

# Skidmore Community Garden Annual Report 2021

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## Index

General Season Overview.....	2
Crop Summary.....	3-7
Work Parties and Community Outreach.....	8
Harvest Dinner.....	9-10
Pricing.....	10
Pests.....	11
Tips and Suggestions.....	11

## **General Season Overview**

It was a fantastic year in the garden, with its own set of challenges and accomplishments. Since there was no garden manager on site last summer due to the pandemic, weeds had become completely overgrown. Thus, I spent much time weeding and reviving the beds at the beginning of the growing season. Many Dining Services employees also aided in weeding, which was hugely helpful and a great way to strengthen our connection and relationship. Unfortunately, the excessive weeding caused crops to go into the ground later than usual. Additionally, the weather throughout June and July was generally cool and rainy. These conditions were pleasant to work in but proved challenging for the crops. Many, like peppers and tomatoes, took longer to ripen or were disrupted by the heavy rainfall. On the bright side, this meant I only had to water twice the entire summer. We never even set up the watering tape.

Despite these difficulties, we had many successes. We experimented with okra for the first time, and it did surprisingly well. I also harvested immense amounts of kale throughout the growing season. To keep the beds maintained and minimize weeding in the future, we put down row covers in the walking spaces. We also built a raised bed to upkeep an area of the garden that had become overgrown. Pests were not a problem, despite Japanese Beetles, which a few traps easily remedied.

The Northwood Stewards and I enjoyed organizing activities in the garden with Camp Northwoods at the end of the summer. Not many people stayed on campus over the summer, but work parties began attracting volunteers in the fall. I particularly enjoyed the events, such as the movie screening at the garden and the Harvest Dinner. In addition, I loved learning more about the food from the Chefs and seeing the ways they prepared the garden produce.

## Crop Summary

- Arugula
  - The arugula did not do very well; when planted in late spring, it quickly got too hot, produced small yields, and tasted spicy.
  - I would recommend transplanting/seeding earlier so they have time to grow before it gets too hot.
  
- Basil
  - Routine pruning is vital to help the plants grow bigger and bushier.
  - We didn't have enough basil to provide the Dining Hall for the Harvest Dinner, so maybe preserving some earlier would be wise.
  
- Bush Beans
  - They produced a quick and large harvest.
  - I would recommend harvesting often because as quickly as they come, they also go.
  - One mistake I made was planting bush beans in the permaculture plot (corn, beans squash) rather than snake beans. I tried to transplant, but many of them didn't take. Don't be me!
  
- Beets
  - Since this was such a rainy season, many of the beets swelled and then cracked.
  
- Berries
  - There were SO many strawberries! Try to get them all! Freeze them!
  - It was nice to have Dining Hall staff come by the garden to pick their own strawberries.
  - I made homemade strawberry ice cream with leftover strawberries, which I highly recommend.
  - The blueberries had a hard time. In total, I think we got under ten berries. The plants dried out quickly and benefitted from extra watering. I also sprinkled in soil acidifier around the base of the plant, but not touching, to help the PH levels.
  
- Bok Choy
  - The bok choy did well this year, which may be attributed to the cooler weather. I think I could have made more space to grow even more.
  - I could have planted more than I did!
  
- Carrots

- The first round of carrots planted in early May didn't take
- I was successful with a second try at intermingling baby carrot seeds in mid-June.
- They did take quite a long time to grow. I would suggest planting more carrots in general and a variety of species in June.
- Chard
  - The rainbow swiss chard was beautiful but not very bountiful due to bugs leaving many holes
  - I would recommend trying to cut more giant leaves more often to allow the plant to grow bigger and bushier
- Corn
  - The corn was successful and tall! In general, the popping corn species did the best.
  - I tried my best to follow traditional Native American practices of planting the three sisters (corn, beans, squash) in circles in the permaculture plot. I found it difficult to discern the plants and weeds from another; however, I enjoyed this learning process.
- Cucumber
  - They proliferated due to the heavy rainfall
  - The plant became a yellowish color which I learned was due to erratic rainfall
  - I would suggest doing regular checks for ripe cucumbers because I found many when they were too big and inedible
- Currents & Gooseberries
  - These were a gift from Ella's (the garden manager two years ago) mom.
  - I'll admit, they became a bit forgotten and neglected in the business of all the other more significant crops. Please give them some extra love and attention!
- Eggplant
  - We planted Fairy Tale eggplant this season which I highly recommend for the future! They are a beautiful purple color and quite tiny and cute.
  - I waited until they were at least 3-4 inches to harvest
  - Many ripened all at once, so typically yielded few but large harvests.
- Flowers
  - None of the poppy seeds sprouted.
  - The morning glories were gorgeous. I recommend collecting seeds at the end of the season! They are a great gift.

- The snapdragons bloomed very late but were a fantastic pop of color in the colder months!
- The nasturtium was also lovely! I learned that they are edible but didn't get to experiment with them. Maybe inquire if the Dining Hall is interested.
- Fruit Trees
  - The apple and pear trees need more branch support and regular weeding around the base.
  - The Pawpaw trees look great but aren't producing fruit.
  - I got more information about them from a dear work party volunteer named Rimmele and his mother: "Pawpaws are, with a few exceptions self-infertile. They need pollen from another variety of Pawpaw. If you plant two Pawpaws but they are grafts of the same variety they will not pollinate each other. The problem with Pawpaws is that they are pollinated by flies and beetles which don't get around very well so pollination and thus fruit set can be poor. Hand pollinating is what I usually recommend. I have had mixed success. Flowers start female dominant and then become male dominant. To pollinate, you look for male stage flowers that are shedding pollen and shake the pollen into a container and then that same day, you find a female stage flower on another tree and dab some pollen on with a soft brush."  
<https://www.wilsonbrosgardens.com/pollination-of-paw-paw-trees.htm>
- Garlic
  - At the beginning of the summer, the garlic scapes are a huge treat and beloved by many chefs at the Dining Hall.
  - Low maintenance plant
  - Once harvested, make sure the bulbs go directly into a dark and covered location, so no mold grows.
  - A few of the garlic bulbs became moldy and then spread to others in the bag, so make sure to check on them and separate them.
  - Because the 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. I handed them out to dining hall staff, the band that performed, and students working/volunteering the event
- Herbs
  - The chives were incredibly resilient and fast-spreading. Chef Ben uprooted and moved a few of them, and they quickly adjusted.
  - Our other herbs produced a few small bunches.

- I recommend keeping the chives under control so the other herbs can flourish a bit more!
- Kale
  - I planted a mix of Dinosaur and Curly Kale which both did ridiculously well
  - They were incredibly robust, fruitful, and hearty and yielded SO much produce
  - The kale was one of the first crops to bloom, grew very tall, and was one of the last crops to die
  - By far, the most passerby's asked was what the "palm-tree" looking plant was
- Lettuce
  - The lettuce did very well in such a rainy season. We had some large harvests!
  - from the heads, mixed, and washed well
  - Each variety was beautiful and did great! My personal favorite was the Joker lettuce.
- Okra
  - I would say this first run was a success! There was a lot of okra.
  - DHall only wanted large quantities of them, and the crop ripened in small waves so it took a couple of weeks to get a volume worth anything to DHall. They don't usually have it in stock, so it's not something they can really fold into regular recipes easily.
  - The okra was either taken home by volunteers or most of it was saved, blanched, and frozen for later use at the Harvest Dinner.
  - The okra curry at the Harvest Dinner, served with pita bread, was a fan favorite. Shout out Chef Ben!
- Peas (Sugar Snap)
  - The peas are arduous to trellis and maintain. They had to be trained to the trellising very frequently
  - The plants get intermingled and grow all over each other. It's a scavenger hunt to find peas, have fun!
  - An animal, likely rabbits, ate some of the peas when they were just growing and still short.
- Peppers
  - The peppers were quite bountiful, and one of the crops that really shone in September when students returned
  - They stayed green for a long time this year before they turned beautiful shades of yellow, orange, and red

- Potatoes
  - We didn't have as many as I expected. Some molded and were a green color or were squishy. The heavy rain didn't do them any favors.
  - The purple potatoes were a beauty and enjoyed in the Harvest Dinner
  - It was a fun garden party activity to get all volunteers involved in
  - Remember to store them in a dark and dry environment or they will mold!
  
- Radish
  - We experimented with a new variety of black radish, which did well and, for the most part, grew larger than the other species of radish.
  - I enjoyed experimenting with the black species of radish. They had a beautiful bright, white interior
  - The radishes also swelled quickly due to the rain and then cracked
  - I would suggest a routine thinning of the radishes throughout their growth to make sure they have enough room to grow to their potential
  
- Rhubarb
  - It was ripe at the very beginning of the summer
  - I took it home because there wasn't much and kept it frozen for the future
  
- Spinach
  - I harvested the spinach too late in the summer
  - It got too hot for them, and they began to wilt and brown
  
- Squash & Zucchini
  - The yellow squash generally did better than the zucchini
  - I recommend taking squash flowers home! I stuffed them with ricotta and fried them, which was delicious.
  
- Tomatoes
  - So many beautiful orange, red, and yellow baby tomatoes!
  - 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 :(

## **Work Parties and Community Outreach**

Work parties were on Sundays from 3-5 pm as usual. During the spring and summer, it was challenging to get volunteers. Very few students stayed on campus this summer which was partly due to the pandemic. I relied heavily on help from Dining Hall staff, Jen, and the Northwood Stewards during this time.

I had a lot of fun organizing activities with the Northwoods Stewards for Camp Northwoods. One day we gave campers a garden tour and played a scavenger hunt game where they had to match photos to the various crops. We also did some “Veggie Offs” in the grass surrounding the garden, where two kids would compete at a time and the referee (the Stewards and me) would count down from three and yell out a veggie the kids had to mime. Another day, we gathered at the Northwoods map near Falstaffs and spoke about the different trails and history of the woods. Each camper had a printout of the map and colored in each trail as we went. We also brought examples of the invasive species that the Northwoods Stewards work to eliminate and passed them around. After, we colored in and made vegetable crowns for each kid.

Over the summer, I tried to also organize an event with the Wesley Community. My vision was to have seniors paint new veggie and fruit signs. Also, as a thank you, I wanted to assist them in planting or give them a small herb or flower plant to take back to their rooms. Unfortunately, it was challenging to coordinate with our busy schedules and Covid, so the event never happened. Also, it was challenging to coordinate with their staff. However, Jen still has all the materials, so please feel free to use them for this or something else!

Starting in the fall, work parties filled up. For the first few Sundays, there were over 15 volunteers. This was very exciting but also overwhelming to manage. The large work parties were much more manageable when I prepared written to-do lists and thought about which tasks could be handled by volunteers alone and which needed more careful supervision. At the busier work parties, I spent more time delegating tasks than getting my hands dirty. As the season went on, volunteers began to dwindle, but there were about four loyal attendees no matter the conditions. Then, as it got cold, volunteers were scarce.

It was helpful to post every Sunday on my own personal Instagram and the Sustainable Skidmore Instagram about the work parties. I also raised awareness about the garden by attending the club fair. I brought veggies from the garden to put on the table and had an email sign-up list.



## Harvest Dinner

Overall, the harvest dinner was a great success! There was a big turn-out from students and generally had positive reviews. Next time, I would also have the Dining Hall send out an email themselves to raise awareness. We used some garlic, okra, potatoes, and kale from the garden. However, the Dining Hall prefers to use pre-peeled garlic for speed purposes. Leah Freundlich, a Dining Hall Intern, distributed a Skidmore Dining Customer Satisfaction Survey to students at the Harvest Dinner. One question asked students to rate the quality of the food served at the dinner on a scale of one to five. The majority of students rated the dinner a four. Following that was a five, and subsequently was a three. Only two people rated the dinner a two, and no one rated a one. There was some confusion among surveys about whether the questions were for all DHall meals or for the Harvest Dinner themed meal. We thought it was a fair assumption that the dinner was overall positively rated.

Another question asked was what your favorite food served at the dinner was. The lasagna and the apple crisp got six mentions each. Following, the mashed potatoes got five comments. After that, the surveys mentioned the okra curry four times. And lastly, the pumpkin ravioli, garlic bread, pumpkin cannolis, and cider donuts all got three shout-outs each.

We didn't have many volunteers sign up; however, this wasn't a problem because the dining hall staff did so much. Most of the volunteers were garden party attendees. Additionally, we invited clubs such as RestoreMore, EAC, Democracy Matters, and Feedmore to have information tables around the space. For example, RestoreMore shared information about food justice/sovereignty and food desert vs. food apartheid. A dear friend and two other talented musicians played the event, which brought great energy. I would highly recommend live music. Further, I set up a table at the exit of D-hall with garden shirts and garden stickers with the help of Stella (Northwoods Steward). We sold out entirely of both! I also used this opportunity to fundraise for the nonprofit LifeWorks. LifeWorks is a nonprofit that works to alleviate poverty at the local level in Saratoga County and the Northern Capital Region Lifeworks offers a variety of food programs to fight food insecurity, including a daily community lunch, a food pantry, and food deliveries. I collected the money from the garden shirts and stickers to my personal Venmo. We had initially thought that some proceeds would be put towards the garden. However, Jen and I decided that we wanted to donate all proceeds to LifeWorks.

The Harvest Dinner and all its delicious food are exciting to plan! It's also a lot of work and coordination. Definitely try the food and enjoy as much as you can the night of, despite being busy. It's a delightful and wholesome meal with an excellent opportunity to spread information and sustainable, local, just food.

### Pricing

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

## Pests

The Japanese beetles were the most prevalent pests this summer. There were heaps of them, and they bit holes in many leafy plants. They also crowded the fruit trees and raspberry bushes. I ended up putting up three beetle traps around the garden. This helped significantly, but I will warn you they are pretty gross. Rabbits also munched on a good amount of fresh peas when they were still close to the ground. This summer, Jen watched a hawk swoop down into the garden and take a rabbit mother from her babies. Otherwise, I did not encounter many other pests.

## Tips and Suggestions for Future Garden Managers

- Stay organized and have fun! This job is a lot of work to do on your own. Remember that there is constantly a to-do list for the garden that will never end, don't get discouraged. It is physically tiring, and the weather conditions can be challenging; however, the end products are incredibly rewarding. Enjoy the process and the beauty!
- The garden is a big task, but keeping a notebook with lists and notes is incredibly helpful!
- 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 job thoroughly before moving on. If a task needs more time than you can give it, set a goal or a time limit.
- To make weeding more manageable, use mulch and straw! It's a huge time saver. But try to use it before it gets rained on because it quickly gets moldy and yucky.
- At the beginning of the season, Jen will help you make a planting chart. This chart is a significant 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 [oehrlich@skidore.edu](mailto:oehrlich@skidore.edu)! I will be around and attend work parties in Spring 2020, but even after that, keep in touch!