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# Seeking common ground

## A community of gardens, herbs, food and healing

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ABOVE: Shimmering Light Farm members harvesting snap peas.

### Shimmering Light Farm

It was 2002 when I first joined the community garden at Seeking Common Ground's Shimmering Light Farm in the Bristol Hills overlooking Canandaigua Lake—and it quickly became a refuge in my life. I had just lost a three-story home and gardens on five acres. My two young children and I moved into a two-bedroom apartment in town. I couldn't give up my love of gardening, so on Saturday mornings I packed up my kids and took a fifteen minute scenic drive to Shimmering Light, a place I had heard about from a friend. I went there to plant, weed, and harvest with others. It was so rewarding to watch my then three-year-old push sweet pea seeds into the soil and weeks later, harvest baskets of lovely peas. The community garden became a quiet grounding force in my life as well as

a place to cry for loss and replant the seeds for my and my children's tomorrows.

The Community Garden began in 1997 at a property in Honeoye Falls, but moved to Shimmering Light Farm in Bristol in 2001. "When you garden together you can grow so much more food," says Deb Denome, the Executive Director of Seeking Common Ground who bought Shimmering Light Farm with her family in '01. SCG has an expanded mission to include outreach educational programs and healthful eating at cafeterias, all of which Denome oversees.

The community garden is a member cooperative that is also member driven – meaning that members help select seeds and decide what to grow. Members who work some Saturdays receive a discount for weekly harvests that go from early May through October. A CSA (Community Supported Agriculture, a farm produce sharing concept) option is available for those who want to just pick up their organic, flavorful vegetables, fruits, eggs, and herbs. Members are updated weekly through emails, which also keep folks abreast of upcoming special events like barn dances and potluck suppers.

The harvests have been bountiful over the past decade and plans to support 20-30 families by 2010 are underway. Shimmering Light Farm also hires farmers—until recently the team of Mike Wilcox and Deb Muntner, who help with the ordering, organizing, and daily operations of running the farm which hosts over a dozen free-range hens and honey bees. Members can receive fresh eggs and organic honey as well as delicious garden goods.

Last year the community garden tried growing popcorn, which turned out to be a great success, and also planted a three-sisters garden of corn, squash and beans. Child-centered activities around gardening themes are often organized for workdays, giving parents a chance to focus together on projects that need to be done while the children have their own learning adventures nearby. Members are currently working on seed saving for continuous growing seasons without seed purchases as well as off-farm distribution of fresh vegetables to food cupboards and other assistance organizations.



LEFT: Herb Haven Participant, Pauline Thompson, with happy dill.  
CENTER : Herb Haven participants harvesting giant borage that self-seeded in the compost pile.  
RIGHT : *Echinacea purpurea* (purple coneflower) growing at Herb Haven.

## Herb Haven

Herb Haven, part of Seeking Common Ground, is located in Crystal Beach on the opposite side of Canandaigua Lake from Shimmering Light Farm. Herb Haven grows lovely gardens of culinary, aromatic and medicinal herbs, as well as a host of flowers and much more. Here, women striving to overcome obstacles in their lives and become self-sufficient come together to learn about good nutrition, product creation, and small business.