

TEACHING GARDEN

We've all waited a long time for spring this year and at Growing Places, we're excited not just for the sun and warm weather, but for the start of our brand new pilot program: the Teaching Garden, a 14-raised bed garden within the Pierce Meadow Community Garden on Lindell Avenue in Leominster!

With small, hands-on sessions held right down in the veggies, members of the Teaching Garden have the opportunity to learn all aspects of food gardening. Teaching Garden members start from the very beginning by working to plan and plant the garden. They continue by tackling each gardening task as it comes up throughout the season—just as any gardener would do at home – but here with the support of fellow gardeners and our friendly Growing Places volunteers, Garden Gurus Connie and Heather.

Already, they've encountered their first challenge: flea beetles chomping on the young greens in the garden. Together, gardeners and Gurus are plotting their plan of attack, which, so far, involves hosing down the affected plants (flea beetles don't like water) and covering the beds with row cover to protect the seedlings until they grow large enough to withstand the beetles' munching.

It's chances like this, coming across a gardening challenge and working through it with a supportive group, that make the Teaching Garden such a special place to learn and grow. And while folks may have come to the garden for different reasons – health concerns, family activity, a passion for gardening – *everyone* is eager to learn. For those of us at Growing Places, this new model is a chance to help more people at a time, making great use of our volunteers' skills and experience. At the close of the season, all Teaching Garden members will be eligible for garden beds of their own and will hopefully continue to grow in backyard or community gardens the following year. After a season in the Teaching Garden, we know they'll be ready for it!

Nominated by Molly Peterson & Janet O'Brien

