

4-H MINI-GARDEN WINNERS NAMED

October 2-8 is celebrated as National 4-H Week. While 4-H has changed tremendously since its early beginnings more than 100 years ago, the 4-H Mini-Garden program is a more traditional program that helps local youth learn about the money-saving and healthy hobby of vegetable gardening. 4-H first started as Corn Clubs for boys and Tomato Clubs for girls but soon merged into 4-H clubs that includes both boys and girls of mixed ages in the same group.

The Catawba County 4-H Mini-Garden program was started in the spring, when youth gathered at the Agricultural

Resources Center to receive a set of plants and participate in a workshop where they learned how to create a successful home mini vegetable garden with tomatoes, peppers, squash and more. According to Donna Mull, Catawba County 4-H Agent, “following the workshop, youth had the task of planting and caring for their garden over the summer months. For many families, the project became a family affair that allowed youth as well as adult to learn more about gardening and spend time together.” Barbara McAnulty, an experienced teen gardener, said, “the biggest challenge of gardening is dealing with pests that can destroy all your crops. It is frustrating to see all your hard work ruined by little insects.” Despite some challenges, most young gardeners are like Stephen and Sarah Kirby, who say “it is fun to garden so we can grow things that we can eat and cook.”

The gardens were judged by a team of Master Gardeners who visited each child’s home twice during the summer to evaluate the garden. The children also worked on a garden project book that helped them learn more about plants and practice record keeping and writing skills. Like gardening, project books are a traditional part of 4-H that reinforce essential communication skills.

The 4-H Mini-Garden project concluded in September with the announcement of mini-garden winners during a recent 4-H Celebration. Winners were selected based on-site garden judging



Front row: Sarah Kirby, Kat Stulpin, and Luran Surratt. Back row: Pat Brown (contest judge), Stephen Kirby, Gene Brown (judge), Sophia Sharp.

and 4-H garden project books submitted by participants. First year garden winners were Anna Durak, 11 years old, of Hickory and 14-year old, Sophia Sharp of Maiden. Kat Stulpin and Stephen Kirby were selected as overall winners among returning gardeners. Stulpin is 10 years old and resides in Catawba. Kirby is 11 years old and lives in Conover.

Lauran Surratt, age 9, of Hickory was also recognized as Community Garden winner. 4-H worked with Hickory Parks and Recreation to create a community youth garden at Ridgeview Recreation Center. During the summer months, children of all ages met regularly at Brown-Penn to work on the garden and learn about plants and related topics as part of their 4-H meeting time. Lauran, like other youth who grew a garden at home, also worked on a garden project based on her experience with working in the community garden. Barbara McAnulty, a 4-H teen and student at Hickory, who has participated in the gardening program for several years volunteered throughout the summer assisting the children at Brown-Penn with their garden. “The community garden provided a unique opportunity to bring together children of different ages to work on a common project and explore the hobby of gardening”, according to Mull.

4-H is offered through the NC Cooperative Extension Service and provides educational programs and clubs for children ages 5-18. For information about joining the 4-H Garden Club or other 4-H clubs, contact the Extension Center at 465-8240.