

DECEMBER 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 November 30th in-person at Ridglea Christian Church. Eleven members were in attendance.

Meeting Discussion & Announcements:

- TAFB's garden program is focusing on the gardens they have on TAFB property and working to support their Community Garden Network gardens.
- The NTx School Garden Network held a successful Professional Development training session in October and will hold their next one in January.
- Check your local farmers markets for Holiday Markets happening this month and be aware of any holiday/winter schedule changes or closures during the cooler months.
- North Texas Healthy Communities hosted tours at Opal's, Mind Your Garden and Tabor Farms which had great attendance and engagement from the community.
- In 2024, the Mindful Markets will be held on the first Saturday of each month.
- Opal's Farm has a lot of exciting news. They have been teaching gardening workshops to the community; they are planning to have a market at the farm before Christmas; they are partnering with Tarleton to work with previously incarcerated people starting in fall 2024; the urban farming curriculum Charlie helped them with will be published by Tarleton; and they are set up to accept SNAP/EBT!
- The rest of the meeting was an open discussion presenting ideas to RCC's garden transition team on how to manage The Learning Garden after TAFB returns ownership of it at the end of 2023. The group had a lot of great suggestions which RCC may use to request applications, hold a community meeting, or make specific asks to organizations likely to have capacity to be involved. See Lauren's article on p. 2 for more info.

The next CGUA meeting will be on January 25th at 3pm. Location TBD.

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 - Cabbage

Cabbage is a great crop to grow during the cooler months in North Texas. It can be planted as early as August 15th (under shade cloth) for a November harvest or planted throughout the winter, allowing 60 to 100 days until harvest.

- Cabbage is in the Cruciferae family. The name come from the Latin word for "cross". Cabbage flowers and leaves grow in a cross pattern.
- Cabbage is related to kale, broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts.
- There are several different types of cabbage including green, red/purple, savoy, Chinese/Napa.
- Cabbage has a wide variety of culinary uses and can be stored several different ways. Green cabbage stores fresh for up to several months, wrapped in plastic in the fridge. It can also be chopped and frozen or fermented to make saurkraut or kimchi.



Cabbage is a relatively easy, hands-off winter crop. Give it a try in your garden soon!

Learn more cool facts about cabbage, visit: <https://foodprint.org/real-food/cabbage/>

Events & Classes

NEXT CGUA MEETING

January 25th, 3pm
Location: TBD

TCFPC GENERAL MEETING

TCFPC Networking Meeting
Thursday, March 7th
Time & Location TBD

SAVE TARRANT WATER

Pruning & Tool Maintenance
Dec. 2nd, 8am-5pm

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

NTX SCHOOL GARDEN NETWORK

Farm to School Professional Development
Jan. 20th, 9am

<https://ntxschoolgardennetwork.org/events>

MINDFUL MARKET

Dec. 16th, 11am to 2pm
<https://coactntx.wixsite.com/funkytown-mindful-ma>

COWTOWN FARMERS MARKET

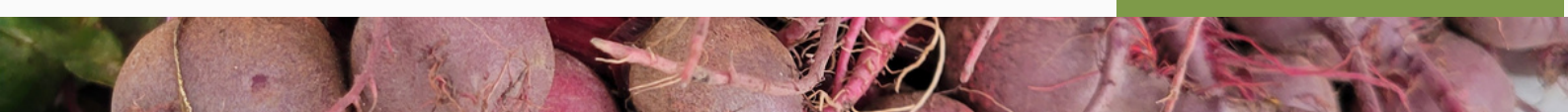
EVERY Saturday, 8am to NOON
www.cowtownmarket.com

HOLIDAY MARKET - DEC. 16TH

SAGINAW FARMERS MARKET

2nd & 4th Saturdays, 8am to NOON
www.saginawmarket.com

HOLIDAY MARKET - DEC. 9TH





THE LEARNING GARDEN AT RIDGLEA

BY LAUREN HICKMAN, TARRANT AREA FOOD BANK

TRANSITIONING TO A NEW SEASON OF MANAGEMENT

Tarrant County is home to a vibrant community of gardens that focus on building community and increasing food security. Tarrant Area Food Bank plays a major role in this work by operating active community gardens and supporting the development and sustainability of a large Community Garden Network.

The Learning Garden at Ridglea Christian Church (RCC), established in 2014, has served as a hands-on learning environment for the community for a decade. The garden demonstrates a multitude of growing styles while producing approximately a ton of fresh produce each year. The primary goals of this space have been educational; teaching neighbors how to grow fruits and vegetables, start community gardens, try new healthy foods, and participate in moderate physical activity. Tarrant Area Food Bank has managed this space with the support of the community while RCC has managed the Jubilee Garden, also on-site. As TAFB begins planting the seeds for the new Ready To Learn Garden at its Main Campus, management of the garden at Ridglea will shift to RCC and supporting partners. TAFB and CGUA will continue to be active thought partners with RCC during this transition.

GRATITUDE FOR ALL THAT HAS BEEN

Words are not adequate to express the impact of the decade-long partnership between RCC and TAFB!

- The garden has served as a guide and resource for a network of more than 60 community garden sites in our community.
- Approximately 12,000 people have invested their time and received the wellness benefits of volunteering in the garden.
- The Learning Garden compost yard has diverted about 11,000 gallons of commercial produce waste from the landfill, converted it into nutrient rich soil amendments, and taught environmental stewardship to thousands.
- Almost 20,000 pounds of fresh produce grown at the Learning Garden has gone directly into local food pantries to reduce food insecurity.
- The garden has functioned as a living classroom for nutrition & culinary education while supporting increased physical activity.

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT SEASON

In this season of change, we look forward to seeing the continued impacts of the garden at Ridglea, the new Ready to Learn Garden at TAFB, and the other incredible community gardens who are educating and growing food in our community!

- If you or your organization are interested in acting as a supporting partner for the next season of the garden at Ridglea, please contact Russ Boyd at russ@ridgleachristian.org.
- You can volunteer in a local community garden by signing up here: tafb.org/volunteer
- Learn more about the Ready to Learn Initiatives at TAFB: <https://tafb.org/ready-to-learn/>

Ridglea Christian Church, thank you for all you have done and all you will continue to do for our community by hosting this thriving garden on your property!



“In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.”

WILLIAM BLAKE



DECEMBER TO-DO

Watch the weather forecast and prepare your frost protection for cold nights.

Finish planting cool season vegetable crops and herbs if the weather stays mild.

Plant bulbs for spring like tulips and hyacinth.

Mulch bare soil and beds.

Cut back spent perennials, leaving 6 inches of stem for critters to use as shelter.

Prepare for seed starting and garden planning.

Rest and get ready for next year!

One Pot Lentil Soup

Recipe from The Minimalist Baker

Gather around the table for an easy, healthy weeknight dinner that can use your garden harvest and farmers market haul. Link to recipe: <https://minimalistbaker.com/1-pot-everyday-lentil-soup/>



INGREDIENTS

- 2 Tbsp water
- 2 cloves garlic (minced)
- 2 small shallots (diced)
- 4 large carrots (thinly sliced)
- 4 stalks celery (thinly sliced)
- 1/4 tsp each salt and pepper
- 3 cups baby potatoes (roughly chopped into bite-size pieces*)
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 2-3 sprigs rosemary or thyme
- 1 cup uncooked green or brown lentils (rinsed and drained)
- 2 cups chopped sturdy greens (such as kale or collard greens)

PREPARATION

- Heat a large pot over medium heat. Add water, garlic, shallots/onion, carrots, and celery. Season with salt and pepper and stir.
- Sauté for 4-5 minutes or until slightly tender and golden brown, careful not to burn the garlic.
- Add potatoes and season with more salt and pepper. Stir and cook for 2 minutes more.
- Add vegetable broth and rosemary or thyme and increase heat to medium high. Bring to a rolling simmer. Then add lentils and stir. Once simmering again, reduce heat to low and simmer uncovered for 15-20 minutes or until lentils and potatoes are tender.
- Add your greens, stir, and cover. Cook for 3-4 minutes more to wilt. Then taste and adjust flavor as needed, adding more salt and pepper, vegetable broth if it's become too thick, or herbs for earthy flavor.
- Garnish with fresh herbs. Enjoy as is or serve with rice, cauliflower rice, or a side of flatbread or rolls.
- Store leftovers covered in the refrigerator up to 5 days or in the freezer up to 1 month. Reheat on the stovetop and add more vegetable broth to rehydrate as needed.

IN THE NEWS

- Local urban farm made the news inviting the community out for farm tour https://fortworthreport.org/calendar/?_evDiscoveryPath=/event/2042552-farm-to-fort-worth-an-up-close-look-at-urban-farms
- Community garden in Texas receives large donation from foundation and a corporation to fund growth <https://www.12newsnow.com/article/news/local/west-port-arthur-community-garden-receives-75000-donation/502-bdaaa63f-cfaf-4de7-9d37-6cffe746f3a4>

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)

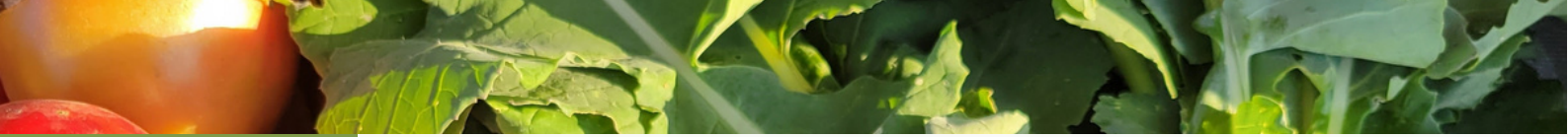
Tarrant County Master Gardeners

[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

Carrots, Beets, Radishes

Mustard Greens, Collards, Kale, Lettuce



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 hope you all had a great Thanksgiving! December is upon us and with it all the hustle and bustle of Christmas. That doesn't mean we get to neglect Opal's Farm, though. All the Fall crops – kale, collards, mustards and other greens, salad mix, lettuces, beets, turnips (Japanese and purple-top) to name a few – are in and growing well. However, winter is the time to get ready for the cold and prep beds for Spring. There's not really a good time to take a break!

The Old Farmers Almanac and NOAA are in agreement – this is supposed to be a colder and wetter winter than usual. When planting our Fall crops, we've covered most of them with Agribon 19 frost cloth. The 19 fabric allows in water, 90% of sunlight, and provides good frost protection in our Texas climate. However, when the temperature is going to be below freezing for more than a day or so we use the heavier Agribon 30 fabric to lay over the top of the beds to provide better freeze protection. They offer a 50 for colder climates but we simply double layer as we won't need the heavier 50 fabric for the most part. We purchase our Agribon fabric from Johnny's Select Seeds. It's available in a variety of sizes to accommodate home gardens or urban farms like us.

We've also added a greenhouse this year to start our transplants in. This is part of our prep for Spring. We've used weed fabric for a couple of years with our tomatoes and peppers. We have a template and a flame weeder to place the planting holes just right. We're hoping that we'll be able to do the same with the other Spring transplants. Summers are getting hotter and longer. The weed fabric will help cool the soil to provide for longer growing in the spring and summer.

Climate change has brought hotter, drier, and more extreme weather to North Texas. Thinking ahead to next year, I've found a couple of varieties of veggies that do well. We use Tokyo Bekana and Asian greens in our salad mix. Both grow well in our climate and are far more heat and drought resistant than more traditional greens. We can grow them year-round if we provide a floating row cover (again, Agribon 19) in the winter.

We've also discovered the Yardlong green beans love the heat. They are strong producers with great flavor. However, if you only grow for yourself you might want to limit the size of the bed (plus, these require trellising – they are a pole bean). They go to town! The variety we use is called Python and is native to Southeast Asia so it's used to the heat.

We at Opal's Farm wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! We'll talk to you in 2024!

Greg Joel

Farm Manager - Opal's Farm

<https://www.facebook.com/opalsfarm>

