Skidmore Community Garden Annual foggReport 2018

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2018 Annual Report

2018 was an awesome year for the garden. We implemented a lot of new installations to the garden which will be exciting to watch grow and improve over time. The big projects were the permaculture plot, the fruit trees, and the herb spiral, but there were a lot of other new things we tried in general, which were met with varying degrees of success (different crop varieties, new technique for tomato trellising, the owl). I think it’s important that the garden continues to be a place where new things can be explored. One purpose of the garden that I feel often gets overlooked is education. There is so much that I personally learned by working in the garden, and so much I saw friends, classmates and volunteers learn as well. I think the garden works best when everyone is learning together, and the best way to do this is to keep trying new things.

I’m going to try to put stuff in this report that I think would be helpful, or that I think I would have liked to hear when I started off as the garden manager, rather than focus too much on specifics of the year.

**So you wanna manage a garden?**

Congratulations on becoming the new garden manager! It’s a really cool job, and very rewarding when you put in time and care. It is a lot of hard work. It is sometimes exhausting and sometimes very stressful. You are managing the whole garden and sometimes you will walk through it and you will wonder how you are going to do it all. Here is some very general advice that would be good to remember throughout the year:

* You are not alone. Jen and Levi are very cool and want you to succeed. You can ask them questions and they will give you answers. Seems pretty simple, but it is good to remember.
* Plants are a lot more resilient than you would expect. I got stressed planting everything the first week of summer because I was afraid I was going to plant too deep or too close together or too far apart or pack the dirt too tightly, but in the end, everything was fine. Plan and garden with care, but don’t worry too much over little things
* **Common sense is your friend.**
* Use the beginning of the year wisely: Choose your seeds early and start seeding as soon as Jen and Levi let you. The beginning of the summer was a little slow for me because I was behind on seeding. If you seed early, the summer will go really smoothly you won’t need to worry about catching up, and there will always be stuff to plant and harvest
* Along with that, **make a seeding schedule early and stick to it**. I did not do this and it was a mistake.
* It’s gonna feel like no one is coming to work parties. But if you get three or four regulars, those are good numbers. I think part of the reason for this is there’s not as much to do in the spring and fall as there is in the summer and it’s hard to hold people’s interest. I think a solution for this would be to get people working in the garden **as early in the year as makes sense.** Planning meetings are fine and dandy, but they don’t hold people’s attention like **cold, hard, manual labor.** I’m serious. There were people in some of the planning meetings who were like “When can we get in the garden?” and I would tell them March, and they would say, “See you then,” and I would never see them again. And if it’s not manual labor, at least get people doing something that makes them feel productive, even if it’s something silly. Most of the people I communicated with would have rather worked out in the cold than sat inside and choose seeds from the Hudson Valley catalogue.
* Cultivate frequently with the razor weeder. It can be boring and a little tedious, but it will help prevent a lot of very unpleasant weeding down the line

**Spring**

**Work Parties**

In the beginning of the year, there seemed to be a good bit of interest in the garden. We would usually get about 7 or 8 people in each meeting. Again, it seemed like people started to lose interest since there wasn’t a lot to do during indoor meetings besides plan for the summer. We did get a handful of consistent volunteers who came to the garden regularly, which was awesome, but I think we would have been a bit more successful if we also advertised a bit later in the year, when there is more to do. I put up posters in early February for our first work party on the 11th, and by April most of the consistent volunteers had stopped showing up. I asked my friends to come to work parties, with mixed success. Don’t be afraid to ask people you know. If only people you know come to a work party, but good work got done, it was a successful work party.

**Farmer’s Summit**

This was a pretty cool event that I went to with Levi and another student to in the early spring. It was basically a convention of farmers and gardeners for different colleges, and you could go to these different lectures on how they were doing things at their own farms and how they were getting their schools involved. And they had really good food.

My biggest takeaway from this event, which I wish I had looked more into, was that **community gardens on college campuses are incredible tools for education**, and not just about gardening, and not just for science-heavy classes. I think Cornell was doing stuff where they were growing wheat with history classes, due to its historical and cultural significance, and I think they were also growing the beans that Thoreau grew in Walden, which would be cool for an English class. There’s really so many ways this could be taken, and I think it would be a cool idea to reach out to your favorite professors at the beginning of the year and ask them if they would want to get involved somehow, and maybe plant stuff that could be used for classes in the fall. Stress reduction/yoga classes might work well in the garden too.

We planted potatoes for potato chips because of their local significance (Saratoga is the home of the potato chip, little known fact), but other crops could definitely be planted for more reasons than just dhall.

**Fruit Tree Planting**

This was the one spring work party event that a bunch of people volunteered for because it was part of “Sustainable Service Day” during Earth Week. We had volunteers digging holes that Levi and I had spaced out a few days prior. After that we put in the trees and filled them with dirt and compost and a lot of water.

Digging the holes was difficult, as the soil past the initial sod obviously did not want to be dug. It was rocky and gravely, there were bits of tarp in the ground that we had to cut through, and at one point we even found a few pieces of insulation in one of the holes, so we a little worried about planting, but ultimately I think the soil and compost have been doing their job and the trees seem to be doing well.

While they’re young they still need to be watered regularly. Ask Jen and Levi for the specifics on that, but don’t forget about them. They need care if they’re going to be productive, so check up on them regularly. You might need to give them some mulch at some point or spray some soap on them to keep the beetles off them.

**Beats for Beets**

* We ordered 5 pizzas, but you could probably order about 10 - they went *fast*
* We had a little bit of struggling with artists/bands. One of them flaked at the last minute, so just keep in mind that this may happen.
* Make sure you have all the equipment you need. We realized at the last minute that we needed a drum set, and had to desperately search for one. Make sure that when contacting bands that you’re getting responses and not just sending emails. Maybe use FB messenger or something else if they don’t respond to email.
* It might help to have an in-person meeting with Lively Lucy’s to figure out equipment, sound, bands, etc.
* Ask clubs to bring food, and maybe find out what they’re going to bring so that they’ll bring it.
* Details
  + Rain location used, Falstaff’s
  + 5 pizzas + salad from 9 miles east
  + ~60 attendees at peak; 30 by end of show
  + Event started at 6pm and ended around 8:30pm
    - Music started at 6:30
    - Set-up started at 5:30
  + S-Rep team MC-ed the event with short quips about Sustainability at Skidmore

**Summer**

**Work Parties**

More people than expected came to the summer work parties, and that was mostly because I invited my friends, with one or two other volunteers who occasionally showed up. We didn’t really have a consistent work party schedule for the summer, having them on fridays during first session, and then a few fridays and a few saturdays second session. If you have a consistent schedule throughout the summer, it would probably lead to more populated work parties if they were always at the same time of the week. More advertising would also be helpful, I sort of neglected the Facebook page over the summer and felt the effects of it.

Work party activities can be anything, but for ours we did some planting, a lot of trelessing, harvesting and hanging garlic, and a lot of weeding. I guess I should put a planting summary in here:

**Planting Summary:**

Quick note: As you can see, some things worked really well and some didn’t. Some things even continuously don’t work every year. That being said, if there is something you really really want to see in the garden, I say give it a shot. It could just be we’ve all been doing it the wrong way, and maybe you’ll be the one to pull it off

* Arugula
  + Recommended
  + Jen and Levi planted some in May, and I planted some around the end of July.
  + These fellas bolt pretty quickly. Keep tasting, and don’t be afraid to do a big harvest if it’s starting to get there. Better to have harvested early than to have a big patch of bolted arugula.
* Asparagus
  + **There is currently asparagus in the garden**.
  + Harvest early, maybe even as early as April if they look ready
  + Cut from the bottom of the stalks, they are perennials, so don’t pull them out.
* Beets
  + Not successful at all. We planted a couple times in the summer. Most got chomped by bunnies. The ones that survived just didn’t grow. If you do beets, try different spots in the garden, they’re finicky about soil quality and shade.
* Beans
  + Recommended
  + We planted once close to the beginning of the summer and the bunnies at all of them. We tried again at the end of the summer with Camp Reese, and the majority survived and did really well!
  + Harvest often.
* Carrots
  + Planted a few times throughout the summer.
  + The ones that worked were pretty short, but tasted good. Be sure to thin them out early or you’ll just be stuck with a big clump of carrot greens with no carrots underneath.
  + **There are currently carrots in the garden.** We overwintered some by the gate near the shed. I didn’t know you could overwinter carrots, but apparently you can. Just remember that they’re growing there
  + You can eat carrot greens. You can make stock with them too.
* Catnip
  + **There is currently catnip in the garden.** Near the fence by the arbor, growing next to the mint.
  + Catnip is related to mint, and might take over everything. Try to pull out any that’s not growing where it’s supposed to be. I didn’t plant it for any reason other than there are cats on campus, and maybe someone might be interested. If you know any cats, you could make their day.
* Chard
  + Recommended
  + Planted twice. Once near the beginning of the summer, once near the end. Got decent harvests both times, but it bolted fairly quickly, so keep tasting it.
* Collard Greens
  + Grows a lot like kale. As such, you can continuously harvest over the summer. Don’t be afraid to do big harvests. As long as they still have a few good leaves, they’ll continue to grow and give you weekly to biweekly harvests.
  + Harvest bottom leaves first and leave the top leaves to grow.
  + There weren’t a lot of cabbage worms this year, but they really hit the collards in the fall.
* Cucumbers
  + Recommended
  + They get planted in mounds. You might need to give them a little reshaping depending on the quality of the soil they’re in. They take a while to get started and then BAM they’re off.
  + I experimented with a few varieties, one of which was actually a melon that looked and tasted like a cucumber. They all grew at different times and were different sizes. Know what the specific variety should look like before you harvest.
* Eggplants
  + These didn’t grow as big as I would have expected, but I think I was just overestimating their size. They also just started to come in after I left so I think most of them were harvested in August when I was at home. Harvest with shears.
* Garlic
  + AMAZING THIS YEAR
  + Tons of scapes over the summer. By far our most complimented crop, to the point where I was almost sad to harvest it because I would stop getting compliments on it. A lot of people asked what it was and were shocked that it was garlic.
  + Massive bulbs. We planted some and used a TON for the harvest dinner.
* Kale
  + Planted once in the spring and again after I left at the end of summer.
  + Great crop. Same deal as collard greens, but there will probably be a lot more.
  + Three kinds. They look really pretty and all taste pretty much the same.
  + Harvested throughout the summer and once in the fall for the harvest dinner.
* Lettuce
  + Planted a ton of different varieties throughout the summer. Joker was a really successful variety. Amish deer tongue was the least successful. Good idea to get a few different varieties and figure out the best ones early. This is a profitable crop, so it’s a good idea to seed a lot of it early and have a regular seeding regimine for it throughout the summer. You can direct seed or transplant from trays, and you should do both.
  + We used a salad spinner, donated from Chef Rose in the Dining Services, to make lettuce mixes. The lettuce is ripped into leaves, washed and spun, and sold by the pound. This is a great way to use a piecemeal harvest of varied lettuce types OR to use lettuce if part of it has been eaten by insects.
* Mint
  + **There is currently mint in the garden.** Near the fence by the arbor, growing next to the catnip. Same as the catnip, make sure it’s not growing where it shouldn’t be growing.
* Nasturtium
  + They had a slow start over the summer. Don’t plant right next to bug blooms because they will be completely shaded. The flowers started to pop in the fall.
  + This crop is fun for kids and groups visiting the garden, as the flowers have a bright, peppery flavor.
* Peas
  + Similar situation to beans, where the bunnies got them very early. There were a few survivors that Camp Reese got to eat as snacks, but we didn’t sell any to the dining hall.
  + Keep a close eye on them for bunnies, and if they survive bunnies, keep a closer eye on them to make sure they are constantly supported and trellised. They flop over really easily.
* Peppers
  + I was scared that they didn’t get tall, but they were very productive. It’s an ongoing joke between the garden and the dining hall that they can’t do much with too many hot peppers. I went with Jalapeños because they’re a bit milder and more versatile, and they didn’t complain. But I would go majority sweet peppers.
* Popping corn
  + This was one of the saddest crops. It grew super tall and we were all very hopeful because we could see big cobs starting to grow. Then, all at once, the squirrels decimate it. There were corn kernels all over and around the garden. I think if we try these again, we need a way of keeping off the squirrels. I managed to save and pop half a cob, and it was pretty good, but wasn’t really ready yet. They need to dry on the stalk for a while.
* Potatoes
  + They are due to be harvested in late summer once the plant dries out. They’re easy and fun to dig out. Remember to NOT wash the dirt off, as exposing the potatoes to water increases chance of rot and mold. Also do NOT leave potatoes in the sun for an extended period as they will start to photosynthesize and get green spots- potatoes are nightshades and the part of the potato that turns green is poisonous!
  + I never saw the harvest, as they were sold in August.
* Radishes
  + Similar to beets, but not quite as bad. The difference was, we did get a crop, but they weren’t really edible. Very tough and bitter radishes. I think they really need the right soil. Planted some more in the fall by the fence near the arbor, and they were actually pretty productive and tasty.
* Rhubarb
  + Didn’t provide a lot. Might not be enough to sell to the dining hall.
  + I boiled it and it was ok, but I think it might be better later in the season
  + Leaves are poisonous, don’t taste them. Eat the stalks.
* Scallions
  + We did one round in the summer and one in the fall. The former was successful and tasty. The second never grew very big, and by the time I harvested, they were chewy. They like a nice summer haircut- cut the tops off when they start to get bigger, then wait for them to grow really big and harvest them with the bulb.
* Spinach
  + I think spinach doesn’t like me because it has been successful in past years, but I didn’t get huge harvests from it. I think I might have harvested too late
  + New Zealand Spinach!!! It’s not actually spinach, but it tastes similar (I think better) and grows for longer, and is really productive. Highly recommended!
* Strawberries
  + They were done. Had one tiny harvest and then nothing, as the plot was covered in weeds and the strawberry plants had died off. I pulled them all. Please plant some more, because they’re really good and give good harvests for three years at a time!
* Tomatoes
  + My favorite crop, and the one I put the most work into, probably.
  + We trellised using two methods: Hanging string and basket-weave. It was the first time hanging string had been tried in the garden and it was definitely a success. We did three rows of tomatoes, and they were quite productive in August and September.
  + Remember to pick off suckers frequently or you’ll have to deal with multiple stalks.
  + Careful when watering. Blight lives in the soil and if soil is touching the aboveground plant too much it will spread.
  + Blight is kind of inevitable. You may need to pull some tomatoes if it gets really bad. Use your discretion when you do.
* Basil
  + We grew two kinds of basil, lemon basil and Italian large leaf. Lemon basil was a lot more productive. Pulled off seeds as they grew. Don’t be afraid to harvest a lot.
* Cilantro
  + Planted once and harvested a few times.
  + Probably better to plant multiple times and harvest younger. I let the one batch we grew go for a long time because I wanted to try to harvest coriander seed, nothing ever came of that.
* Herbs (Parsley, thyme, oregano, sage, rosemary, sorel, chives, garlic chives, lavender)
  + I wasn’t great about harvesting herbs, mostly because a lot of them went in near the end of the summer (because it took us a while to build, and I wasn’t sure how to harvest some of them, or how much to harvest).
  + I did harvest chives frequently. Harvest in big bunches. You can give dining hall the flowers too.
  + We used a lot of the herbs for the harvest dinner.
* Bug blooms
  + Grew like crazy.
* Morning glories
  + Grew like crazy. Fun to plant around the arbor. They make it look really nice late summer and early fall.
* Sunflowers
  + Very pretty.
  + There were a few wild ones that grew alongside the ones we planted.

**Camp Reece**

Things went pretty well with Camp Reece in general. We mainly played it by ear in terms of the activities we did. I gave tours to a couple groups, but most of the kids didn’t show a ton of interest until we actually started work. Activities we did were weeding, putting down handfuls of wood chips, putting down straw under tomatoes, and planting beans. Harvesting beans would have been a fun activity, but unfortunately because of rabbits, there were none to harvest at this point in the summer. Creative things like drawing with chalk, making signs, or painting stones might also be fun things to do.

**Pre-college Program**

These guys were AWESOME! We got so much work done in two hours. We weeded the entirety of three long rows and the walking space in between, both of which were stressing me out quite a bit. Weeding and putting down woodchips is a great task for these guys cause there’s always so much to be done, but if there’s some other task that’s been lingering for a while that requires a lot of hands, this is the event to get it done.

**Fall**

**Work Parties**

Probably the most popular work parties of the year, but not by much. The first two had maybe ten people, and then numbers dropped as the semester went on. That was pretty much to be expected, as it gets colder and excited first-years start to lose interest. But I had three to four people who would consistently show up to almost every work party, so we got some good work done. Mostly these work parties consisted of harvesting and cleaning up (taking down trellising, pulling out dead crops, picking up drip tape).

**Harvest Dinner**

The Harvest Dinner was very good this year. I think we got around 275 students, and a lot of compliments on the food and the event in general.

We used a similar menu to last year, with a few significant changes, notably white bean and greens soup (my child) and vegan mac-and-cheese taking the place of vegetarian chilli as a main course. We purchased food this year instead of asking for donations because we had the funds and wanted to support local farms.

There was a jazz concert the same day as the Harvest Dinner this year, so I wasn’t able to find live performers in time for the event. Instead, compost managers played music through an AV cord, and that worked as a decent alternative.

We recruited volunteers through emails, posters, and facebook. These volunteers prepped food Friday + Saturday and served on Sunday. These volunteers need thoughtful direction and instruction via email before the event and in-person day-of. The Sustainability Reps (S-Reps) tabled with Garden t-shirts and stickers for sale. The Compost Managers organized a dish return station so attendees could compost leftover food waste and the compostable bowls from the soup and apple crisp/ice-cream.

This was the menu:

White Bean and Greens Soup (Originally escarole, but we couldn’t find any, so we used spinach and kale instead)

Vegan Mac and Cheese

Scalloped Potatoes

Roasted Root Vegetables

Roasted Vegetable Medley

Carrot Slaw

Simple Salad

Garlic Bread

Pumpkin Bread

Apple Crisp

Vanilla Ice Cream (Battenkill Creamery)

We used kale and garlic from the garden. Kale went in the soup, but that only made up a small amount of the kale needed. Garlic went in pretty much everything (as it should be). There was so much that we were able to use it in the garlic bread, the scalloped potatoes and the soup, and there was still some roasted garlic left.

There was a lot of extra food after the event, mostly due to some miscommunications with the dining hall staff regarding amounts. People were also very full. I think next year it might be a good idea to go lighter on the carbs, because people definitely could have gone back for seconds. Feedmore took most of our leftovers though, so that was great.

**Notes/ Suggestions**

* Bunnies were our biggest pest this year, eating most of our peas and beans over the summer. I don’t know what could be done differently to prevent this. Maybe using soap spray more?
* There’s a barrel that collects rainwater connected to the shed. It’s there so we could probably use it.
* There’s an herb garden outside of Joto. It’s there so we could probably use it.
* Bring back the mushroom logs! It would be a cool project to grow some mushrooms.
* Make soap spray at the beginning of the summer. Mixing up some soap and hot sauce in water.
* Be creative with your posters! You can definitely get people’s attention with a cool poster. I drew little happy vegetables on mine.
* If you’re feeling overwhelmed, let Jen and Levi know. They are understanding of that kind of thing.
* If you have any questions and I haven’t graduated yet, feel free to e-mail me at my Skidmore e-mail and I would be glad to help - ehersh@skidmore.edu