

Village of Hope garden goes organic

By ELYSSE JAMES

TUSTIN The garden at the Orange County Rescue Mission's Village of Hope is getting a makeover.

First, the dirt in 20 Village of Hope raised garden beds was replaced with donated organic soil last week.



Then, groOrganic will create a design plan to determine where certain plants should grow.

On Feb. 27, members of groOrganic will help Village of Hope residents and volunteers plant seeds.

GroOrganic workers will teach the residents how to care for the crops, which will be used to feed the 200 residents of the Village of Hope on the former Tustin Marine base.

The garden company, founded by Karen Cancilla, is working with residents and Village food services to decide what fruits, herbs and vegetables to plant. Once the seeds have been planted, company representatives will check in with residents frequently to answer questions and to teach more about gardening, Cancilla said.

She's also considering starting a gardening certification program for residents who learn

how to maintain the garden.

The Village of Hope is serving about 1,000 meals each day, said Ken Weekes, food service manager for the Orange County Rescue Mission's Village of Hope. The kitchen serves three meals each day, seven days a week. Just buying produce for the meals costs \$1,500 to \$2,000 per week, Weekes said.

"We try to stretch the budget as much as possible," Weekes said. "To go out and spend additional money on herbs is really not in my budget, so to be able to grow fresh herbs and provide fresh from the farm to the table type herbs is just going to be unbelievable."

The Village also will be growing bell peppers, tomatoes and carrots that can be used in recipes or in the fresh salad bar, Weekes said. The Village of Hope kitchen also offers vegetarian options each day. And the leftover food can be mulched and placed back into the garden.

"It's a great program," Cancilla said. GroOrganic has created a seasonal list of possibilities for the Village garden. "You have to know what to plant and what time of year."

Residents last year grew jalapeños, tomatoes and bell peppers but the vegetables didn't mature as planned, he said. A crop of rosemary did thrive, he said.

"We tried last year on our own with some success, but not a great amount of success," he said. "I think the help that we're going to receive this year, from the ground up, is helping us understand the total organic process."

"We're looking forward to starting from scratch," he said.