

Monmouth County Master Gardeners Class of 2010 spreads it thick Season's last rite: Manure

By JOSEPH SAPIA • STAFF WRITER • November
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FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP — When their final harvest is done in the next few days, the Monmouth County Master Gardeners Class of 2010 will have provided more than one ton of home-grown produce to the needy.

On Saturday, 20 or so master gardeners from this year's class and previous ones were "spreading the wealth" among themselves as Diane Larson, the Rutgers University Cooperative Extension local horticulturist who runs the program, described the

goings-on outside the county Agricultural Building. The currency? "Black gold," Larson said. To nongardeners, the stuff they were ankle-deep in was, uh, well . . . horse manure.

It was a manure-spreading party, an end-of-harvest rite that prepares two approximately 40-foot by 50-foot gardens for over-wintering.

The Class of 2010 had already planted garlic — a "legacy crop," per tradition — for the Class of 2011. And it still had to pick a final harvest of radishes, beets, turnips, cabbage, lettuce and kale, scheduled for Monday, to be delivered to the Freehold Area Open Door food pantry for the needy.

So, on this last weekend before 25 members of the Class of 2010 graduate Thursday — from the program run by Rutgers, Brookdale Community College and the county Park System — it was a good time to shovel the uh, well . . . horse manure. "It adds nutrients and adds to the capacity of soil to hold onto those nutrients," Larson said.

"It doesn't have to be horse manure," she added. "Anytime you add any kind of organic matter to the soil, you'll have a better garden. If you get your (falling) leaves, you can mow them up or chop them up and add them to your garden bed."

Here, it was horse manure — four dump truck loads, or at least a \$600 value considering product and transportation, donated by Bella Rosa Riding Academy in Howell. It being horse manure, there were jokes.

"I think that Yuengling (beer) went right through him," said Bob Strempek, 52, of Howell, noticing a green beverage bottle in the manure mix. "A plastic bag or a large horse condom," said Candice Burke, 40, of Colts Neck, noticing plastic debris.

More than likely debris mixed in with the horses' bedding material, rather than items ingested by a horse, Larson said. But Larson was not above joking either. "What goes in comes out," she said.

Piles of manure were spread about, near the garden for the needy, a teaching garden for youth gardeners and a shrub island. The manure had no smell, because Bella Rosa's material is well-composted, Larson said.

"They turn it a lot, which makes it go faster (into decomposition)," Larson said. The turning over of the compost generates heat from microorganisms breaking down, Larson said. In turn, the heat kills off weed seeds, meaning a cleaner mix is added to the garden, Larson said.