

Harvest of Hope Community Garden Cultivates Food, Friendship, and Support in Kingsport (Contributed) (published 2026-06-27)

Founded in 2011, the garden continues to expand access to fresh food while bringing volunteers and gardeners together.

The Kingsport Harvest of Hope Community Garden is a welcoming space with raised beds on land generously provided by First Presbyterian Church in Kingsport. Open to anyone who would like to grow fresh produce, it has become a place where neighbors can learn new skills, share what they grow, and support one another through a shared love of gardening.

Founded in 2011 as the first project of United Way's Safety and Stability Vision Council and the Food Security Initiative, the garden began with a simple but meaningful goal: to help feed and support neighbors experiencing homelessness. AARP and other community partners helped make that vision possible, and over the years the project has continued to reflect the generous spirit of the organizations and volunteers who helped start it.

That spirit of giving continues today. Gardeners are encouraged to share extra produce with local food ministries such as Kitchen of Hope, the Salvation Army, and Second Harvest Food Bank. At the same time, garden plots are available to anyone on a first-come, first-served basis, making this a place where both growing and giving can happen side by side. In that way, the garden serves not only as a source of fresh food, but also as a small but meaningful example of neighbors helping neighbors.

What began in 2011 with just 25 shallow raised beds has grown into a thriving garden with 91 beds, many now as deep as 16 inches. About 75% of the beds are currently in use. Many gardeners live nearby in apartment communities and have little or no space to grow food at home, while others gladly make the trip from as far away as Jonesborough to take part. Several beds are designed to be easier to access, helping make the garden useful to a wider range of community members.

In addition to free raised beds, gardeners can use free water made possible through donations, compost purchased in bulk from Down to Earth in Johnson City, and free vegetable plants and seeds generously provided by Evergreen of Colonial Heights and Silver Lake Garden Center in Church Hill. When there is interest, we also offer spring, summer, and fall classes that help gardeners learn and grow together using research-based guidance from Extension Service scientists. Topics have included raised-bed gardening, seasonal planting, and practical ways to get the most from limited space. We also keep an eye on how gardeners are doing and offer one-on-one guidance when extra support is needed.

This year, we were grateful to once again take part in the "SeedMoney" grant program, which helped us raise additional support through crowdfunding and provided a \$300 challenge grant. Support like this is especially important because the garden depends on donations and volunteers rather than paid staff, allowing resources to go directly toward maintaining and improving the space.

These funds have helped us buy treated lumber and screws to repair or rebuild raised beds that have worn down over time. We also need additional crushed rock to strengthen thin spots in the aisles and make the walkways easier to maintain. Volunteers are always welcome to help spread the rock, which must be moved by hand using wheelbarrows. Even small acts of help can make a real difference in keeping the garden safe, useful, and welcoming.

Northeast Tennessee Master Gardeners have been faithful supporters of this project from the very beginning. Their grant program has helped fund the rebuilding of many beds, but because repairs are

ongoing, all 91 beds are not always available at the same time. While we have not needed a waiting list yet, that may change in the future. We are also grateful for any extra help with mowing and weeding, especially outside the main gardening season when the surrounding areas need a little more shared attention. Like the garden itself, this work depends on a steady spirit of cooperation and care.

If you would like to garden with us or lend a hand in caring for the space, please email netmga2017@gmail.com. We would love to welcome you and are always glad to see new gardeners, volunteers, and supporters become part of this ongoing community effort. Whether you can plant, weed, water, or simply help spread the word, there is a place for you in the garden.