‘Yardening’ gains local momentum

By GENE STOWE SBT Correspondent | Posted: Saturday, August 17, 2013 11:45 pm

SOUTH BEND -- A grass-roots anti-grass movement is bringing the local-food focus right to the front door. Yard gardeners — “yardeners,” they call themselves — are replacing the green grass of home with more fruitful crops they can harvest rather than mow.

A Facebook page launched by Sara Lowe, who learned about yardening when she volunteered with the Unity Gardens last year and gave a talk on the subject at Ignite Michiana, has grown to more than 260 members since March.

“I did a talk about growing our own food and supporting ourselves and eating local,” she says. “In that whole discussion, I was talking about how we should want to grow food in our yards other than just grass.

“Some of the members are just now growing for the first time this year. Some are more expert gardeners. There’s been an exchange of ideas and support for anybody who has a question. I posed a question about what to do about rabbits, and I got probably 20 comments that all were very helpful.”

Although gardening information is available online, the personal connections provide more support, Lowe says.

“I’ve made at least 10 new friends that helped me,” she says. “We’re learning from each other. I learned about how to grow using natural methods.

“This year I’ve learned to control the weeds and get better tomatoes.”

People who have used performance-enhancing chemicals on their yards should consider installing raised beds of at least 2 feet, with a barrier such as cardboard on the lawn, for their yardens, she says. On her natural ground, she layered cardboard, grass clippings and leaves to kills the grass and use the topsoil for her food.

Lowe, who started with about 100 square feet last year, got permission from her Southmore apartment co-op to plant in the front yard when she more than doubled her garden this year.

“At first I had neighbors who were not really sure — they were giving me side looks,” says Lowe, who won their hearts with free food. “I’ve had a couple of neighbors come up and talk to me about the garden. I’m able to share some food. I’m growing a little community there in my own area.”