



Sugartown Gardens Update

Willistown Township is teaming up with Greener Partners at Willistown's Sugartown Preserve, located between Spring and Providence Roads, to create Sugartown Gardens, an 80- by 120-foot teaching garden and 45- by 45-foot heritage fruit grove. They will be used to educate and entertain children and adults with respect to a host of sustainable agricultural, environmental, and cultural topics—and to inspire gardening in all visitors!



Members of cub pack 98 "diggin'" improving Willistown's Sugartown Preserve through planting trees. Left to right are Alice Heiman-Dowd, Sam Goldman, and Drew Schenk.

Our special thanks go to Greener Partners for investing their energies in Sugartown Gardens. We also thank Potter's Nursery and Landscaping Company and Sam Brown's Nursery for donating three native dogwood and three maple trees, respectively, and Cub Pack 98, under Willistown resident Andy Schenk's leadership, for planting the trees. It's a real community effort!

Site Preparation

As a first step in preparing the site and to manage the wild rose shrubs the meadows at Sugartown Preserve were mowed. Surprise! A couple of weeks later the noxious weeds that had been waiting to sprout, did—and they were everywhere! Said weeds included poison ivy, oriental bittersweet vine, and thistle. This put a halt to the project until the weeds can be brought under control and is evidence that farming depends upon natural elements that can often times derail efforts.

Agricultural Practices at Sugartown

Determination, however, is also a major component of farming—and determined this team is! The following practices being employed by Greener Partners will have the gardens ready for visitors next spring.

■ *Sheet-Mulching*

Just like making a lasagna, sheet-mulching is all about layering. It's a technique in which layers of compost, newspaper, leaf mold, and grass clippings are applied, keeping weeds down, attracting earthworms to better aerate the soil,

reducing erosion, and retaining moisture. The end result is a nice, crumbly, organically rich soil that will support the natural growth of healthy, nutrient-dense foods.

■ *No-Till Planting*

In the areas that are sheet-mulched, a no-till method for planting will be used. This means the plants will be put into the ground directly, and the soil will not be disturbed elsewhere. This will allow the beneficial nematodes, earthworms, and other soil-dwelling organisms to do their dirty work.

■ *Cover Cropping*

In areas with less weed pressure, instead of using the sheet-mulching technique, a cover crop of rye and clover will be planted this fall. In the spring the crop will be rolled down and left to decompose into the soil, providing a great natural source of nitrogen and other nutrients for the garden plants. No-till planting will be utilized in these areas as well.

Outreach

Meanwhile, Willistown Township and Greener Partners have been meeting with educators, local schools, and interested groups in an effort to design gardens that will illustrate their lesson plans and curriculums out in the field. Outdoor hands-on learning at its best!

If you are interested in getting involved in this wholesome, healthy, and fun effort, please contact Erin Herz of Greener Partners at ashbridgefarm@gmail.com or call 610-937-7472. ■

Okehocking Preserve Update

The Okehocking Nature Center board of directors (board), including Willistown's director of parks and recreation, Mare McLoughlin, has been hard at work for the past eighteen months on a detailed feasibility study of the proposed nature center and its location.

Board representatives interviewed members of the community, directors of other nature centers, fundraising professionals, and educators and received input from Willistown residents through numerous public meetings. They sought early input from the township's planning and historical commissions and supervisors. They discussed the proposed project at length with experts in fields ranging from traffic engineering to landscape architecture and civil engineering. The board also received a project assessment from the Social Entrepreneurship and

Community Leadership class of the Penn State master of business administration and master of leadership development program.

Simultaneously the board carried on its mission to connect people with nature by collaborating on the Okehocking Celebration Series events. The Willistown Parks and Recreation Department staff continues to seek creative ways to serve township residents. Through the nature center project (and as part of the inspiration for the project), we have brought together some outstanding programming partners, including the Upper Main Line Y, Great Valley School District, and Paoli Hospital, to help us provide entertaining and pertinent programs for Willistown residents. Engaging such partners is an efficient way for the township to provide a wide range of educational and recreational services without

hiring more staff. Meanwhile the partners are fulfilling their missions through the activities and events at Okehocking. It's a win-win for all!

As a result of these activities, it became clear that there are immediate requirements for Okehocking that include shelter, restrooms, running water, parking, and improved access. Meeting these basic needs would go a long way toward making Okehocking a welcoming location—for special program participants and casual visitors alike! The board is working with Willistown Township to provide these accommodations. See willistownparks.org for updates, and we'll see you at the next Okehocking Celebration Series event! ■

