



# Green Thumbs, Healthy Joints

Carmen Fullmer  
Inetta Fluharty  
John David Johnson

West Virginia  
**AgrAbility**

April 15, 2015

# West Virginia AgrAbility Partnership

1862 Land-Grant Institution



Assistive Technology



1890 Land-Grant Institution



Non Profit Direct Service Provider



# Has “Arthur” gotten to you yet?



Over 27 million Americans have arthritis.

WV has one of the highest rates of arthritis in the country.



# Joint pain may be caused by several factors:



- Overuse of joints over time
- Working in one position for years
- Repetitive motions
- Aging
- Past injuries
- Tissue loss
- Rigorous work tasks



# Gardening as a Hobby



Gardening is one of the most popular leisure activities in the U.S.

In a 2012 study, almost half of the homeowners in the U.S. had done some gardening within the past year.



Source: “Nearly Half of All American Homeowners Give a Green Thumbs-Up to Home Improvements” at <http://scarborough.com>

# Gardening Can be Great Exercise



- Gardening works the major muscle groups
- The activity can help increase flexibility, endurance, and strength
- relaxation
- Joint flexibility
- maintaining range of motion

It's easy to overdo it, so check in with your doctor and know your limits.



# How can accessible gardening help?



# Accessible Gardening

- offers solutions that can remove barriers to gardening
- uses alternative methods, strategies, and tools for doing agricultural tasks
- creates an area where people of all ages and abilities can participate.



# Accessible gardening for any ability

- Introduces gardening as an activity for anyone who thought they couldn't garden
- Helps seasoned gardeners with limitations continue to garden
- May help prevent impairments and injuries that occur from repetitive and cumulative trauma
- Opens the door to gardening as a wellness activity after an injury



# The Green Thumbs, Healthy Joints Program is ...



an accessible gardening program. It is sponsored by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resource's Osteoporosis & Arthritis Program and administered by the West Virginia Assistive Technology System, Center for Excellence in Disabilities at West Virginia University.



# A Bit of History

- The program launched in 2007
- Originally, Green Thumbs funds were earmarked for Master Gardeners groups
- Later, the program expanded to include non-profit organizations in general



# A Seed of an Idea

- The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health Osteoporosis & Arthritis Program recognized a need.
- They attended an AgrAbility training about the benefit of accessible gardening for people with disabilities.
- This started a conversation about accessible gardening could benefit people with arthritis, osteoporosis, and joint limitations.



# Planting the Seed

- The Osteoporosis & Arthritis Program offered to provide money to the West Virginia Assistive Technology System at the Center for Excellence in Disabilities on behalf of WV AgrAbility to cultivate their ideas into creation of a new project.
- The purpose of the project was to focus on helping people with arthritis and other limitations maintain productive lives through accessible gardening.



# Nurturing the Seed

- The initial plan was to invite master gardener groups around the state to participate in building accessible gardens at a community location of their choice.
- The protocol was to offer seed money to the master gardener groups to build the accessible garden and provide ergonomic tools for use in the garden.
- The foundation of the project relied on volunteers.

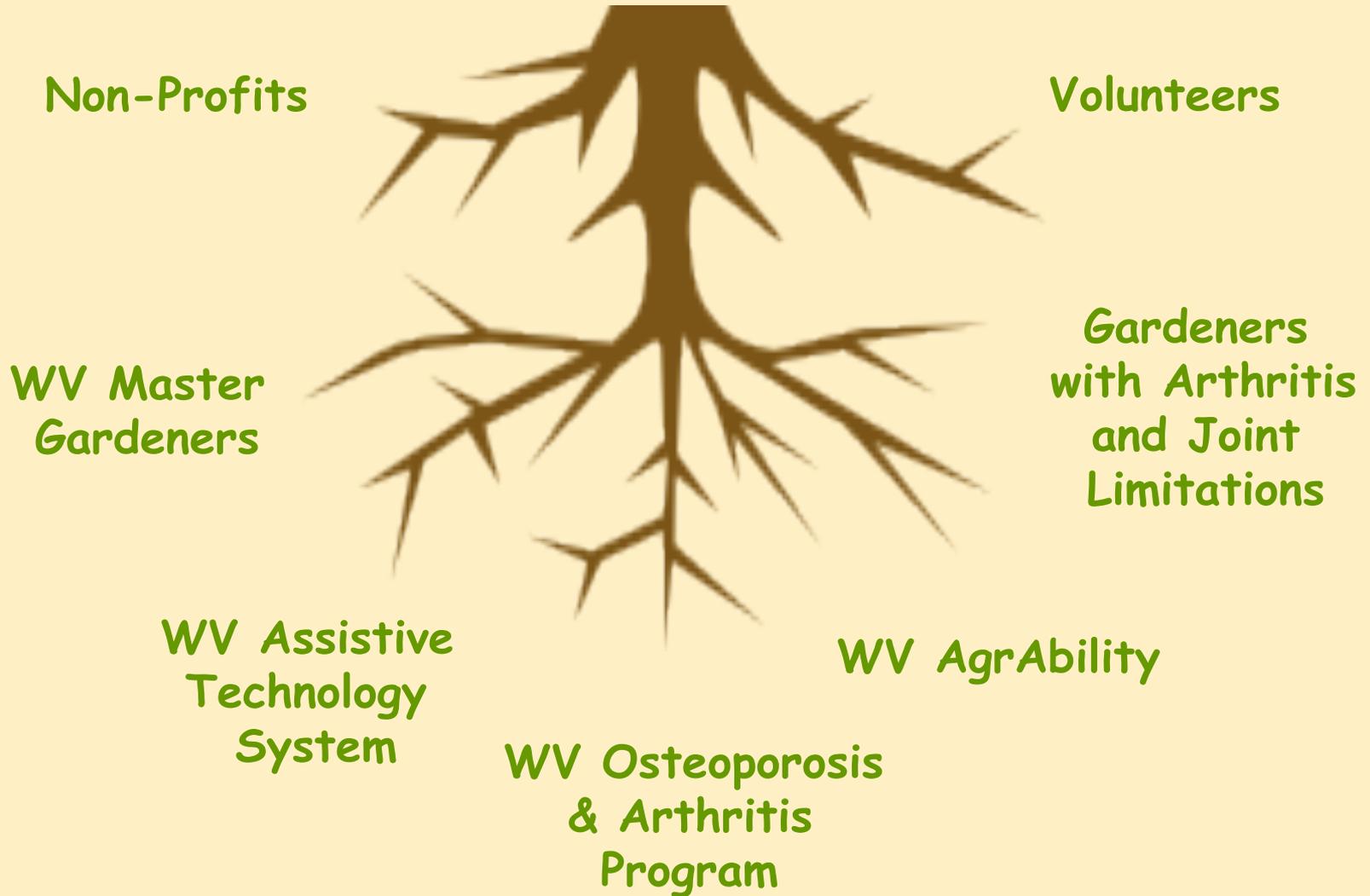


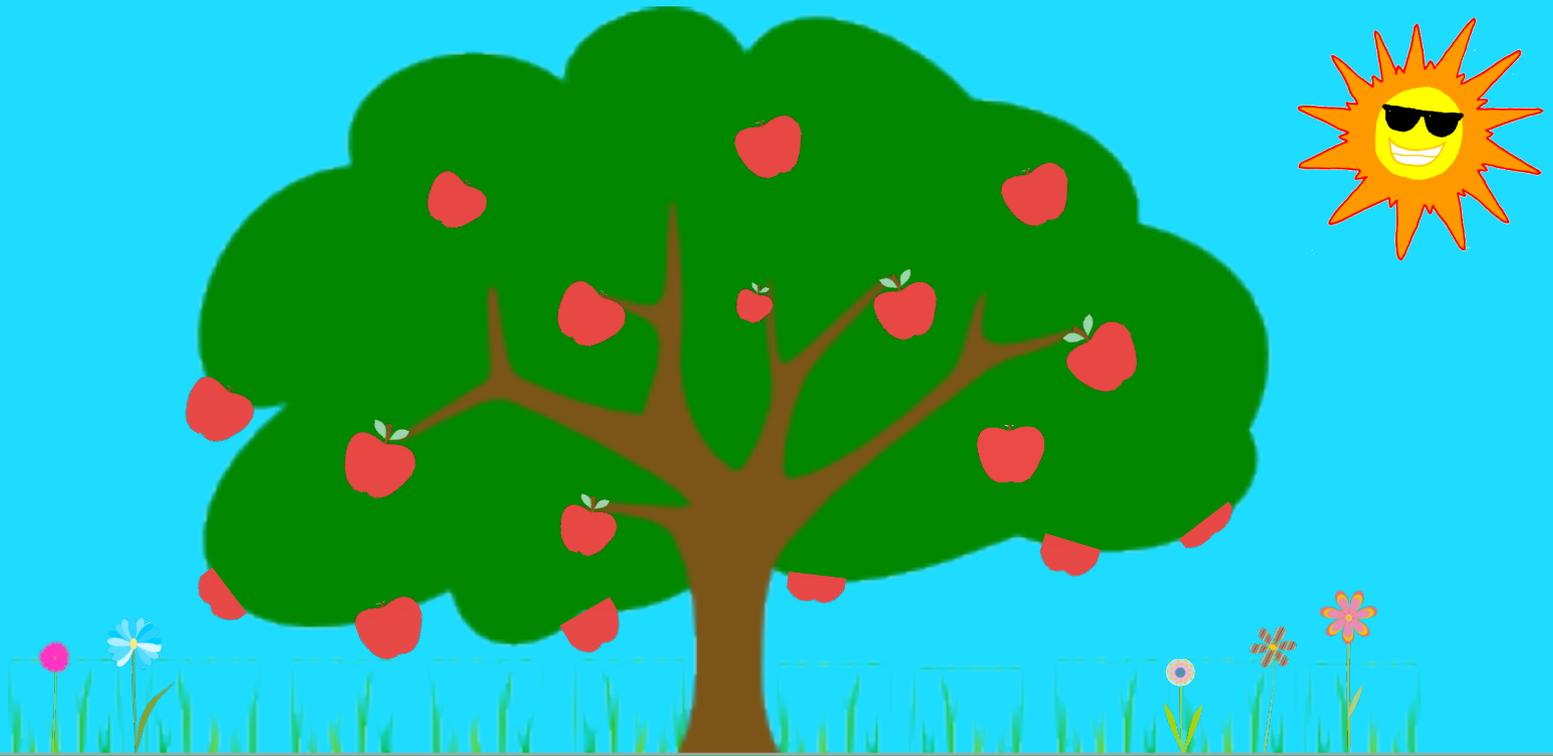
# Harvesting the Crop

- Seven master gardener groups built accessible gardens during the startup year of the project.
- These projects included a sensory garden, a butterfly garden, and raised garden beds.
- Locations for these projects included senior centers, rehabilitation hospitals, a community park, and a homeless shelter.



# The roots run deep...





Green Thumbs, Healthy Joints

# The Idea Blossoms

The Green Thumbs, Healthy Joints program has kept its roots in accessible gardening. The program has blossomed into one which now includes non-profit organizations around West Virginia.

Each year, the program gives organizations an opportunity to compete to receive a mini-grant award to build or maintain an accessible garden.



# From Flowers to Healthy Food

- The first projects were flower and ornamental gardens.
- Through the years, some groups have expanded an interest from beautifying their communities to growing and sharing healthy food, too.



# Working together with Green Thumbs, Healthy Joints



120 mini-grant gardening projects have been awarded in WV since the program started in 2007.





# To Everything There is a Season

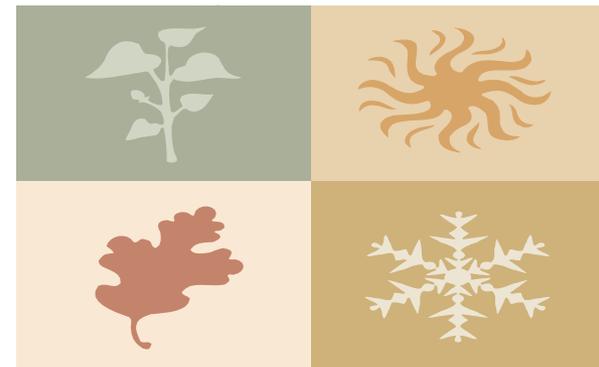
The program awards mini-grants each year to non-profit organizations around the state:

Spring: Awards are given; projects begin planting

Late Summer: An application for the next grant cycle is announced

Autumn: There is a date in the fall for when applications are due (to be announced)

Winter: Green Thumbs staff reviews applications, and selects projects for the next growing season



## Award Amount for 2015 growing season

- Each group will receive up to \$1,000.
- Between \$150-\$275 must used to buy ergonomic tools and assistive gardening devices.



# A Time for Reflection



At the end of the growing season, each group writes a final report about its experiences and successes.





*“This is a wonderful project for the seniors. They enjoy sharing ideas on planting and canning. Any project can start small and grow....”*

*~ Wayne County Community Services Organization, Inc.*

*“The Community Garden is a great project to start. It helps people in their everyday life with everything from their diet to their physical health.”*

*~ Jackson County Community Garden*

Fun for All Ages  
Any number of players



Garden  
ing

Fun for All Ages  
Players: 1+++

Inter-generational projects

# Our Home in Morgantown, WV

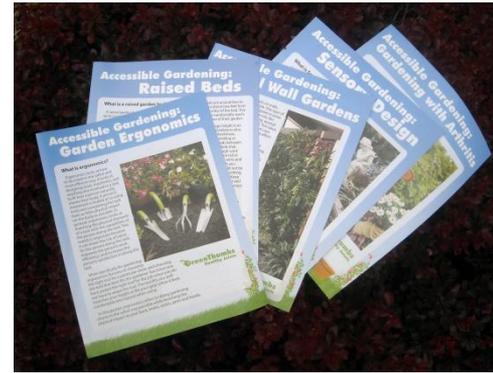


West Virginia Assistive Technology System  
Center for Excellence In Disabilities  
West Virginia University  
<http://wwats.cedwvu.org>  
800-841-8436



# Keeping up with Green Thumbs

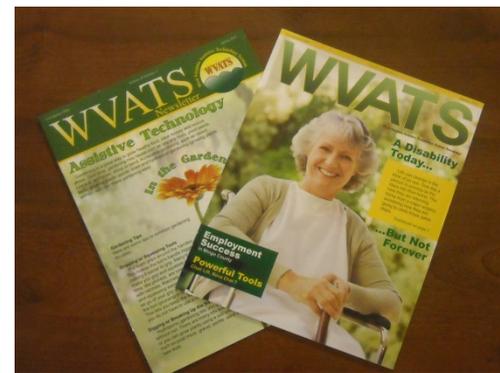
- Green Thumbs, Health Joints Fact Sheets



- Green Thumbs, Health Joints Blog



- CED newsletters and publications





Volunteers  
in Action

# What are some project examples?





**Community Resources, Inc.** (Parkersburg, WV) developed accessible neighborhood gardens in two lower income areas of Parkersburg, and shared information with the community.





**The Ohio County Master Gardeners** constructed an accessible pergola on the grounds of Peterson Rehabilitation Hospital to be used as an outdoor classroom.





**Greenbrier Valley Master Gardeners Association** (Lewisburg, WV) developed a drip irrigation and rain barrel system for raised beds in the Heritage Garden at the West Virginia State Fair Grounds.





**City of Huntington** (Huntington, WV) planned to enhance accessibility in the community gardens at the Barnett Community Center. One of its goals is to "provide neighborhood stabilization through outdoor revitalization".



# Growing Forward



Often, participants enjoy the project so much, they decide to expand on it. Sometimes this is done by:

- applying to the Green Thumbs, Healthy Joints program again another year, and/or
- seeking other community support.





## **Gateway Industries, Inc.** (Ronceverte, WV)

In 2013, Gateway completed their first project, building raised garden beds.

In 2014, Gateway partnered with the Ronceverte Development Corporation and city of Ronceverte in transforming an old pool that had been damaged by flooding. The pool was filled and raised beds were built.

The result was the Ronceverte Community Garden on Island Park.

# Q: What success stories, big or small, can you share about the project?



Tony Benedetto,  
GTHJ's Project Manager  
from Gateway Industries, Inc.

**Tony's Answer:** “My personal favorite is of the 90-year-old Ronceverte resident who wanted to participate in the garden — but couldn't initially, as there was a need for an additional raised bed, which we were having made. Each day he would... inquire,

**‘Is it ready yet?’**

He was thrilled, as were we when it finally was and he could begin his garden... he finally had a garden bed that he could call his own.”

# A Green Thumbs Profile in Success

Jackson County WVU Master Gardeners

John David Johnson

- Project Manager for the Jackson County WVU Master Gardeners Green Thumbs Project
- WVU Extension Agent

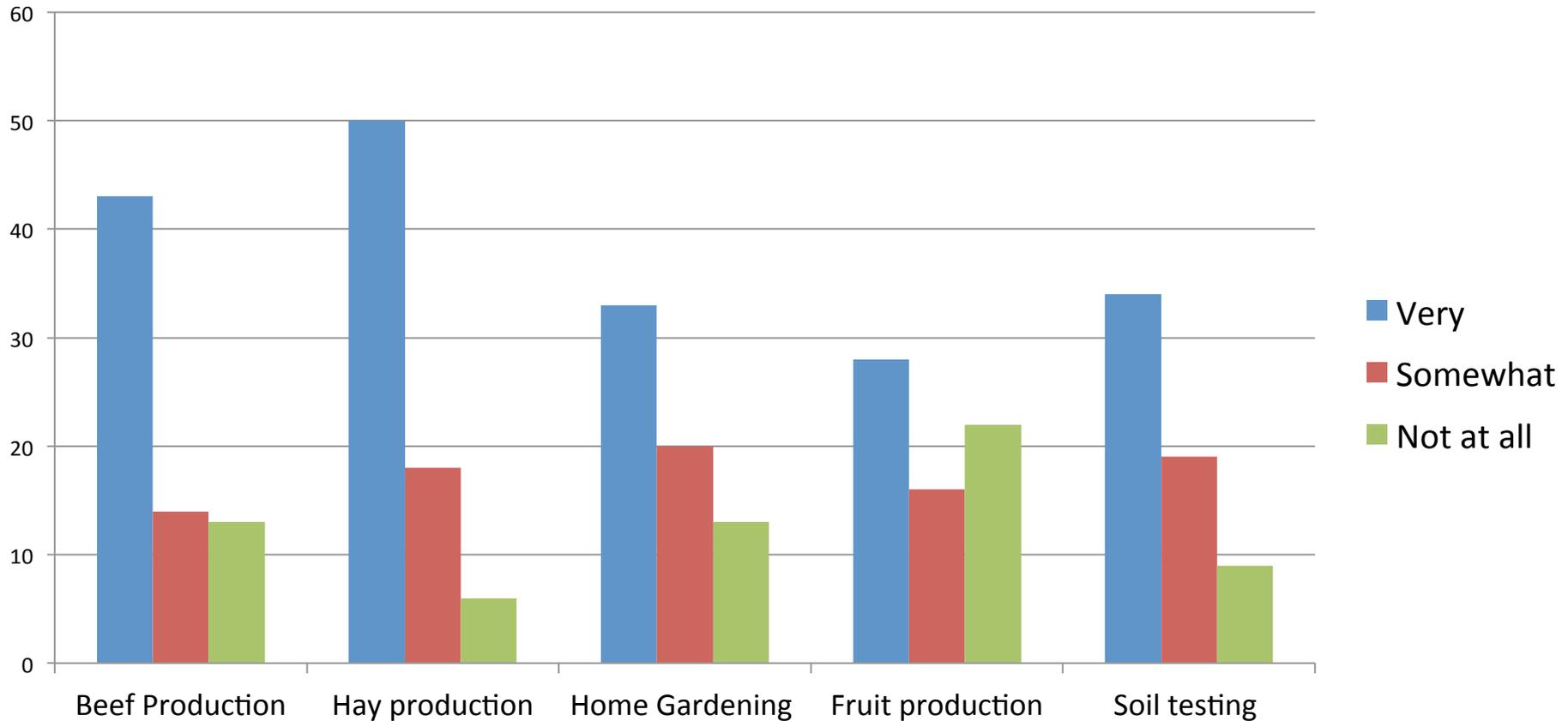


# Jackson County WVU Master Gardeners

- In 2012, Jackson County WVU Master Gardeners, Jackson County Extension, and vocational agriculture students teamed up to build two accessible community gardens. One garden is located at the Jackson County Fair Grounds and the other at the Jackson County Middle School. Each garden is open to all so everyone can have the opportunity to grow their own produce. Public education classes teach topics on vegetable production and nutrition awareness.
- In 2014, Jackson County WVU Master Gardeners created a wheelchair accessible path for its educational research high tunnel at the Jackson County Fairgrounds.



# What are the communities needs?



# Who I got on board

- County Commission
- Fair Ground Board
- Green Thumbs and Healthy Joints
- Western Conservation District
- Local Businesses
- Gardeners (advertised in local paper)
- Community Groups



# How it started



# The First Year



# Second and Third years



# High Tunnel Project



# Projects that stemmed from the Garden and HT projects





# GreenThumbs

## Healthy Joints



800-841-8436

[www.greenthumbs.cedwvu.org](http://www.greenthumbs.cedwvu.org)

