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OU student takes MBH green with a new garden and organic practices

By **Katie Land**, news editor

As part of an ongoing project to minimize its impact on the environment, Oakland University's Meadow Brook Hall has enlisted the aid of senior Laura Kwiatkowski, a member of the newly-created Summer Student Campus Corps.

Her role in the Hall's landscape sustainability project is to plant, maintain, research and document the new kitchen garden, as well as to assist the MBH Garden Club with various organic compost piles and to identify and implement new green practices throughout the grounds.

"These projects are improving the MBH experience. It is great to know that we are making an effort to lessen our impact on the environment and utilizing our own students as key players in this process," said Nicole Thomas, facility operations coordinator for Meadow Brook Hall.

However, the bio chemistry major has far surpassed the original scope of the project, and has formed a wealth of knowledge of organic techniques. She has created nearly a dozen additional tasks for herself, including writing grants, renovating old footpaths and making her own fertilizer.

"Laura is innovative," Thomas said. "She tackles any issue that may arise. She thinks on her feet and I trust her every move."



Laura Kwiatkowski's work and research at MBH has helped reduce the Hall's impact on the environment.



Senior Laura Kwiatkowski stands by the new MBH garden she planted using all organic techniques.

Gentle and modest, Kwiatkowski opens up when she talks about the garden and its care. She planted the seeds and vegetables in May, and looks with a parent's eye when surveying their progress.

MBH's executive chef prepared the list of vegetables, including a delicate strain of heirloom tomatoes, cilantro, basil, sage, rosemary, bell peppers, eggplant, chives and pumpkins. Some of the plants are already ripe for use in dishes.

"We use completely organic techniques for pest control, disease control and weed control," Kwiatkowski said. "A lot of my time is spent researching and learning these techniques."

Kwiatkowski's studies have led her to create her own fertilizer, made from tea steeped from the carefully-tended compost piles. It is the best way to extract nutrients from the plant waste, she said.

A keen attention to detail has drawn Kwiatkowski to inspect, turn and maintain the multiple compost piles daily, including monitoring their temperatures. The piles are composed entirely of plant waste from the grounds of the Hall. Everything used can be renewed on the premises.

"I love the atmosphere here," Laura said. "I didn't have any idea what Meadow Brook was like until my first day on the job. It is a beautiful place to get ideas and be able to experiment."

Learning as she goes along, Kwiatkowski is also a teacher. She works with the Hall's volunteer force to discover and share new techniques to keep the garden's success sustainable, even after her position ends in the fall. "It is a learning experience. The garden club and I cycle tips through each other and bounce ideas around to keep things going."

Before coming to MBH, Kwiatkowski had done some gardening, but nothing on so grand a scale. She calls gardening a lifelong learning process, and throughout the course of the summer has become a virtual expert on all things green.

"I definitely want to use some of these techniques in my own home," Kwiatkowski said. "I love to learn about nature and plants and understand how they work. This experience has been truly eye-opening."

Now that her role in the gardens has shifted to maintenance, Kwiatkowski has moved to the forested grounds and the Hall's library, where she goes through old archives to uncover the remnants of one-time footpaths. A current offshoot of that project is writing grants to the Department of Natural Resources for the funds to remove dead trees and plant new ones.

Thomas considers her a part of the MBH family and hopes to be able to renew this position again next summer. Everything Kwiatkowski does is professional, complete and beyond expectations, Thomas said.

"Many of the projects Laura is working on are ones we have wanted to do for years. We have finally been able to put these plans into effect on a large scale now because of Laura."

For more information about Meadow Brook Hall or to set up a tour, visit the [Web site](#).

SUMMARY

Senior Laura Kwiatkowski is doing her part as a member of the Summer Student Campus Corps to implement green and environmentally innovative practices at Meadow Brook Hall.

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