

Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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Woodstock High School Green Club now in full bloom

COVID-19 slowed or halted many student organizations. But after planting figurative and literal bulbs about an outdoor activity students could enjoy with their friends, everything has come up canna lilies for the Woodstock High School Green Club.

About 4 years ago, WHS Green Club received a portion of federal grant for nutrition and physical education to help build a garden on the western edge of the high school building. The colorful oasis now brims with life including zinnias, canna lilies, tomatoes and peppers, among other plants.

Plants aren't the only things blossoming, the Green Club now boasts up to 15 members compared with the two to four students it's had over recent years. The few who participated while school buildings were closed during COVID-19, convinced many friends to join in on the fun.

"Last year it was COVID, nothing was really happening. I always had a bunch of plants in my room so this sounded fun," said Samantha Walsdorf, a WHS senior and club president.

Only two people were participating in online meetings at the time. Sandra Brainard, one of the group sponsors, sent students packages to plant at home, and Walsdorf was able to get others interested.

David Bliss, the Green Club's other sponsor, said the hands-on quality to the activities was one of the things that made participating appealing to students.

"There have been some real positives with education and technology, but students have seemed to be excited to partake and embrace the more tactile and physical aspects of working in the garden," Bliss said.

For some students, including seniors Naidelin Cortes and Robert Zawadzki, their parents' love of gardening helped spark their interest in Green Club.

"My dad also has a garden at home, he grows tomatoes, jalapenos, cilantro. Things you would buy in the market, we can just pick from the garden," Cortes said.

Brainard said it's exciting to see the club expand. Many staff members, students and residents have dropped by to express their appreciation of the garden's beauty. Students have also begun building garden beds near the school's tennis courts. This time of year, they're also focused on propagation of house plants including jade and cacti.

"Right now it's just being back together and doing something active," Brainard said. "Everything here was just a seed or a bulb and then you come back and you've got this."

Skyler Solis, a senior Green Club member, said she appreciated the educational aspect of the club, but says horticulture is more hobby than a future vocation for her.

"But I know that I'm going to be gardening for the rest of my life, so I might as well learn more about it," Solis said.