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Tulsa library seed program grows to 4 branches; hosts plant swap

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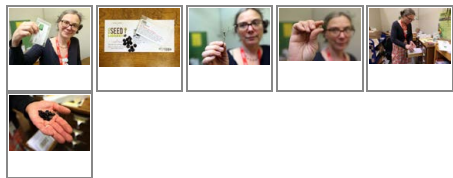
Posted: Friday, April 29, 2016 1:00 pm

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Johanna Burton, editor of Tulsa organizations and services, oversees the seed program through Tulsa City-County Library. She works at the library's research center where she can sort through seed packets, package and label them for check out through any of the libraries. CORY YOUNG/Tulsa World

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BY JESSICA RODRIGO World Scene Writer | 0 comments

It's prime growing season, whether its flowering plants, herbs, fruits or vegetables.

And if you're not quite sure you want to fully commit to gardening, the Tulsa City-County Library has you covered with its seed program.

TCCL launched its Seed Library in 2014 at two library branches, Glenpool and Suburban Acres, and has since added two more to the program, said Johanna Burton, who coordinates the program. The Zarrow Regional Library and Nathan Hale Library help to cover the north, south, east and west areas of Tulsa.

"It's been growing by leaps and bounds," she said. "All over the country these programs have been growing."

Seed programs are not new to library systems, but they're gaining popularity as people are becoming more interested in growing their own produce, she added.

The TCCL online catalog features 182 seeds to choose from, including flowers, herbs and edible varieties. And if people are interested in something the library doesn't have, Burton can order seeds from other seed saving programs.

Gardening programs

Plant Swap

What: TCCL Seed Library and Tulsa Seed Common is hosting an event where library

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members and the public can come and learn more about the seed program and share any plants, seeds, bulbs, tools or garden equipment. People will also be able to checkout seeds from the libraries collection and connect with area growers for tips or answers to their questions.

When: Saturday, April 30, 1-4 p.m.

Where: Kendall-Whittier Library, 21 S. Lewis.

Cost: Free

More information:
guides.tulsalibrary.org/tulsaseedlibrary

Bucket Gardens

What: Plants can be grown in all sorts of containers including buckets. The program will show to use buckets for gardening and attendees will be able to take home a bucket.

When: Saturday, May 21, 1-2 p.m.

Where: Glenpool Library, 730 E. 141st St.

Cost: Free, but R.S.V.P is required.

Information: 918-549-7617

Seed-saving tips

Grow your garden.

Choose your best plants - strongest, tastiest, prettiest or most productive - and let them to seed and ripen fully.

Collect seeds when ripe.

Fermentation-process seeds from wet fruits, like tomatoes, by soaking the seedy pulp 2-3 days in a jar of water, then rinsing.

Dry all seeds completely.

Store in any handy container and label.

One limitation to the program is that it cannot maintain bulbs, onions, cuttings or other supplies. That's why the Seed Library is hosting its first Plant Swap event at the Kendall-Whittier Library on Saturday. The event is open from 1 to 4 p.m. to library and community members who are interested in learning more about the program and sharing their knowledge or pass-along plants.

"Once you've been gardening for a while, you end up with way too much," she said. "People can bring plants they want to give someone else a chance to grow."

It's also an opportunity for people to learn more about gardening from people who might have been doing it for a while, including Burton. She plants vegetables in her own yard and also has a bed in a community garden where she's planted program seeds.

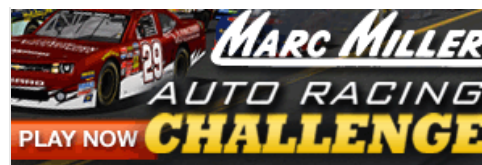
The seed program was created to lower barriers for people who have considered starting a garden, but don't have means to buy the materials to do it. Start up costs for gardening can be expensive with a potential for no return on the investment. Materials are the biggest hurdle to gardening.

"There are people who can't afford it, and this provides access (to seeds) for everyone," she said. "There's also a social commitment to sharing seeds and growing tips, maintaining heirloom varieties and growing traditions culturally."

Some popular seeds checked out from the program include Asian greens, cilantro and collard greens.

Jesse Weitenhagen, site manager for the Glenpool Library, shared a story about one library member who was searching for a particular variety of mustard greens he couldn't find through area markets. So he checked out every packet he could to experiment with the varieties.

"When he got the opportunity to plant some of those seeds, he jumped right in,"



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Weitenhagen said.

Check outs from the seed library are not subject to penalties or late fees, but check outs are limited to five packs per season. To keep the program growing, members are encouraged to return seeds not planted or seeds that were successful in the garden. People can also leave feedback on each of the seeds through the library's online catalog.

Weitenhagen said the program has already checked out as many seeds so far this year as it checked out in all of 2015.

"This is will be our third year in the distributing seeds, and the community's interest has been really strong. The numbers have been bigger and bigger," he said.

At the Glenpool Library, the seed display is the first thing people see when they walk through the doors. The library's location itself could be one reason for the seed program's success. A lot of people in the area have land to cultivate seeds, Weitenhagen said.

But that's not to say people who live in urban neighborhoods or apartments can't participate. Throughout the growing season, the seed library locations host gardening workshops on topics such as container gardening.

"I admire the ingenuity of the urban homesteader," Burton said. "I'm super impressed with how happy and willing people have been to check out seeds they wouldn't normally check out."

Burton said the more information people can share about the seeds they check out the more she can adjust the library's catalog to eliminate or add different varieties that will grow well in Oklahoma's climate. Bringing back seeds from plants grown from the seed program will help grow a strong heirloom collection for members of TCCL to share for generations.

Weitenhagen added that although the Glenpool Library is one of the Seed Library locations, all the seeds are available through the TCCL online catalog and can be requested just like any of the books or media the library has to offer.

"If you're interested in growing something of your own, just put it in the ground and see what happens," he said. "It's a great time to look at getting into it."

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