

New life sprouting in community garden

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There's been a lot of talk about babies lately in my family. My sister-in-law is expecting, and my mother is ready to be a grandmother.

Well, Mom, a whole lot of little ones have just joined the brood. But their names are pepper, potato, sugar pea and roma bush bean.

I started my plot in Stayton's community garden.

I am taking a risk and starting a few seeds early. I've gone out to my plot every day to check on my plants and water them when it's been sunny.

My boyfriend, Jim, who grew vegetable gardens for years in Northern California and now owns a bakery in Waldport, showed me how to plant and what tools to buy. It was a session of Vegetable Gardening 101.

For tools, we went to Home Depot. I had to start from scratch. I bought garden gloves, a tined rake, a hoe, a trowel, a 50-foot garden hose and a hose extension tool, all for about \$75. After my plants grow bigger, I will need a soaker hose and a hand weeder. I'm not sure yet how I will compost.

For most of my plants, I decided local garden centers were best. It is easier to get local, fresher, higher-quality seeds and transplants for the same or better prices. I went to Fresh To You Produce & Garden Center in Stayton for potatoes and three varieties of pepper transplants, all for under \$7. I even got a cool potato variety that was purple all the way through.

My strategy in planning the garden has been to pick only what I like to eat and what is cheaper to grow than to buy in the store. For example, I did not get any onions because they are so cheap to buy. But the taste of fresh-grown tomatoes is more valuable to me than store-bought varieties.

I bought several books and read as much as I could. But reading about it is far different than actually putting your trowel in the ground. So having an experienced gardener to show me the ropes was very helpful.

As we worked the rocky soil and planned our rows in the community garden, neighbors drove around the corner on their way home, kids shouted as they played and we could hear the

laughter and conversation of a party in the distance. Carolyn Poe, the overseer of the garden who lives nearby, helped me out when I got stuck.

There's been a lot of talk at the coffee shops and grocery stores around town about how to bring economic vitality back to Stayton, about how best to beautify and revitalize downtown and other neighborhoods in the city. I do not know the answers to those policy questions.

But in the heart of downtown Stayton at Florence and Fourth, there will be new life sprouting soon. I can't wait to meet Pepper, Potato, Sugar Pea, and Roma Bush Bean.

I feel proud to be a part of this remarkable neighborhood resource.