

GROW Windham Launches Workshops

Submitted by Sally Milius

On Saturday, October 15, GROW Windham welcomed over 30 gardeners and farmers from Eastern CT to our new growing space in Lauter Park, Willimantic, where we learned how to build healthy soil, and applied that new knowledge to plant a row of fruit trees donated through a grant from the North Central Health District. This workshop, "Soil First: Foundations of Successful Gardens and Farms," marked the launch of two agricultural education initiatives hosted by GROW Windham, that will teach us sustainable growing practices, develop our new community garden in Lauter Park, and help us to grow a community of local gardeners and farmers who can both support each other and our local food system.

Both initiatives are free and open to the public. They include classroom trainings over the winter and hands-on workshops in the garden at Lauter Park during the growing season.

The classroom trainings are offered in partnership with UCONN Extension, which has engaged GROW Windham to serve as one of six Agriculture Learning Centers across the state. This multi-year project, funded by the USDA's Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, will enable GROW Windham to host 10 trainings over the next three years. This year's trainings, taught by Extension educators, will be hosted at CLiCK, Willimantic's

Commercially-Licensed Cooperative Kitchen, and will focus on topics selected by local farmers and gardeners. They include Hoop House Installation and Use (December 3); Soil Health and Management (January 21); Vegetable Production (February 4); and Fruit Production (February 18).

Reinforcing these classroom trainings is a series of five hands-on workshops led by the Eastern CT Conservation District that teach how to integrate key conservation principles into growing practices. These principles include soil health, which we explored together in October, and water quality, water conservation and irrigation, composting, and integrated pest management, which will be taught March-June next spring, dates TBD. The project, funded by a grant from the National Association of Conservation Districts, will support both individual growers and farmers as well as community gardens and urban agriculture programs. The project enables the ECCD to support GROW Windham to develop our new .3 acre community market garden in Lauter Park. This garden, funded by the Jeffrey P. Ossen Family Foundation and the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, will serve as a model program and a hub to integrate regional urban agriculture and community gardening programs into a community of practice that will enable us both to support each other and grow our programs.

For more information, please contact us at info@growwindham.org, 860-423-4534 x312.