

Promise of Peace Community Garden inspires nationwide award

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By BETSY FRIAUF / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

A community garden near White Rock Lake created with neighborhood schoolchildren in mind has helped inspire Burpee to start an awards program supporting similar vegetable plots all over the United States.

The national seed company will accept applications until Dec. 3, 2010 for next year's "I Can Grow" Youth Garden Award. The winners may be established or start-up urban school and community gardens. They will receive up to 500 vegetable and herb plants, up to \$2,500 in garden supplies and on-site help from Burpee experts in laying out and planting the garden.

Applicants must show well-developed and staffed plans for a youth-centered educational program, with an emphasis on nutrition and food production, environmental awareness and social responsibility. Eligible groups include schools and youth educators, community centers or organizations and youth groups.

The number of winners will depend on the quality and quantity of applications, but Burpee expects to choose between five and 10, according to a company spokeswoman.

Dallas' Promise of Peace Community Garden at 7446 Grand Ave. East was established this year by DISD teacher Elizabeth Dry and a group of volunteers, with help from Burpee in the form of 20 raised beds, soil and vegetable transplants. What Dry describes as a former trash-ridden lot produced hundreds of pounds of okra this summer, plus herbs, strawberries, tomatoes and bell peppers.

"We've had unbelievable community support," Dry says. Donations include a storybook playhouse, tool shed, greenhouse, outdoor stage and wrought-iron fence.

Dry is proud of helping kids learn to grow food with programs like Junior Master Gardeners, but she emphasizes that getting children involved in their community is also important.

"We have kids from more than 10 schools, families from over 12 different neighborhoods," she says.

The Promise of Peace gardeners have big dreams. Their next major project is a capital campaign to buy their land.

"We want to have a building with an industrial kitchen and a huge dining table for farm-to-table events," Dry says.

The "I Can Grow" Youth Garden Award application is available at www.burpee.homegardens.com.