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Even seasoned gardeners get a kick-start from boot camp

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A By **Special to the Hillsboro Argus**

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Courtesy Ann Nickerson

Jenna Bayer (right) shows former Hillsboro Police Chief Lila Ashenbrenner where to dump the soil for a raised bed during a garden boot camp.

Last year I stepped back into the vegetable gardening world by helping our son plant his raised beds. I guess I was a little rusty on my placement, because we had vegetables growing on top of each other.

So last month I attended **Garden Boot Camp**. I wasn't sure what to expect, but it was both informative and entertaining.

Our teacher was **Jenna Bayer**, a landscape architect of more than 18 years, who was a fun and interesting teacher.

We focused on building and planting a raised bed for vegetables. First, we talked dirt. We have wretched clay for soil here on the west side. It's best not to fill a raised bed with it. Even mixed with garden compost, it seems to revert back to heavy clay.

Jenna recommends a mix of sandy loam, compost, pumice, peat moss and mycorrhizae (helpful fungi.) Dave at **Pro-Gro in Sherwood** sells Jenna's Wonder Soil in

bulk. You can order it at 503-682-3500.

Jenna uses metal brackets, pressure-treated wood that is cut to size at the lumber yard, and a few screws to build an 8-by-4-foot raised bed in a half-hour. Guess what I'm going to install in my new community

garden plot!

After building the bed, former Hillsboro Police Chief Lila Ashenbrenner, another boot camp attendee, drove a big tractor and dumped the premixed soil into the raised bed. Boy, was I envious.

We then talked about spacing the plants. Jenna divided the bed into three sections lengthwise -- the middle section was about 2 feet wide and the side sections about a foot wide. We planted larger plants like tomatoes, Brussels sprouts and peppers in the middle, and saved the sides for smaller plants such as lettuce, carrots, spinach and beets. We also built a garden teepee using bamboo poles and a nifty sheet of rubber with holes in it that keeps the tops of the poles tied together. We planted peas; cucumbers, cherry tomatoes and most types of beans also grow well on teepees.

We built potato towers with welded wire, zip ties, straw and compost. New potatoes are on my garden wish list so I was excited. We formed the wire into 2-foot diameter cylinders, secured them with zip ties and placed them in the garden. Then we layered straw mulch and a circle of five potatoes three times and topped it with more mulch. Jenna recommends wrapping the tower with black plastic, ground cloth or an old bamboo shade to help warm the soil. She removes the wrap when the potatoes leaf out.

We're planting three towers in my son's yard and two in our community garden plot. I know my grandkids will enjoy watching them grow and harvesting the potatoes. I'm even told we can plant something on top, so I may add sweet peas so they can hang down and look pretty.

The final joy of boot camp was a tour of Jenna's garden, Rosemound Farm, a beautiful historic home at Southwest Scholls Ferry and River roads. I've admired the house for 30 years. It was great fun to see how she has enhanced the historic garden.

I took Basic Training Boot Camp, but Jenna offers many other options including site planning and development, plant selections, and installation and maintenance. All are hands-on classes.

Ann Nickerson is a resident of Hillsboro and has been a practicing landscape designer for the past 19 years. Please feel free to contact Ann via her website at www.ann.nickerson.net or by phone 503-846-1298 with your comments or questions.

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