

Horticulturalist nurtures local garden club

When Poinsettia Heights resident Robert Bornstein purchased his squat, pale house on North Victoria Park Road 12 years ago, the backyard's only ground cover was a small portion of patchy grass. His desire to transform his own barren property became the seed that eventually grew into a club that took Bornstein more than 11 years to found: the Poinsettia Heights Garden Club.

The neighborhood club, which is just six months old, had its first gathering on a Sunday morning at Bornstein's home.

"My passion is nurturing [and] growing," he said.

Bornstein's once-barren property has become a well-behaved tropical jungle rather than a typical collection of jonquils and morning glory vines.

The plan was to meet in a different home each month, he said, with the intention of sharing and enjoying all the different aspects of gardening with local people.

"It's a brand new group, like a little seedling rather than a big oak tree," he said.

Bornstein, 51, has a degree in horticulture and operates his business out of his Poinsettia Heights home.

"I'm a horticulture therapist," he said. "I visit retirement communities from Jupiter to Miami, offering plant-related activities. When people work with plants, they forget their own troubles. Plants help with depression, with hand-eye coordination."

"A lot of the neighbors are interested in making their gardens as beautiful as possible," said Poinsettia Heights resident

Mark Elderkin. "It's really useful to have an expert like Robert show us what we can do."

Elderkin lived in the Northeast before coming to Florida and said gardening in the North is much different.

"You can't grow palm trees in your backyard, or orchids," he said. "The garden club teaches us what we can grow here, how to grow it, how to make it flourish."

The path through Bornstein's tropical landscape begins east of his kitchen door. Pots of cooking herbs — parsley, oregano, mint, lemon grass — guard the entrance. Mangoes droop overhead.

"Robert keeps things unstructured and a little wild," said Poinsettia Heights resident Bettina Moench, a garden club member. "Other gardeners have



GARDEN PARTY The Poinsettia Heights Garden Club is a new group aimed at those with green thumbs. SUBMITTED PHOTO

more-flowery yards."

The club typically meets once a month and allows members to talk about the plants they have, how they use them, and sometimes to ask for help.

There are benefits to the neighborhood, too, Moench said — benefits that go beyond

the locals' backyards.

"It's a way of beautifying the entire neighborhood and helping people who have a solitary existence and perhaps aren't mobile," she said.

Bornstein said the club will meet again on June 28.

"We'll have a mini-mango festival," he said. "Everyone will bring fruit from their garden, and we're going to talk about ways you can eat them. We'll sample all the neighborhood mangos."

To get involved in the garden club, Bornstein said, members don't need to have a house or even a yard.

"Some have just a patio garden or a terrace garden," he said. "And that's just fine."

Those interested in the Poinsettia Heights Garden Club are invited to call 954-537-5526.



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