

Skidmore Community Garden Annual Report 2019
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2019 Annual Report

General Season Overview

What a great year in the garden. At over 1,400 pound produced (not including snacks), we grew the most produce that the garden has ever yielded. There were not a ton of large scale new projects, I mostly focused on maintaining the garden and getting the most fruits and veggies to grow in our space as possible. There were no new major projects this season. However, every year there are projects built into the needs of the garden. One larger project was to try to get path weeds under control. Toward the end of the summer, we made a big push to clear the grass and weeds from in between the beds. We put down cardboard and straw to try to keep them at bay. Hopefully this large scale of weeding will not need to happen again for a few years, especially if new straw goes down in the paths. Bio plastic and straw in some of the rows, also help immensely to minimize weeding crises. I also tried to bring as many people into the garden as possible, for large work parties and partnering with RA's and PHE's for work party events. We also were able to host a morning activity with a group from Saratoga Bridges. Weather wise and pest wise we were very lucky particularly in the spring. The weather was warm enough for things to grow right off the bat but rarely was it so hot that working in the sun was terribly rough. Although the bunnies and voles started moving in later in the summer and stayed through the fall, they were not super prevalent in the spring when small vulnerable plants were trying to grow. Other pests such as asparagus beetles and japanese beetles did become a bit of a problem and had to be plucked off of the plants. I enjoyed chatting with the Chefs, and finding out what they were making with the produce and which crops they were particularly excited about.

Crop Summary

When choosing what to plant, we decided to honor Dining Services requests and aimed for larger harvests and fewer varieties. They seemed thrilled with the quantities, and I never felt like I was missing out if only two or three varieties of a crop were growing. All in all, I was very happy with plants I seeded and the harvests they yielded. I tried to be quite true to the planting chart, which was very helpful. The specifics of when crops were planted and harvested, what they yielded, pricing, and how many rounds were planted can be found in the [Planting Chart](#) and the [Produce Totals Chart](#) (I love a good spreadsheet).

- Arugula
 - Arugula did well, especially when planted in large batches. It is direct seeded in the cool weather. Only the outside leaves are harvested so that each plant will continue to grow after the harvest. Once the plants start to show signs of bolting or flowering, I pulled them and harvested all remaining leaves.
 - Each planting only lasted a few weeks, particularly when the weather was warm.
 - Bugs did put some holes in the leaves; insecticide soap seemed to help a bit.
- Asparagus
 - Asparagus is a perennial that can be harvested in its third year. This was year three! However, much of the asparagus did not pop back up this spring and seems to have been cultivated away. We only got one small harvest, but that was a nice lunch for me.
 - In the future, maybe next year, new crowns should be planted.
 - In late June the orange [asparagus beetles](#) tried to eat the living tissue, so I had to pick them off and dispose of them daily. But after about two weeks they were gone, and the plants survived.
- Beets
 - The garden finally got a decent beet harvest this year.
 - They took forever to mature. However, when we finally got a harvest some of them were nearly 4 inches in diameter.
 - They seemed to be picky about soil quality, one end of their bed was noticeably more productive than the other; with four inch beauties on one side and the other barely bulging at all. As the overall soil quality of the garden improves though, beets, and roots in general should do better than they have historically.
- Beans (Bush beans)
 - Beans were successful.
 - We started them under row cover, so that they would not be too tempting to the critters.
 - They ripened up very fast and at their peak were harvested three times a week.
 - We tried to get a second round of beans in later in the season but the baby plants were all eaten.
- Blueberries
 - We transplanted the blueberry bushes in early May.
 - The harvests were small, mostly just snacks for us or for the kitchen.
 - [Japanese beetles](#) decimated about half of what could have been a crop, and many of the leaves, in July. Soap spray and beetle picking seemed to help but only a bit.
 - We left them surrounded in chicken wire to prevent critters from collaring them (eating the living bark) through the winter months.
- Bok Choy
 - It was an ok year for bok choy. We definitely grew a lot of it; however, it was a bug favorite, even when it was covered.

- Since there is so much variety in the size of the heads, in the future pricing by the pound rather than by the head could be good.
- Bok choy likes cool weather, so it needs a hiatus in mid summer.
- It made a good come back as a successful fall crop.
- Carrots
 - It was a great year for carrots. Like the beets, the carrots are very happy with the improving soil quality.
 - Carrots must be thinned as they grow (which means garden managers can eat baby carrots so this is not really a chore so much as a snack).
 - They did take quite a long time to grow, and carrots planted on the same day were sometimes ready to be harvested weeks apart.
 - Some carrots have been left to overwinter in the keyhole bed (covered in straw).
 - Carrot beds need to be kept very weed free.
- Catnip
 - The catnip was just left alone this year (it is between the old raspberries and the flowers).
 - Beware that it does not take over in the years to come.
 - Comparing the plant we have to photos online it looks more like catnip than it does mint. However, some was gifted to some cats and they were not very interested.
- Chard
 - Chard did well.
 - We planted it twice but the first round lasted just as long into the fall as the first; so one batch would be perfectly alright.
- Cucumbers
 - The cucumbers were fantastic!
 - At their peak they were ripening up almost faster than I could harvest them.
 - Their growth started slow but then they got big fast. They need to be regularly trained to stay in their trellising net.
- Currents and Gooseberries
 - These bushes were donations from my mother and new to the garden this year.
 - They are mixed in with the raspberries. They probably should be transplanted to the permaculture bed where they can have a bit more space. In the next few years, I expect the raspberries will become more thickety and choke them out.
 - A handful currents were harvested, but no gooseberries formed this year.
- Eggplants
 - Eggplants were very successful.
 - We covered them while they were small to prevent bugs and this seemed to work well as they grew up well.
 - Each plant seemed to concentrate on growing one eggplant at a time. So as the fruits were harvested, new ones would start to swell up.
- Fruit Trees

- The snow melted to reveal a fruit tree tragedy this spring. Most of the trees had been collared (animals had eaten all the bark from the bottoms of the trunks).
- We replaced those trees and added some wire mesh around their bases so hopefully the same thing will not happen this winter.
- Garlic
 - Garlic is planted in the fall.
 - Over the summer we harvested scapes. Dining hall used these, and cutting the scapes keeps the plants from using energy that we want in the roots toward going to seed.
 - The straw around the garlic really helped to keep the weeds down.
 - We harvested and cured the garlic later in the summer, and planted some of the best cloves in the late fall. These garlic plants are still descendants of the first garlic ever planted in the garden.
 - Because dining hall is not very interested in peeling garlic, it was hard to find something to do with what was left after the harvest dinner. We sold ten pounds to my waldorf middle school in Great Barrington MA for planting in their student garden. Spa bought the rest.
- Kale
 - The kale was great!
 - We tried to do a second round of kale later in the season, but it never really took. The first round was still good to eat up through the Harvest dinner. So, similarly to the chard, I would recommend sticking with one generation.
- Lettuce
 - Lettuce production was second only to tomatoes by weight. Which is saying a lot since tomatoes are so much heavier.
 - Early in the season we struggled to come to an agreement about pricing and presentation with dining hall. In the end we settled on \$7/lb for lettuce that have been separated from the heads, mixed, and washed well.
 - We kept growing lettuce late into the fall. As other crops finished up we filled just about the whole garden with lettuce. This was a very big undertaking for the few hours that a garden manager has in the school year. Careful planning in terms of when to transplant and when to harvest is called for considering the limited hours and such a large fall crop. However, it was very good to have produce at a time when all students are on campus.
- Peas
 - We got very lucky with the peas this year since we were rabbit free in the spring.
 - We planted two generations of peas about two weeks apart. I think this might have been unnecessary as we took them down when the first batch was finished.
 - They had to be trained to the trellising very frequently.
 - We made one big mistake with the peas this year. We planted spring mix in the pea bed just a few weeks before the sugar snaps went in. This led to a struggle to weed out field peas. Without harming the sugar snaps. Field peas have purple

flowers and purplish leaves which made it a bit easier, but I would still recommend keeping spring mix out of future pea beds.

- In the fall we tried to do a second generation, but the rabbits ate all the sprouts.
- Peppers
 - The peppers were quite bountiful and one of the crops that really shone in September when students returned.
 - Unfortunately they were also quite popular with the critters. Weeding really thoroughly in and around the beds helped a bit, as it removed hiding place for the voles.
 - The doe hill variety (small yellow bells) were absolutely delicious.
- Potatoes
 - We grew potatoes in the back half of the permaculture bed. They did fairly well.
 - There was definitely notable critter damage, but we still harvested a significant crop.
 - I also wish I had been better about mounding the potatoes: some of them started to turn green.
- Radishes
 - Radishes did very well. They were one of the first colorful crops of the season, so the first harvest was very exciting.
 - In the fall as it got colder, they did very, very well under row cover.
- Raspberries
 - The raspberries were transplanted from my mum's garden this spring.
 - They started producing right away. They fruit in mid summer and again in the fall.
 - In future springs they may need to be pruned.
- Rhubarb
 - I did not do much for the rhubarb besides pruning it when the stalks got very tall.
 - I never harvested. But it is available for garden managers or friends of the sustainability office to make a lovely summer pie, as dining hall does not seem interested.
- Spinach
 - It was a bit of a lackluster season for spinach.
 - In the spring it was planted very individually, and so it took a long time to get just a small harvest. In the fall it took so long to grow, that by the time we had enough for a harvest, some of the older plants were too far gone.
 - I would recommend aiming for fewer larger harvests, rather than trying to stagger generations. It might also be good to plant in tight rows and harvest with the blue handles serrated knife, just like the arugula.
- Strawberries
 - We planted strawberries this spring.
 - Because it was the first year for these plants, I cut all their flowers, so that energy would go into the roots rather than the fruits.
 - Next year they can be allowed to fruit, but they will surely be a critter favorite.

- I did not cut many of the runners so that a mat of plants would form. But in the future, it may be a good idea to cut runners so that energy does not go away from the berries, and so that they do not take over or get over crowded.
- Tomatoes
 - The tomatoes did reasonably well.
 - Toward the end of the season we did begin to contend with some blight.
 - Oregon Spring variety had the hardest time. Sungold cherries were probably the most successful.
 - Tomatoes require a lot of work. They have to be trained to grow up the trellising and the suckers (extra branches) need to be pruned once a week.
 - Peek tomato season happens in August when the garden manager is away. :(
- Basil
 - Basil was a big hit with dining hall.
 - For a while in July, we were producing as much basil as dining hall needed.
 - It is a lot of work to harvest, as the leaves must be individually separated from the stalks.
- Herbs (Parsley, thyme, oregano, sage, rosemary, sorrel, chives, garlic chives, lavender, lemon verbena, dill, cilantro)
 - Chives did very well. If you cut them back to the ground whenever they start to go brown or get tough, they will grow back nice and tender again.
 - Our other little herb plants only produced one or two bunches a piece throughout the season, not much on a dining hall scale.
 - Lemon verbena makes the BEST tea.
- Bug blooms
 - Beautiful!
 - They did better on the right (as you enter the garden), as the left was very grassy. It might be wise to sheet mulch the left for a season to try to reclaim the space from the grass.
- Zinnias
 - So good!
 - Zinnias make lovely bouquets and hold up well in vases. The more you cut the more they flower. So they make great cut flowers. I brought many to dining hall, as well as to my friends and teachers.
- Marigolds
 - One of my favorite flowers.
 - We seeded them inside and planted them at the ends of many of the beds. They help ward off bugs.
- Morning glories
 - They took a while to start climbing, but by fall they were all over the garden entrance.
- Sunflowers
 - Planted by gates. In late July they greeted me every morning which was very nice.

- There were several self seeded volunteers from last year as well.
- Nasturtiums
 - They did best when planted at the ends of beds, rather than mixed in with other flowers: give them some space to bulk up.
 - I brought complementary nasturtiums to Emily's if the chefs were interested and tried to schedule deliveries for special events.

Three sisters

We [coplanted](#) corn, beans, and squash in the permaculture beds.

- Corn
 - We grew some sweet corn, which made a nice treat for some of the September volunteers. It was pretty and fun but we do not have the space for large quantities.
 - We also grew some popcorn, which germinated a bit better than the sweet corn.
- Pole Beans
 - We planted several varieties of pole beans to grow up the squash, including rattlesnake beans, which we sourced from my mother. Some rattlesnake bean seed was saved.
- Zucchini
 - Zucchini and yellow summer squash did pretty well but were certainly a favorite of some critters.
 - Once the plants matured, individual zucchinis matured surprisingly quickly.
 - Relative to other squashes their plants are quite compact.
- Futsu Squash
 - These winter squash were great and so pretty. They were very tasty at the Harvest dinner (and beautiful for posters).
 - They were another vole favorite, but the animals just gnawed sparingly on the outside of many of the squashes so the whole fruit was still able to be harvested.
 - They were very sprawling so they need lots of space.

Work Parties and Community Outreach

Work parties in 2019 were on Sundays from 3-5 as per usual. In the spring it was quite hard to get a large pool of volunteers. I think this was because we did not start to ask for volunteers until the middle of the semester when people had already established extracurricular routines. Service day was our best turn out of the spring with about 10 volunteers. Other spring work parties had about 0-5 people attending. Over the summer there were no volunteers besides a few friends that I dragged along to help me out, so I really relied on help from Jen, Levi and the northwoods stewards.

Right from the get go, the Fall proved to be the best time to get volunteers. The first few September work parties had about 15 participants. This was very exciting but also a bit overwhelming. These large work parties were much more manageable when I prepared written to-do lists and thought ahead about which tasks could be handled by volunteers alone and which needed more careful supervision. At these busy work parties I spent most of my time delegating rather than actually getting my hands dirty. As the season went on the tide of volunteers dwindled to about four regulars who showed up rain, snow or shine. Fall seemed like the easiest time to build a community in the garden.

To get these volunteers, I had to raise awareness about the presence of the garden among students. I attended club fair. I reached out to professors such as Anne Ernst and Shirley Smith who teach classes that focus on humans' relationship with the environment and with food. I also invited RAs and PHEs to join our work parties in the name of dorm floor community and student wellness.

In addition to connecting with students, I partnered with a friend interning at Saratoga Bridges. We hosted a group of adults with special needs, giving them the opportunity to see how food is grown.

Harvest Dinner

On the whole the harvest dinner was smooth and could have been tremendously successful, except we were short people to eat the dinner.

Next year more focus should be put into increased attendance. Student facebook invites and more physical advertising could both be utilized to spread the word. We didn't have any Saratoga community attendees, but we worried that the Facebook post (shared on community groups and promptly deleted) would alert too many members of the broader community. Next year the event will be on Sunday, Nov 8, which will avoid any conflict with Halloween activities or stress. I also think that reaching out to ResLife to offer it as a potential floor event (RA's could bring underclassmen) could increase attendance. A variety of RAs brought groups to the garden this year, and we could collab with them. A larger portion of the attendees were upperclassmen, it would be great to make sure more freshmen and sophomores knew about the dinner.

Despite much apprehension about getting a large enough workforce, we had plenty of great volunteers! The Sign-up genius should include a note about how we need folks' REAL cell numbers to contact volunteers if plans change. The Sunday shifts should be restructured so that they start just before serving and another shift beforehand which folks can just leave early from (i.e. 2:30-4:30 and 4:30-6:30). We had volunteers just waiting around before the event started for quite a while.

The menu was delicious, but we did get some comments about how it was so similar to last year's. Vegan mac & cheese should be relabelled as pasta with squash sauce (there were many folks not interested in fake cheese, but the squash was appealing). Mixed veggies should be cut smaller: the cauliflower and squash were very large. It was good to have gluten free scalloped potatoes. The apple crisp certainly could be gluten free as well in the future. We can

even buy our own oats that are gluten free. We could have been much more heavy handed with our roasted garlic on focaccia and in the roasted veggies. Additional menu options for the future could include: potato leek soup, cornbread, chili, or garden lasagna. We had extra of everything since we prepared for 300 plates but only served about 150, so it was hard to evaluate what was over- and under-prepared. The 5 gallons of ice cream ran out for 150 people. Many of the leftover items, including pasta, bread, and potatoes were picked up by Feedmore volunteers and packaged to be donated to the soup kitchen in Saratoga.

Pricing

Over the course of the season we had to adjust the pricing. Several items were previously sold at prices that, given our increased productivity this season, seemed quite high to us. Other prices were adjusted by dining hall. It also was sometimes tricky to dig through old invoices in search of prices for crops not grown in a few years. With all this in mind, here is a comprehensive list of the prices we settled on by the end of the season. In the future, I recommend switching all prices to by-the-pound; this is easier to standardize and understand as our veggies are never uniform. Some items, like herbs, flowers, and berries were complementary, because harvests were so small.

Crop	Price
Arugula	\$6.00/lb
Baby Bok Choy	\$6.00/lb
Basil	\$18.00/lb
Beans	\$6.00/lb
Beets	\$3.00/lb
Carrots	\$6.00/lb
Chard	\$3.00/lb
Chives	\$3.00/lb
Cucumbers	\$2.50/lb
Eggplant	\$4.00/lb
Garlic	\$10.00/lb
Garlic Scapes	\$4.00/lb

Crop	Price
Kale	\$3.00/lb
Lettuce	\$7.00/lb
Peppers	\$8.00/lb
Peppers(green)	\$4.00/lb
Radishes	\$2.00/lb
Spinach	\$12.00/lb
Sugar Snaps	\$4.00/lb
Tomatoes	\$6.50/lb
Tomatoes (Green)	\$3.00/lb
Zucchini	\$2.00/lb

Tips and Suggestions for Future Garden Managers

- Summer schedule
 - The garden is a big undertaking, but getting everything (or at least enough) done is possible with a bit of planning.

- I kept a notebook full of lists: to do lists, areas that needed weeding, harvest totals etc.
- I reserved Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings for harvesting. At first this was more than enough time, but as the season progressed three four hour harvests a week were needed. I ended up scheduling which day of the week would be for which crop. For instance zucchinis might be harvested Monday and Friday; Carrots might only need one harvest a week so they would get Wednesday; and everyday would be a lettuce day.
- I had some time dedicated to projects such as trellising or planting as well.
- All remaining time (especially shorter increments) could be dedicated to weeding and cultivating. I kept track of which areas needed to be prioritized in my notebook.
- There will ALWAYS be more to do in the garden. It can be hard not to get distracted by the endless tasks. To manage this, whenever possible, finish a task thoroughly before moving on. If a task needs more time than you can give it at that time, set a goal or a time limit.
- Be specific when setting tasks for yourself. A task like “weed and cultivate” could take all summer; “weed and cultivate carrots” is a planned hour of your day.
- I recorded brief notes about what I had accomplished at the end of every day. I recommend this practice.
- Resources
 - Use your resources!
 - You have access to all the paperwork from past years such this annual report. If you are ever in need of advice, reference these documents!
 - At the beginning of the season, Jen and Levi will help you make a planting chart. This chart is a major resource to you. Keep it up to date. Do your best to plant according to the chart!
 - Feel free to reach out to me at elong1@skidmore.edu I will be on campus (and at work parties) Spring 2020, but even after that keep in touch!
- Other notes
 - The shed is in fairly good order, but some items are in there rather precariously. Remove the stakes before other large items, or a terrible game of pick up sticks might ensue.
 - This job is very fun but also a lot of work.
 - This is an all weather job. Of course, if it is dangerously hot or if thunder and lightning come out to play indoor tasks and paperwork can be prioritized. But in general be excited and prepared to be outside in the heat, rain and snow. It can feel really satisfying to come home after a long hard day, but not if you let the weather get you down: embrace it.