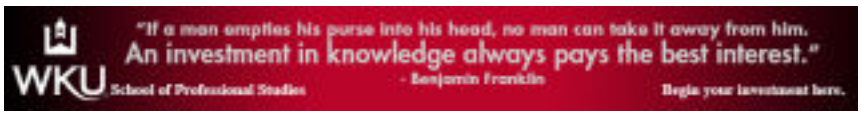
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Warren County ‘seed’ libraries blossoming

CAROLINE EGGERS ceggers@bgdailynews.com 6 min ago

Lush sunflowers, fragrant basil, resplendent cucumbers – there are endless ways to fill a garden.

To help inspire a new generation of gardeners, Warren County Public Library is offering an assortment of plant seeds through its “seed libraries.”

“If you’re looking to start a garden at home, look no further than the library,” said Laura Beth Fox-Ezell, the library's educational delivery services coordinator.

Library patrons can select five seed packets a day during spring and summer, or until supplies last. To “check out” the seeds, people go to the circulation desk and follow a similar process to checking out a book – only you keep the seeds.

“We just want them to take the seeds home and plant them,” said Fox-Ezell, who founded the seed libraries in 2017 after gaining inspiration from Nashville’s public library system as well as Western Kentucky University’s seed library.

It started with two small seed libraries, and now all four library locations have programs with donations from seed companies and local farmers.

County residents, from children to the elderly, are increasingly utilizing the seed libraries. Since February, when the seed libraries reopened, residents have checked out more than 700 seed packets.

“We haven’t even been open a month,” Fox-Ezell said, though the busiest planting season runs between March and April.

In addition to the seeds, the library offers books on gardening, planting tips at warrenpl.org/seedlibrary/tips, and occasional classes.

For first-time gardeners, picking out seeds can be fun, according to Martin Stone, professor of horticulture at WKU and director of the Baker Arboretum.

“The absolute cheapest way to start a garden is to put seeds in,” he said.

Flowers and herbs are popular garden choices from the seed libraries, but there is a devoted movement of backyard food growers, according to Fox-Ezell.

Stone believes digging into the dirt is an instinct wired into human DNA.

“There are few things in life more satisfying than growing your own food, and eating your own food,” he said.



Stone and his wife grow blueberries, figs, squash and more. He doesn’t have a squared-off plot specifically for vegetables, but instead integrates the produce into the rest of his garden – as he thinks anyone can do.

Gardening can improve people’s health through exercise, nutrition and “dirt therapy.” If you pick vegetables straight from the stem, and put them on your dinner plate a half-hour later, that’s about as nutritious as it gets, according to Stone.

“Vegetables lose their nutritional value the longer they have been picked,” Stone said, though vegetables can be frozen to preserve that nutrition. “In lieu of a gym membership, people could invest in gardens.”

The community gardeners are encouraged to save seeds from their harvests and donate seeds back to the library.

Seed saving is an essential practice with heirloom produce, which is mostly unique to small-scale gardens. Groceries demand perfection, while heirloom produce doesn’t last long and is “a little ugly," but it’s tastier than hybrid seed produce, according to Stone.

It’s not required, but it’s fairly easy to save and share seeds, according to Stone.

“That’s the nature of gardeners, to share plants, to share seeds and to share ideas,” he said.

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Caroline Eggers

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