our chickens and wildlife, it is still easy to share with friends and neighbors. :-)

Our family has always had a desire to use our land somehow to benefit our neighbors and our community. Being a part of the GYO program has given us a vision for how to make that possible. It is our hope that we can continue on with the program and expand our garden next year so that we can eventually open up our land to our community once we have easier access. It is our hope that we can have people come and pick produce directly from our garden and that we can share with them our excitement and the lessons learned so that they will want to grow food for themselves. It is our dream to see people of all ages and different socioeconomic backgrounds embrace the idea that they can "Grow their Own" food, regardless of the size of their land or past failures. Thanks so much for giving us this opportunity. We hope to pass it on.

Andrea, Abingdon, VA

Gardening is Joy's JOY



Meet Joy, a first year home gardener with the Grow Your Own program. This little gal embodies everything that her name means, she is outgoing, curious, and extremely smart. At only 7 years old, she dictated the letter below to her mother. Joy's thoughts on the program are written below:

It was fun. I liked going to the classes and helping sow cover crop in the GYO garden. I think both Miss Andrea and Miss Michelle did a great job. I liked how Miss Andrea put out samples for us to try and taught us about healthy eating just like my mom does. I like gardening now.

My favorite part is planting the seeds and seeing them sprout. The first thing I picked was a radish. It was huge and so much fun to pull out of the dirt. I also love pulling carrots up and finding squash. We missed one and ended up getting a HUGE zucchini. It was great harvesting potatoes too. We thought our crop failed, but we got over 50 pounds of potatoes!

Bush beans are fun to pick too. hey actually do grow like a bush and so many hang from them. The moths kept coming to our cabbage, but we were able to make sauerkraut from it. I would do this program again because I learned so much and had fun doing it with my family. I am sad we only have one more class.



Joy, Abingdon, VA

A Lot More for Less



The letter below is from another member of the Moorman's family, 14 year old Tess. This young woman is always so helpful and kind during our workshops and always has a smile on her face. Her reflections of the program are articulated in the letter below:

My parents have been trying to encourage us as children to not only learn the general school subjects like science, math, etc. but to learn the basic skills that are going to be most useful to us in life, for example growing and harvesting our own food. As with most areas in life, it's easier to do something, when it's fun. We tried gardening as a family once before several years ago, but I think, or rather I know, our family was unprepared and didn't have the experience to understand how unrealistic our goals were given the size garden we started with. We worked extremely hard planting, weeding and watering and yet in the end we had a nightmare on our hands that seemed to consume our lives. We started too big. We couldn't keep up with the weeds and we didn't know what to do about the pests because our desire was to grow our food organically. Now, that's not to say we didn't get a harvest; we got some great tasting food, but the amount of time and effort was HUGE in comparison to what we harvested and we were all very tired and discouraged.

My mom, however is not one to give up easily and she researched various growing methods that are less labor intensive. Her determination to see us succeed combined with the information, materials and schedule supplied to us through the GYO program was just what we needed. With the help of Michelle and the workshops, we were able to stay focused and on track.

The Grow Your Own program has been very helpful in making this valuable skill a time of fun and learning together as a family, as opposed to a burden with little benefit like our previous experience. I've found that gardening is a great joy, and there really is nothing quite like harvesting fresh produce from your own garden instead of going to the supermarket.

I hope to be a part of the program again, and learn and grow even more! Thank you for giving us this opportunity!

Tess

A Lot More for Less



Meet Miss Amy of Miss Amy's Childcare located in Abingdon, VA. Inspired by the Reggio-Emilia methods of play-based learning. From 22 months to 7 years of age, the children are involved in every aspect of the garden including feeding scraps to their laying hens and marketing their garden goods at the Abingdon Farmer's Market. Below is Miss Amy's review of the Grow Your Own program:

When we began this adventure 3 years ago, we were totally unaware of what a wonderful opportunity this was for us to teach the children in our care about fresh organic food. The staff of Miss Amy's has enjoyed learning all about the garden, what to plant, when, how much, what to do about pests, and fungus. We have had such a wonderful experience. We have shared this learning with parents of the children in our care who have helped pull weeds, hoe, plant things and of course pick the fruits of our labors.

We have seen children who would not try a vegetable before eat them right off the vine from the garden, and be excited about telling their mom. We planted enough carrots to feed a small army, and the children were ecstatic about pulling them!!!! The best thing I guess has been the people who help us with the program and that we get to share it with others to pass it on.

Oh and one more thing, the children are learning about selling, since we often set up a little farmers mkt. on our playground and "sell" the produce we grow. We also took an opportunity lately to actually set up at the market and sell some cucumbers, squash and carrots, we also gave out samples of gazpacho, which we made at our little school, and we used the pulp that we strained off of the mixture to serve as a dip for nacho's. We had so many people tell us how great it was. A garden is one of the best curriculum's that you can teach children at any age.



Miss Amy, Owner of Miss Amy's Childcare, Abingdon, VA

Away they Grow



Meet the YWCA TechGYRLS. Their community garden is located in downtown Bristol, TN where displaced and homeless individuals often congregate, the garden is open to all who pass by so that they may grab a bite to eat. Their leader, Tonja, has been an incredible part of the garden, attending workshops and taking the information back to the hive.

YWCA Bristol TechGYRLS needs a Grow Appalachia program to teach our youth the importance of sustainability, responsibility and a high quality work ethic. Our garden isn't used as a sole source for healthy foods, but instead, it is an extension of our classroom and provides further learning opportunities. By having our community garden on site, we are able to incorporate science, math, critical thinking skills and team building, all while providing healthy snacks and food alternatives. Our community partner, Appalachia Sustainable Development, provides us with all the loving support we need to have a successful garden and takes a personal interest in seeing our students succeed. We are happy to be a part of Grow Appalachia and thank you for providing the opportunity to our region.

Tonja, YWCA, Bristol, TN

Who "New"?



The letter below was written by a family new to this area. When I first met them, they were incredibly eager and enthusiastic to learn how to grow their own food at their new home. Both adults come from science backgrounds, so they caught on very quickly. With two small children, they have never missed a workshop, rain or shine, snow or sleet, they are there. They've been invested since the start and are always willing to give back to the program whether it be seed separating or assembling tools. Below is Missy's review of the program.

Part of our interest in the GYO was to get to know the community better and both share and learn more about gardening in this area. Coming here from a different area we weren't sure how to alter our plantings. We also really enjoyed being able to learn about organic methods of fighting disease and pests that we did not previously know about. Without the program we'd be certain to have lost a large portion of our harvest without knowing how to properly care for them. Learning about new tools and new varieties of plants has also been very beneficial. And seed saving! We have not been successful at saving seeds previously and I think we will be able to this year.

So, it was HUGE to find this program to get started with our garden in Virginia. Thank you so much to ASD and the supporters of this program!!!

Missy, Abingdon, VA

"Teach a man to fish..."



Meet Christy of Laurel Bloomery, Tennessee. As a first time market gardener, she and her family have worked tirelessly to grow and sell for market. Christy reflects on her time with Grow Your Own below:

Grow Your Own has been an awesome experience for me, it has given me so much knowledge of how to garden, and given me the confidence to give it a try. I have so appreciated everyone's willingness to answer questions and help in any way they can. Financially it has been a huge blessing, since we are just starting out in farming, we have so many expenses, and you all have helped us to get some tools we would not have otherwise been able to get, and the seeds and plants were a God send for us to be able to have enough produce at the right time to sell.

I also love the aspect of the program that teaches people how to help take care of themselves and their family. "Teach a man to fish..." i believe it is so much better to teach people how to help themselves rather than teach them to rely on other people for what they need. I think it gives people pride in themselves when they can put in an honest hard days work and provide for their family at the end of it, and that is so valuable to building the strength of a community.

Christy