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curriculum materials needed to pilot the program at Two Rivers.

This year, the prison was able to supply the inmates with 12 raised garden beds, where they could physically prepare the soil, plant seeds, pull weeds, water their plants and watch everything grow. Last year, the course was only offered as an instructional tool without the hands-on opportunity.

"We had to have it inside the fences so we could provide everyone in the program the opportunity to work in the garden," Martinez said. "All understood that it was going to be challenging. The goal was for everybody in the class, regardless of clearance, could go out and work."

Martinez said the course is offered once a year and it is mostly the inmates' responsibility to work their way through and learn all of the materials to complete the program.

"About 95 percent of it is totally on them," he said. "They are responsible for doing the homework, the leg work and reading up on the materials."

Throughout the approximately 13-week course, inmates study program manuals, watch weekly video lectures and take a series of module quizzes that teach

them all the basic gardening essentials, from preparing gardening soil, planting, plant diseases, composting, good versus bad insects and more. Inmates who pass a final exam at the end of the program with a score of 70 percent or better are also presented with a certificate of home horticulture at the institution.

"It was a (great) opportunity to watch a video and then go out and use the equipment," inmate Jason Winebarger said. "We were out at the garden every day weeding, watering and, now, harvesting."

The inmates planted a variety of vegetables, including tomatoes, garlic, beans, cilantro, peppers, pumpkin, cucumber, zucchini and more. They also planted marigold flowers, which attract insects that are beneficial to the garden.

The inmates also experimented with seeds of fruits and vegetables given during meal times.

Inmate Cody Bailey said they were able to grow a couple of different fruit and vegetables that way.

Martinez said the goal of the program is to teach the inmates valuable skills about gardening while contributing something to the community. He said, eventually, program



MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO
Two Rivers Correctional Institution inmates in the master gardening program have worked over the past couple of months to grow a large garden. Many were amazed to see how planting a single pumpkin seed could grow a plant as large as the one pictured.

organizers want to donate the fruit and vegetables grown in the garden to non-profit agencies in the region.

Winebarger said, in the past, the gardens have yielded as much as 75-pound harvests full of vegetables and fruit in a single harvest day.

None of the food items, however, have gone to waste.

Bailey said building and managing his own garden has given him a love for vegetables he never had before.

"Before, I never ate any vegetables, but there is a say-

ing that if you grow your own, it tastes better," he said. "It must be true because I've grown fond of vegetables now. I've eaten more cucumbers now than I have in my entire life."

Winebarger said the inmates tried to keep the garden as organic and natural as possible.

He said they needed a little bit of help with Miracle-Gro at the beginning because the soil they were provided with was mainly sand, however the rest of the process was done as natural as possible.

"We were taught to recognize insects that are beneficial to the garden," he said. "I had a gardening background before, but my approach was to spray everything. Now, I use good insects instead of the harmful chemicals."

Bailey said because the garden is so important to him, he was very protective of it at first, and it was hard for him to share with everyone.

"I was so over-protective," he said. "(This) really taught me the value of sharing and communication. I can't own it. I have to share. I even had

to go up to Jason (Winebarger) later and say 'look man, I'm sorry.'"

Winebarger said if inmates didn't have people skills before, they learned them fast.

Winebarger said the program is also helping him prepare for his life after he gets out of prison.

"I tremendously enjoyed it," Winebarger said. "It sparked an interest in me. I am looking into agriculture classes when I get out and pursue a college career."

He said that is perfect for him because, as a felon, he will hold a stigma upon release that is going to make it hard to find work. The program, however, gives him useful skills that demonstrate he wasn't just sitting around while he was serving his time.

Bailey said he has already been offered work gardening and landscaping when he is released in October because of what people have seen of the garden at the prison.

"There are a lot of guys interested now in the program because they have seen what we've done out here," he said. "People compliment the garden all the time."

Bailey said the garden also provides the chance to add a bit of color to the institution.

"It takes away from the straight landscape," he said. "We've got a lot of color out here."