Gardeners encourage donations of surplus crops to soup kitchens

This summer marks the start of the Delaware Master Gardeners association with Plant a Row for the Hungry. Sponsored nationally by the Garden Writers Association, Plant a Row for the Hungry encourages home gardeners to donate surplus vegetables to local food banks and soup kitchens.

“In future growing seasons, we’ll be encouraging Delaware gardeners to set aside an extra garden row specifically to feed the needy,” says Carrie Murphy, horticultural agent for New Castle County Cooperative Extension.

“But this year, we’re just asking gardeners to donate extra produce now, at harvest time.”

The Master Gardeners practice what they preach.

Murphy says that the Master Gardener demonstration plot at Bellevue State Park will soon have excess produce to donate.

And the Master Gardener demonstration garden in Georgetown already has donated a considerable amount, says Master Gardener Linda Peters.

Master Gardener Barbara Busch, who lives outside of Millsboro, was instrumental in getting the Master Gardeners and Cooperative Extension involved in the Plant a Row program.

In October, she relocated from Maine, where she was active in the York County Master Gardeners.

Each year, this group donates some 60,000 pounds of produce to the needy. Thus far, the Delaware effort can be measured in hundreds of pounds, not thousands. “But every little bit helps,” says Busch.

“So far this summer, I’ve brought 60 pounds of produce to the Christian Storehouse food bank in Millsboro.”

Busch’s backyard garden only measures 6 feet by 10 feet and is mostly planted in heritage tomatoes.

Although she has given away some of these tomatoes, the whopping share of that 60 pounds of produce was donated by area farmers.

Steven Smith, director of operations for the Christian Storehouse, says that the Master Gardeners’ efforts are appreciated, especially in light of the current economy. “The number of people we help has doubled in the last six to eight months,” says Smith.

For more information, call the Sussex County Cooperative Extension office at 302-856-7303.