

SEPTEMBER 2023

WHAT'S GROWING ON?

TCFPC Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture Working Group

CGUA MEETING NOTES

The Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture working group met on May 22nd in-person at the Tarrant Area Food Bank.

An informal CGUA gathering was held on August 31st at 9am at Heirloom. Heirloom is located at Archie's Gardenland. Four members attended and discussed existing resources for school and community gardens along with ideas for future resources! Stay tuned for more informal gatherings!

The next CGUA meeting will be in September 28th at 4pm. Location: North Hi Mount Elementary, 3801 N. 7th Street Fort Worth, Tx 76107.

We're looking forward to seeing everyone and hearing about your garden successes and your upcoming plans! Plan to attend the meeting on September 28th and watch for an email from Dave on meeting location.

For questions and information about CGUA, contact our co-chairs, Dave Aftandilian at d.aftandilian@tcu.edu or Lauren Hickman at lauren.hickman@tafb.org.



SEASONAL PRODUCE FUN FACTS - Okra

Okra does not exist in as many different varieties as some of our other favorite vegetable crops, but there are several different types to look for. You may be able to find old-fashioned heirloom varieties, spineless types, dwarf okras, giant okras, round-pod okras, star-pod types, and red okras!

- Okra is a species of the Hibiscus genus and is related to hollyhock, cotton, Rose of Sharon and hibiscus.
- Okra can be grown in most hardiness zones in the United States, but it is most popular in the southern part of the country. Many gardening and recipe books produced elsewhere may not even include okra!
- Okra seeds can be used as a caffeine-free substitute for coffee that tastes surprisingly similar!
- Experts cannot seem to agree on the origins of okra, but it likely came from East Asia, West Africa or Ethiopia.
- Okra is a mucilaginous plant which is why it can get slimy when cooked certain ways. Some folks don't care for this slimy texture, but it can be really useful. The slime can be used to thicken soups, create biodegradable packaging and treat waste water!

Learn more cool facts about okra at <https://facts.net/lifestyle/food/okra-facts/>.

Events & Classes

NEXT CGUA MEETING

September 28th, 4pm
Location: North Hi Mount Elementary School

TCFPC GENERAL MEETING

No General Meetings Until November 2023

SAVE TARRANT WATER

Fall Garden Prep
Sept. 2nd, 8am to 5pm

<https://savetarrantwater.com/events/>

FORT WORTH BOTANIC GARDENS

How to Grow Plants in a Container
Sept. 23rd, 10am-12pm

<https://fwbg.org/calendar-events>

AMERICAN COMMUNITY GARDEN ASSOCIATION

Annual Conference: Celebrating the Diversity of Growing
September 27-30
Houston, TX

<https://www.communitygarden.org>

COWTOWN FARMERS MARKET

Saturdays, 8am to NOON
www.cowtownmarket.com

Fall Festival - September 30th
Veterans Park, Grand Pavilion
8901 Clifford St.
White Settlement, TX 76108



PRODUCING FOOD IN THE TEXAS HEAT

BY BECCA KNUTSON

The heat of the summer will occasionally force me to spend more time inside than I would prefer and I have been spending a lot of that time thinking about how our summer weather has impacted our local food crops. While September often provides a little relief from the heat of the North Texas summer, the last two months have been a struggle for farmers and gardeners.

As I am writing this, we have experienced 42 days of 100+ degree weather in 2023. This year ranks 7th in recorded history, with more hot weather in the forecast. We have also experienced a very dry summer. The combination of these two factors is impacting a lot of different aspects of life, but most relevant to this group is local food production.

At the farmers market, we have experienced a severe lack of fruit being harvested because crops like peaches, cantaloupe, watermelon and blueberries aren't able to get enough water. We had a great tomato season earlier in the summer, but the outlook for fall tomatoes is grim. Direct seeded crops like okra, beans, southern peas and squash are having trouble staying moist enough to germinate and grow slowly if they do manage to mature.

The heat and drought have brought out grasshoppers in droves which chew away at crops that are already stressed and chomp into the little fruit we are producing. If the heat continues into September, we may have trouble establishing fall crops which could result in delays or crop failure.

The lack of produce at the farmers market is frustrating and disappointing. Likely, we will have a better fall or even a much better season next summer, but that doesn't stop me from thinking about what we could do differently to better manage increasingly volatile weather conditions as it relates to growing food. How can we better equip farmers with tools and structures like high tunnels, shade cloth and irrigation to help them adapt to different weather conditions? What resources do we have to help farmers choose hardier varieties of our favorite crops that are more well-suited to thrive in a variety of conditions? How can we work together to better plan a good selection of foods to ensure the desired crops make their way to the farmers market?

What other solutions can we think of to help strengthen our local food system despite the weather we experience? Farmers and gardeners alike need to be able to adapt to our changing and unpredictable climate to make sure we have food for the future.

As I continue to learn and try new techniques on my farm, I have a couple things planned for the fall that will help me have more to bring to the market and offer at other retail outlets:

1. Low Tunnels:
 - a. If you lack abundant growing space, funds or ability to install large structures, low tunnels are a great way to provide protection in the summer and winter.
 - b. You can use conduit or smaller wire to create custom tunnel structures to hold shade cloth, frost cloth or greenhouse plastic.
 - c. For more on low tunnels: <https://www.johnnyseeds.com/growers-library/methods-tools-supplies/winter-growing-season-extension/managequickhoops.html>
2. Planting into Landscape Fabric:
 - a. Landscape fabric can help protect the soil in the summer and winter from extreme temperatures and excessive evaporation.
 - b. I currently only plant strawberries into fabric but plan to try using it with several other crops and gauge the success. It will also help me manage the weeds!

What have you tried to help protect your crops in extreme weather? Did you have any success with heat tolerant varieties or crops this summer? Let's network together to help everyone be more successful growing food for our community! Feel free to reach out with questions or ideas: hollowtracemarketfarm@gmail.com.

September was a thirty-days long goodbye to summer, to the season that left everybody both happy and weary of the warm, humid weather and the exhausting but thrilling adventures.

LEA MALOT



SEPTEMBER TO-DO

Begin removing spent plants to prepare for fall planting.

Plant broccoli, cauliflower, kale and cabbage transplants starting mid-month.

Direct-seed spinach, lettuce, peas, arugula, radishes, carrots, turnip and beets at the end of the month.

Consider planting perennial herbs and fruit trees.

Add a layer of compost to cleared areas to refresh the soil nutrients.

Plum Jam

Recipe: Hannah Lamar Gibson

A simple, quick recipe to use up excess stone fruit and store a taste of summer. This recipe makes about 24 oz jam, but is easily scaled to your quantity of fruit.



INGREDIENTS

- 2 lb plums, pitted and quartered, with skins on
- 1 1/2-2 C sugar (per your preference for more tart or more sweet jam)
- Juice of 1 lemon

PREPARATION

- Prepare mason jars by boiling a pot of water, then submerge jar and lid in the boiling water for 5-10 minutes. When done, allow jars to air dry while your jam cooks.
- Combine ingredients in a heavy-bottomed pan and cook on medium heat until fruit is soft, about 15-20 minutes.
- Mash fruit in the cooking pot with a wooden spoon or potato masher to break up fruit into smaller pieces.
- Turn heat to low and continue to cook, stirring regularly, for about 30 minutes.
- To test for doneness, drop a small dollop of the jam on a cool plate. Allow to cook for about 30 seconds, then run your finger through the middle of the jam. If the two halves of the jam do not touch, your jam is done. If the two halves run back into each other, continue to cook for another 5-10 minutes and test again.
- Ladle hot jam into mason jars. Use jam within 8 weeks.

IN THE NEWS

- "Teachers gather in For Worth to Learn How to Bring Gardens Back to their Schools" <https://fortworthreport.org/2023/07/20/teachers-gather-in-fort-worth-to-learn-how-to-bring-gardens-back-to-their-schools/>
- Fort Worth food advocates meet with local representatives <https://www.star-telegram.com/news/local/fort-worth/article278348149.html>
- Federal Support for urban farming is under consideration <https://civileats.com/2023/08/07/congress-puts-federal-support-for-urban-farming-on-the-chopping-block/>
- An interview with the first director of NYC's Office of Urban Agriculture <https://civileats.com/2023/08/21/re-envisioning-new-york-citys-green-spaces-with-qiana-mickie/>

GARDEN RESOURCES

Local Nurseries:

[Archie's Gardenland](#)
[Calloway's](#)

Free Seeds:

[TAFB Community Garden Program:](#)
communitygarden@tafb.org
[GROW North Texas](#)

Bulk Soil/Compost/Mulch:

[Living Earth](#)
[Silver Creek Materials](#)
[City of FW Drop-Off Stations](#)

Garden Curricula:

CGUA-
<http://www.tarrantcountyfoodpolicycouncil.org/resources---reports.html>

Community Food Systems Map:

<http://www.tarrantcountyfoodpolicycouncil.org/local-food-map.html>

VIRTUAL GARDENING CONTENT

BRIT | Botanic Garden

[youtube.com/user/BRITplanttoplanet](https://www.youtube.com/user/BRITplanttoplanet)

Paperpot Co Blog & Podcast

<https://paperpot.co/the-blog/>

Tarrant Area Food Bank

[youtube.com/user/TarrantAreaFoodBank](https://www.youtube.com/user/TarrantAreaFoodBank)

Tarrant County Master Gardeners

[youtube.com/c/TarrantCountyMasterGardeners](https://www.youtube.com/c/TarrantCountyMasterGardeners)

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

[youtube.com/c/txextension](https://www.youtube.com/c/txextension)





GREG'S TOP CROPS

Broccoli, Cauliflower, Cabbage

Snap Peas, Green Beans

Mustard Greens, Collards, Kale



FARM RESOURCES

Organizations & Associations:

Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
farmandranchfreedom.org

GROW North Texas
grownorthtexas.org

Natural Resource Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Texas Center for Local Food
texaslocalfood.org

Texas Department of Agriculture
texasagriculture.gov

Texas Organic Farmers & Gardeners Association
tofga.org

USDA Farm Service Agency
fsa.usda.gov

USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture
nifa.usda.gov/

OPAL'S PICKS

I've sitting here this evening (in the air conditioning!) thinking about where Opal's Farm has been and where we are going. The last couple of months have been hectic, but August is a time when things tend to slow down in the garden or at the farm. The Texas heat sees to that! Tomatoes begin to go dormant for the next few weeks, triple digit heat causes more casualties amongst the produce, and it seems like more farms are absent from the market each week as August goes on. Charlie Blaylock used to remind me that August is the time of year every farmer asks themselves why we do this. Texas summer tends to cause a crisis of conviction for even the best of us.

A friend emailed a quote the other day that put things back in perspective - "Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds that plant" (Robert Louis Stevenson). Opal's Farm moved to a smaller, more intensive means of farming this year. I hope that folks are still enjoying their harvests, but I am proud of the



neighbors and community. We will be back! opalfarm.com/unlimited.org. Keep on sowing those seeds you all!

Greg Joel
Farm Manager - Opal's Farm
<https://www.facebook.com/opalsfarm>

