

# KALE YEAH! Gardening For Wellness

Emily Zobel\*<sup>1</sup>, Lynn Matava<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Maryland Extension; \*ezobel@umd.edu

## Background & Goals

Exposure to plants, green space, and gardening has many mental, physical, and social benefits. Gardening increases exercise, reduces stress, and allows for skill development, creative expression, sensory stimulation, a sense of productivity, and social connections (Thompson, 2018). The program “Kale Yeah!” allowed patients at the Eastern Shore Hospital Center (ESHC), a mental health facility located on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the opportunity to plant, grow, harvest, and sell leafy greens and brassica crops. University of Maryland Extension (UME) Extension Agent Emily Zobel managed the program with the help of Master Gardener volunteers and ESHC staff.

**The program aimed to increase participants' sense of productivity and self-satisfaction by growing vegetable crops that could be eaten or sold.**



Image 1 ) Participants watering broccoli plants. Photo by E.Zobel.

“There's nothing better than getting your hands dirty while gardening. It is even better with other people who are enjoying it with you. Kale Yeah is just that -- enjoying others while learning about gardening.”  
- Program Volunteer Joy G.



Image 3 ) Extension Agent Lynn Matava teaching about the health benefits of broccoli (left). Participants then made broccoli pesto using the broccoli they grew (right). Scan the QR code for recipes. Photos by E.Zobel.

### Work Cited

Thompson R. Gardening for health: a regular dose of gardening. Clin Med (Lond). 2018 Jun;18(3):201-205. doi: 10.7861/clinmedicine.18-3-201. PMID: 29858428; PMCID: PMC6334070.

## Outcomes

At the facility's request, no formal survey was given to the participants. Outcomes are based on feedback from the participants about what they learned and feedback from volunteers and staff who helped with the program.

### Statements from the participants about what they learned:

- “I learned there are different types of soil and potting soil. They all have a different feeling to them.”
- “I never knew broccoli became a flower.”
- “I learned how to massage kale today.”
- “I never knew what kale seeds looked like.”
- “I like being able to eat what we grew.”

“I think this class is really good for the patients. They are learning and opening up more since the class is hands-on. They have their own space. I have also learned a lot while helping with the program. My family and I have made all the recipes at home.”  
- T. Askins, ESHC Program Staff



Image 4 ) Participant harvesting broccoli.

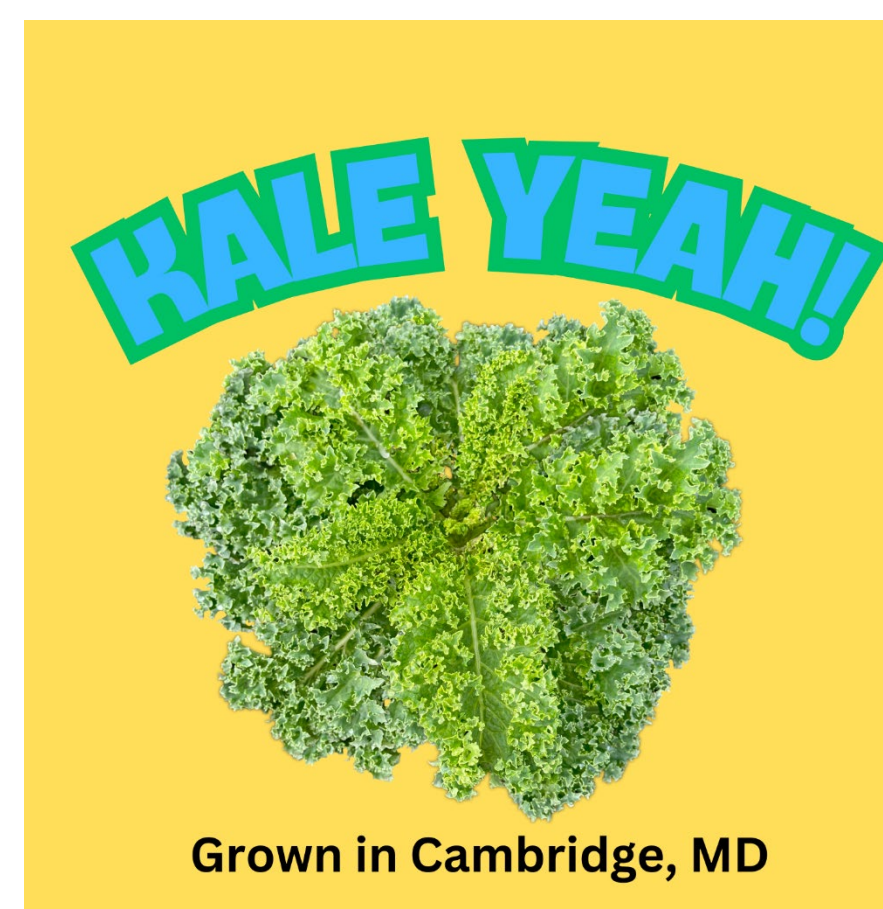


Image 5 ) “KALE YEAH!” logo designed by participants.

“Interacting with the patients and watching their pride in seeing their seeds and plants grow is the highlight of my week.”  
- Program Volunteer Linda C.

## The Program

- Each session ran for 10-13 weeks, with the class meeting weekly for 1 hour. Two sessions were held between September 2024 and March 2025.
- During the sessions, participants planted, grew, and harvested a variety of cool-season crops, including kale, broccoli, and baby leaf lettuce (Images 1, 2, and 4).
- Participants started each class by doing garden stretches to help with physical health and mobility.
- Participants learned about food safety to ensure what they harvested was safe to eat.
- They designed their own “KALE YEAH!” food label (Image 5) to place on bags of kale and broccoli leaves, which they sold to ESHC staff (Images 2 & 6).
- During both sessions, UME Extension Agent Lynn Matava gave a cooking demonstration so the participants could learn basic cooking skills while enjoying dishes made from the produce they grew (Image 3).



Image 2 ) Participants harvesting (left) and packaging (right) their kale in zip-lock bags to sell to hospital staff and volunteers. Photos by E.Zobel

“Seeing the excitement in the patients; learning how to grow then eat the vegetables they have grown.”  
- Program Volunteer Lisa Z.



Image 6 ) Kale Yeah! Bags, which held 10-12 kale leaves were sold for \$1 each to volunteers and hospital staff (left). Hospital staff with their bags of kale (right). Photos by E.Zobel

## Future Program Plans

The program will continue in the spring. In addition to cool-season crops, participants will grow flowers and summer vegetable transplants for the local community garden and a spring plant sale.