

## WCU Unsung Hero: Garden Volunteer Heather MacQueen



*Heather MacQueen, at left, seen here with Luke Rosanova and Joan Welch, is a frequent volunteer in WCU's Outdoor Classroom and Demonstration Garden.*

Early on a July morning, Heather MacQueen was walking through WCU's Outdoor Classroom and Demonstration Garden when she spotted a weed in the arugula bed. Moments later, in a flash of sparkly, purple manicured fingers, that weed was history.

MacQueen was on her way to her office in the geography department so

she couldn't stop and do more. But, later, after this administrative assistant called it a day, she would return to the garden in grubby garden clothes, volunteering her time to pull weeds, water thirsty plants, pick tomatoes, or "whatever else needs to be done," she said.

MacQueen has only been employed by the University since November but already exemplifies WCU's culture of service, which encourages everyone – employees, as well as students – to regularly set aside their own needs and commitments and volunteer for the greater good.

"I come here after work and also stop by at lunchtime to help," she said. "My youngest son, who is 12, likes to work in the garden with me. And I also brought another secretary's granddaughter out here to help one day."

"I love getting my hands dirty. I just use a toothbrush to get those hard-to-reach places under my nails," she added, with a broad smile and glance down at her perfect manicure.

"Staff employees like Heather are the garden's lifeblood in the summer when most students and many faculty are gone," said geography professor Joan Welch, who was instrumental in developing the garden seven years ago. "During the academic year, I am out here with three different classes. Other professors frequently use the garden for teaching purposes, too. We can keep up with the garden then, but now, when the plants are most prolific, we have just one paid intern. Staff volunteers are critical to our success."

This summer the garden intern is Luke Rosanova, a May graduate who will begin a master's in geography at WCU this fall. "It's been awesome to have Heather's help," said Rosanova. "She has mulched beds, pulled weeds, applied organic pesticide, pulled Japanese beetles off plants, and basically does everything she can to keep the garden looking great."

The Outdoor Classroom and Demonstration Garden was designed to promote an appreciation of the region's native plants and wildlife. Species such as red chokeberry, Joe Pye weed and berry bushes attract native birds, pollinators, insects and small mammals. The vegetable and herb garden, where Rosanova and MacQueen focus most of their time and energy, was added a few years after the Demonstration Garden opened. Plants currently being harvested include 10 herbs and 26 different fruits and vegetables, from the expected – tomatoes and lettuce – to the decidedly different – tatsoi and hops. Fifteen other crops either have already been harvested, like strawberries, or aren't in season yet, such as potatoes. While many of the vegetable and herb species are, admittedly, not native, they are a source of locally grown, chemical-free produce for University employees and others.

“We distribute produce in the geography department, and leave out a “help yourself” bin by the garden entrance,” said Rosanova. This year, the garden will be doing even more good, by teaming up with the South Campus Community Garden to donate produce to the Chester County Food Bank.

MacQueen has a garden at home that also keeps her busy, but WCU's Outdoor Classroom and Demonstration Garden is very much a labor of love. “My oldest son graduated from WCU in 2014, my middle son starts here this September, and I have been thinking about taking classes, too,” said MacQueen. “This University is an important part of my life, beyond my job. It feels good to be involved and to make a contribution.”