

GARDENING

FOR

INDEPENDENCE

ONE WOMAN'S
JOURNEY TO
IMPROVE HER
GARDEN,
LANDSCAPE
AND BECOME
MORE SELF-
SUFFICIENT IN
HER FOOD
PRODUCTION



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Edited by Marg Stewart





GARDENING FOR INDEPENDENCE



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INTRODUCTION

It all began innocently enough, Karen being a co-editor and willing article writer for *The Compost Pile*, I had given her an assignment to write about Victory Gardens. We were both interested in the concept and fascinated by the history of the Victory Garden movement.

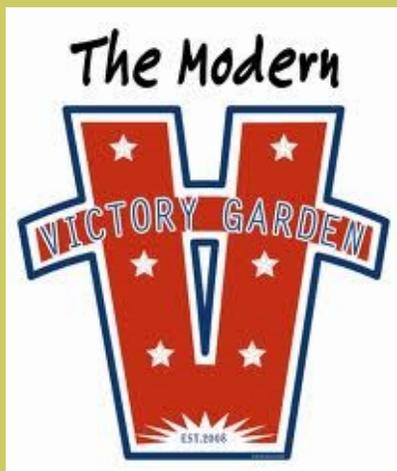
Karen's article(s) were fantastic and she began a personal quest on getting more self-sufficient in her own garden. Personally, I had all ready converted my backyard into a no-grass zone with the area now being dedicated to food production and herbs to use for culinary and medicinal uses. I was interested to see what Karen would begin doing in her own garden(s).

Her first article was featured in September, 2012 in *The Compost Pile*. Unfortunately, it was long and had to be edited down. That bothered me, but I let it go. Then came her October installment. Well, this was another long article and this time with pictures! So the question in my mind became, how to get this unique perspective out to everyone and not have a newsletter that was over 10 pages long.....thus was born the idea of this booklet, brochure, journal....whatever you wish to call it.

Karen agreed to supply the updates and I would get them formatted. You now have the final result in your hands. An amazing look into one person's quest to grow more of her own food and to become more self-sufficient.

We hope you'll enjoy the adventure as much as we did.

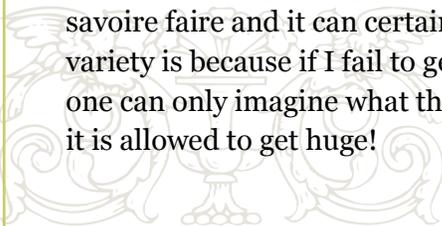
Marg Stewart, Editor





Time for a progress report on my plans for turning an unused area of my yard into a super-productive intensive-garden plot. As I write this in mid-August, the dog days are fully upon us and I'm wondering what the heck I was thinking two months ago when I made plans to build trellises and raised beds over the summer. I've lived here long enough to know that July and August are the 'holding on' months during which you mow the lawn (if you can't get anybody else to do it), resort to spraying Round-Up instead of hand-pulling weeds because it's so much easier, and just 'hold on' because cooler weather is coming eventually. I could give additional excuses for not having gotten some (any) of my trellis and raised bed projects built this summer. But let's just cut to the chase and acknowledge that it's HOT out there and when it's not hot it's been raining cats and dogs. All of which makes it a lot easier and more pleasant to sit at the computer, and point and click and order stuff and have the UPS man bring it right to your door. So that's where I am at this point. I WILL go outside and build things. Soon. But, gee, when favorite suppliers send sale flyers and free shipping deals isn't it a little silly to not take advantage of those and do one's bit to pump up the economy? OK, setting aside the need to rationalize for a moment, here is what I've purchased/acquired/and/or re-purposed so far in my quest to increase food production on a very small plot:

cucumber trellis: Yes, I still want to build a modified version of this nifty PV project: <http://www.pvcplans.com/trellis.htm> and have actually managed to get the husband somewhat interested in helping or at least advising me on parts to buy and how to proceed. But in the meantime, Gardener's Supply had a year-end sale and I snapped up this cucumber trellis for about what it would cost me to buy parts and build my own and certainly for a lot less labor investment (see "point and click" above): <http://tinyurl.com/cffcgay>. The PVC trellis would be a lot sturdier but this one will do nicely and if I remember to take it down and store it properly at the end of the season, it should last for several seasons. I do like the idea of growing the cucumbers out of containers, as pictured in the PVC version. I already grow all of my tomatoes, peppers and citrus in containers and plan to expand the use of containers as a way to overcome the problems associated with poor soil and tree root competition, all of which are very much present in my intensive garden site (and which explains why the area has never really been used successfully in the 20 years we've lived here.) And to digress a bit while on the subject of cucumbers, I've been on a quest within a quest to not only grow cucumbers next year but to grow the tiny ones used for making baby sweet pickles so that I will be able to can several pints of those next year. I had assumed (and been told by the produce guys at the local farmers market) that it was mostly a matter of picking the cukes while they were still tiny and THAT is how you make sweet pickles (or gherkins as they're often called). Well, to my surprise, I discovered that there is a specific variety grown for this purpose and they are called (ready for this?) Parisian Pickling Cucumbers: <http://rareseeds.com/parisian-pickling-cucumber.html> There is also a vegetable called the West Indian Gherkin cucumber which is related to the cucumber and for which one can also purchase seeds: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mv066> But I think I'll stick with the Parisian Pickling Cucumber if for no other reason than growing anything with "Parisian" in the title should lend my garden that certain hint of savoir faire and it can certainly use that! Actually, the real reason I think I'll stick with the Parisian variety is because if I fail to get them picked when tiny, they will grow into still-usable cucumbers. But one can only imagine what that spiny and slightly scary-looking West Indian Gherkin becomes when it is allowed to get huge!





Strawberry Project: I'd like to build my own strawberry pyramid out of cedar which would be an attractive and long-lasting addition to the garden. But with fall looming and the need to get my strawberry plants on order so that I can get them growing over the winter, I went with an eBay find instead: <http://tinyurl.com/chr855> I offered \$5 less than the listing price and that offer was accepted. Alas, it's not beautiful cedar but it does have the advantage of already being mostly built. :) A lengthy search into where to find the best deal on fall-shipped strawberry plants finally turned up a nursery in GA that fits the bill: <http://www.isons.com/> I ordered 50 plants to be delivered to me in early December and the cost worked out to .75 per plant, including shipping. I was very pleased to find a variety called 'Sweet Charlie' as this is one of the varieties recommended by IFAS for Florida home gardens: http://strawberry.ifas.ufl.edu/growing_strawberries_in_the_flor.htm I am anticipating that I will have to grow strawberries as annuals but holding out the hope that I can get some to survive for the following year(s). That will be the subject of a future update!

Raspberries and Blackberries: This is another 'I'm gonna give it a shot' project. Years ago I planted berries here and they quickly took over and got out of control. It took some real dedicated effort to reclaim that overgrown part of the yard and turn it into my pond and waterfall. Not wishing to repeat that experience, I'm going to try growing berries in large containers instead. Blackberries do well in our area and several are recommended by IFAS: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs104> I am going with Arapaho because they're thornless and also have an erect growth habit vs. trailing vines. That should make them more suitable for containers. Red raspberries are much trickier to grow here- the problem being our low number of annual chill-hours, which is the same problem that makes it difficult for us to grow many types of deciduous fruits. In-depth research into this subject indicates to me that red raspberries in Florida are best treated as annuals. Never being one to shy away from a challenge, I decided to try my hand at obtaining plants this fall and then give them some chill time in the refrigerator, all with the aim of harvesting a crop in early spring. After a lot of searching, I turned to Stark Bros, Nursery in Missouri (<http://www.starkbros.com/>) They're located near where I grew up and I've been to their wonderful nursery several times. Stark Bros doesn't have much that is suitable for our area but they do have raspberry plants available for fall shipping. So I ordered some Heritage variety plants which should arrive in November. Then I can try to find room for them in the refrigerator along with the Thanksgiving turkey! It'll be a grand experiment and one of those trial and error things to be updated 'in the future!' If I fail with the Heritage variety I can always fall back on 'Dorma Red' which is a variety suited to our climate but doesn't yield the big handsome raspberries that we all love. Dorma Red is available from the Ison's nursery in GA for fall shipping and is available from several other suppliers as well, although not necessarily for fall shipping.

Containers: With so much of my gardening being done in containers, I'm always scouting out the best deals on those. Generally speaking, the bigger the better. For citrus, blueberries, tomatoes, etc. I use containers that are a minimum of 18" across and preferably 20" or more. I have several inexpensive containers that I use for growing tomatoes and peppers and I'll pick up a few more of those to accommodate the increased number of tomatoes and peppers I plan to grow next year. However, I also like to use more expensive, attractive containers for my citrus trees and berry plants as those are more permanent features in the landscape. Now, my definition of 'expensive' is \$22+ per container! The best ones I've found are from Wal-Mart. They have the advantage of being quite attractive as well as durable. They look like ceramic but they're plastic resin and they come in nifty colors: <http://tinyurl.com/8nyfy7q> Unfortunately WallyWorld does not seem inclined to offer end-of-season discounts on these containers so I paid full price to add several more of these to my stock. But they sure are pretty and they continue to look good year after year. Note that the large sizes are not available at the new Wal-Mart in Niceville. They had only the smaller sizes there. I don't know about the Crestview Wal-Mart but the Ft. Walton store has had them reliably for the past few years.

So, that is where my Intensive Gardening Project stands at this time. It may be too hot and too rainy to get much done now but I'm laying the groundwork for jumping into action when the blessedly cooler days of fall roll around. The dog-days of summer are perfect for dreaming, planning and researching our future gardening projects. And if anyone tries to tell you that you aren't doing enough on these gosh-awful hot and steamy days, you can borrow my favorite response: "I may look to you like I'm not doing much but I assure you that at the cellular level I'm really quite busy!"



Cleaning up and preparing the neglected area: Round-Up has been sprayed on the liriope border and further limbing-up of the magnolia trees is in progress to make room for vegetable trellises. (I almost hope Larry Williams isn't reading this. I can well remember from our Master Gardener classes how passionately Larry feels about leaving the Southern magnolia au naturel, with its lower branches cascading down and sweeping the earth. I really do agree with that in principle but I've had to make some hard choices with this project because of space limitations. Also, the magnolias came with the house 20 years ago. I didn't plant them so maybe I can be excused for limbing them up. I don't murder my crepes. Does that count?) Scores of trash trees have been cut down. Yards and yards of thorny smilax vine have been extricated from the trees and shrubbery along the fence and I have lots of scars to show for that effort. Several established azaleas have been painstakingly dug out and removed. A brief digression: azaleas are, as advertised, shallow-rooted. But what is easy to forget if you are foolish enough to think that means you can easily dig one up, is that those shallow roots spread out far and wide. And when you are finished digging and wrestling that root mass from the ground, you will have something the approximate size and shape of a Volkswagen. And another azalea truism: they will sucker freely and grow readily and bloom nicely where you don't want them to grow. But if you buy an azalea at the nursery, plant it, fertilize and nurture it, it'll get spider mites and fail to bloom. This is the haul of debris that has come out of the project area pretty much on a weekly basis all summer. There are seven full containers of stuff there. Clearly I wasn't kidding about this being a neglected area of the yard.!



The greenhouse: this is an eBay bargain that I purchased 4 years ago. It has held up remarkably well, considering I leave the plastic cover on it year-round and we've had some major windstorms over the years. If you look closely you might see the clear shipping tape that we use to repair it. Tacky but effective. My greenhouse won't win any beauty contests but it serves its purpose well and enables me to grow many of the seedlings I need each year. It's going to see double-duty this year, as I will be starting a number of seedlings of cold-hardy vegetables this fall. In fact if you look closely, you'll see a seed-starting tray

already in use in September. Those are Alpine strawberry seedlings. OK, use your imagination here. When ordering seeds from Burpee over the summer I was

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER *CONTINUED*



smitten with their photos of charming little Alpine strawberry plants growing in containers. As you might expect from the name, they need cool weather to thrive. I'm starting the seeds now to see if I can successfully raise these plants over the winter months. It might be another of my wishful-thinking projects, but at \$3 for a packet of seeds I can afford a little dreaming and in late winter, I might get rewarded with some tiny, tasty, wild strawberries!

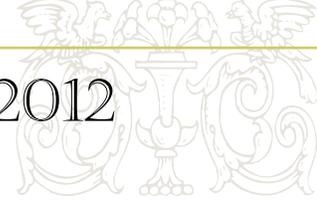


The dilemma: I want my intensive vegetable and fruit garden to be a thing of beauty, not just in my eyes but in the eyes of others who might see it. Thus, I look at this project with a landscaper's eye, with the motivation to create a space that is as attractive as the ornamental areas of the garden. So, landscaper me began thinking of plant arrangements that are appealing and that flow together and draw the eye to various levels and features as well as the need to achieve some elevation differences in a section of yard that is mostly as flat as, well, Florida. With most of my vegetable and fruit plants being in containers, having the containers elevated promotes good drainage and prevents plant roots from growing through the bottom of the container and into the ground. I thought of building a series of wooden plant benches to support containers at different heights. Or to be more precise, I thought of my husband building a series of wooden plant benches for me. But he balked at that, with more vehemence than was really necessary. After a lengthy discussion during which it became apparent he was not going to budge in my direction, he finally played his trump card: the wooden platforms would rot and fall apart in a few years and start looking disreputable and we'd (he'd) be building them all over again. Game, set, match. Since he had won the 'discussion,' he generously offered to shepherd me around Lowe's until solutions presented themselves. With some help from a red-coated expert in the lumber section who immediately understood the project, we looked at siding and treated plywood and considered cutting those into pieces for the containers to sit on. "You could paint it", says the husband helpfully, "and make it look nice". But I really couldn't get past the image of my lovely container garden sitting on pieces of siding and looking an awful lot like trailer park art. A couple of garden gnomes and a cement angel and I'd be all set... So, we moved on to the pavers section. I've used pavers for years to set containers on and they're very handy for that purpose. But they're heavy and difficult to lug around and using them in the quantity I have in mind for this project is a little daunting. We found what appears to be a good solution in the form of synthetic pavers that are lightweight, weatherproof, fairly thick but also flexible and unbreakable. Thus the question of what to set the containers on is answered but I still have the problem of creating areas of elevation within the garden. I remembered some leftover masonry blocks from an earlier retainer wall project and thought of using those to shape some raised terraced areas here and there. I put together a terrace mock-up using the wall blocks and an existing sand berm and placed my container blueberries there. I think I like the effect. And, in spite of spousal resistance, I haven't completely given up on building a couple of platforms. We had a look at Trex, the synthetic decking boards, and those could probably be used to construct some raised platforms that will be impervious to the weather, although Trex is quite expensive. So, the quest for a bountiful and beautiful garden continues.





OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2012

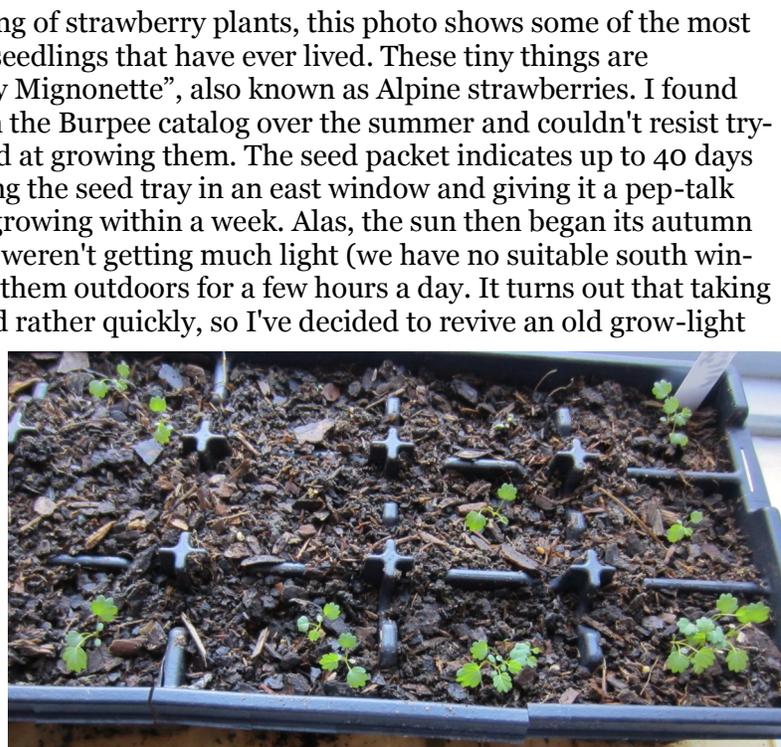


Work on the project slowed a bit in September as we spent as much time as possible with our soldier son who finished up basic training at Ft. Benning and then spent 2 weeks here with us before shipping out to Germany. We also dealt with the loss of our beloved old Doberman, who finally left us at the very advanced age of 15 1/2. The days of missing our son and mourning the dog gradually passed. Cooler weather returned and that always puts a livelier spring in the gardener's step. The project is resumed. Much effort has been devoted to getting some terraced areas prepared and ready for large containers of citrus, blueberries, blackberries and red raspberries. I built retaining walls out of stone wall block and then decided that the tidy rows of blocks were just a little too perfect. I'm thinking they would be much more interesting and attractive if they took on the appearance of fragments of older walls that have been in place for years. This picture shows some newly rehomed citrus containers that have lived on the patio for years and are now residing out in the intensive-gardening area behind rows of wall block. And yes it does look a little like a national cemetery. So, back to the drawing board on that project.



These planters are awaiting the arrival of strawberry plants, expected in November from Ison Nurseries in Georgia. The planters should hold the expected 48 'Sweet Charlie' strawberry plants in an area less than 9 sq. ft. Much time is spent tweaking the irrigation system to ensure that all of the planters and containers will receive adequate water via a combination of drip irrigation and the existing sprinkler system.

And speaking of strawberry plants, this photo shows some of the most pampered seedlings that have ever lived. These tiny things are "Strawberry Mignonette", also known as Alpine strawberries. I found the seeds in the Burpee catalog over the summer and couldn't resist trying my hand at growing them. The seed packet indicates up to 40 days just to germinate the seeds but by situating the seed tray in an east window and giving it a pep-talk every day, I was able to get them up and growing within a week. Alas, the sun then began its autumn march south and soon the little seedlings weren't getting much light (we have no suitable south window to place them in), so I started taking them outdoors for a few hours a day. It turns out that taking a tray of seedlings for a daily walk gets old rather quickly, so I've decided to revive an old grow-light fixture that has languished in the garage for several years and let these spoiled rotten (but simply darling) little Alpine strawberry plants get their daily light needs met that way. I probably jumped the gun by starting these plants in September since I don't really anticipate planting them out until the end of December. But given their privileged existence thus far, I think it's most likely they're destined to live in hanging baskets that can be readily moved to shelter if cold weather threatens.



DECEMBER, 2012/JANUARY, 2013



A lot of progress has been made on my various strawberry-raising endeavors. The planter I originally thought I would use for this project has proved to have some limitations, mainly because the plants in the top levels of the planter are thriving but they shade the plants in the lower levels, which are not thriving. In fact several of them rotted in their tracks while I was otherwise occupied. Meanwhile, I was confined to the house after cataract surgery just before Christmas and spent too much time reading seed and nursery catalogs. This led to a temporary break with reality during which I ordered another 100 strawberry plants with no real plans for what to do with them when they arrived. After the mandatory two-week recovery period during which you're not supposed to lift anything heavier than 10 pounds, I enlisted the help of my long-suffering husband who rallied admirably to the rescue of his demented wife and helped in the creation of two new features in the garden. One is a 'strawberry tree' which we built out of a re-purposed 'topsy-turvy tomato' planter (don't even ask...) and some PVC pipe.

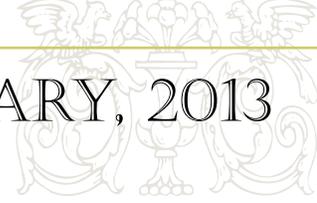


Onto this nifty structure went hanging baskets containing the Alpine strawberry seedlings that I have painstakingly raised from seed. These charming little plants immediately obliged by blooming and setting berries, which was the least they could do considering the effort I've put into their existence.



The other big feature that we added to the garden was a series of raised beds that will be my permanent strawberry growing zone. I modeled these beds on the system used by Akers of Strawberries, in Baker, although of course on a much smaller scale. We measured off and cleared the area and then trucked in several dozen bags of soil and compost and shaped the beds: At this point it looks like a graveyard out there. For now the beds are awaiting drip irrigation, plants and a top layer of mulch, all of which should happen this week-end if all goes well.





In other developments, we built three 4 x 4 raised beds from kits that we found at Home Depot for a mere \$39 each. They're very decent quality, made of cedar and should last for at least a few years. I didn't think I could buy the parts and assemble them for that price and my husband was especially relieved at how easily they went together. We assembled all three within about 15 minutes: I also removed the red raspberry plants from my refrigerator vegetable crisper and planted them out in containers. I figure they got at least 600 chilling hours in the 'fridge. They looked healthy and were already budded when I planted them out so hopefully this experiment will pay off.

And lastly, I took on another new project this morning: growing artichokes from seed. I used to raise artichokes when I lived in California, which is of course where they are meant to grow. They were easy to grow and wonderful to harvest right from the backyard. With the typical price for a single artichoke generally in the \$2-\$3 range I don't buy them very often here. I miss artichokes... and everyone knows that artichokes don't grow in Florida. But maybe they do. Some dedicated research turned up information about growing a specific variety of artichoke (Imperial Globe) as annuals. It seems if you really get the jump on the season (and planting seed trays on January 10th strikes me as 'getting the jump') you can sometimes succeed in getting the plants grown and artichokes harvested within a 5 month time frame before the heat and humidity of summer do them in. And so I'm embarking on the challenge and will report back later on how it goes. I am reminded of the famous words of John F Kennedy, when he spoke in 1963 of his visionary ideas of putting astronauts on the moon in our lifetime. I think the same sentiments apply very well to the pioneer spirit of the gardener who is always pushing the envelope and trying new things: "We do these things not because they are easy, but because they are hard." (Note: as of January 24, the artichoke seeds have sprouted and are looking nearly as vigorous as the young JFK!)



FEBRUARY/APRIL, 2013



Lots to catch up on. I got diverted into puppy-raising on March 1 when we brought home two (count 'em) Doberman puppies. They've been a joy and a challenge and while they haven't stopped me from gardening and photographing my garden, they have very effectively interfered with my time for sitting at the computer and writing about my garden. And then there were those early weeks when they cleverly alternated between unplugging my monitor and my keyboard. Two months later and they're beginning to be a little more civilized and respectful of my computer. Anyway, let's begin with a refresher of the "before" view of my intensive gardening space: last year when I began to clear and plan the space:



And the "during" view in February while we constructed a fence around the main garden area to keep the pending puppies out:

And the 'after' view, showing some of the plantings that were made during January to March:



And, of course, we need to see one of those charmingly destructive puppies, sitting outside the fence:



As to what is growing in the garden, there is a lot! In early March we planted about 20 deciduous fruit trees in containers. Fruit varieties include peach, nectarine, plum, apple and cherry. This photo shows two miniature cherry trees with red raspberries on the trellis behind them. All are thriving because while we know that cherry trees don't grow in Florida, no one has told this to the cherry trees yet. I'm hoping it will be our little secret. Seriously, I did put a great deal of time and effort (and cash) into locating low-chill varieties for every fruit tree that I planted. There have been a lot of those developed since my last foray into growing deciduous fruit trees, which ended with a whimper in about 1996. So, we'll see!



Also in the 'doesn't grow in Florida' category is my globe artichoke experiment, which is thriving and the race is on to see if I can get this plant to bear artichokes before our summer heat and humidity do it in.

I set out all of my tomato plants in early March and then fretted when we had freezing weather afterward. Luckily, while there was some frost damage to the plants, all recovered and are growing well, blooming and beginning to set fruit as of today (April 19). Here they are in the cold.



FEBRUARY/APRIL, 2013



Here they are a month later, none the worse for wear. They include many of the varieties that have performed well for me in previous years, including Amelia, Fletcher and Heat Wave, as well as some new varieties (new to me) such as Giant Paste Tomato, BHN 642, Early Girl, and Better Boy Bush. Throw in a few of the always reliable grape and cherry tomato plants and with a total of 37 plants I'm expecting a bumper crop of tomatoes soon.

Other items include potatoes; pole beans; first ripe strawberry in the raised beds; and a lovely little ripe Alpine strawberry on the 'strawberry tree' (tiny but sweet). Guess who got those berries after the photos were taken? Hint: it was not a puppy, or a bird or a squirrel or a slug. Yes, I finally got a handful of my own home-grown strawberries!



Canning season will be upon us before we know it!



FULL CIRCLE



It's July 26 and my garden (like most everybody's as we head into the dog days of summer) is in a holding pattern. This is an ideal time for the post-mortem- what worked, what didn't work, what I'll do differently next time. Let's start with the successes:

Tomatoes: I planted 36 tomatoes in containers in March. This was many more than I had planned but I had raised the plants from seed in my garage and when it came time to decide which ones to plant and which to discard I was unable to discard any of them. Moral of this story: plant fewer seeds next year. I tried several different varieties and these are the ones that performed best for me: Amelia, Fletcher, and BHN 602, Amelia and Fletcher are great varieties for this area. I first learned about them at Larry's annual tomato seminar in 2011. Larry sent us home with a supply of these two varieties to try and both have performed very well for me. It's worth buying seed for them because you may not find these varieties for sale anywhere locally, although Crestview Nursery has carried Amelia in recent years.

BHN 602 is a large beefsteak-type tomato that I tried on a whim and I was very impressed with it this year. Order seed, grow your own and you don't have to worry about looking for the right varieties every spring. Reimer Seeds has these and many other varieties to try:

<http://www.reimerseeds.com/bhn-602-tomato.aspx>

<http://www.reimerseeds.com/amelia-tomato.aspx>

<http://www.reimerseeds.com/fletcher-tomato.aspx>

So I had a bumper crop of tomatoes this year although the yield was limited by the plants being grown in containers. "They" say you can grow tomatoes in 5 gallon containers. "They're" wrong. Yes, you can grow them but the yield will be small. 5 gallons in my experience is simply not big enough for the plant to develop a decent root system. The containers should be a minimum of 7 gallons and larger containers will give even better results. I'll save my 5 gallon containers for another purpose next year. And what did I do with all those tomatoes, after giving away pounds and pounds of them?? I didn't can tomatoes this year. Instead I made batches of stewed tomatoes and marinara sauce and froze them. Simple procedures (the stewed tomatoes were made in my slow cooker!). I might invest in a small chest-type freezer next year and save my canning efforts for jam, pickles, etc. As of this date, all of the determinate varieties are finished bearing and I've disposed of the plants. The ones remaining are indeterminate, such as grape and cherry tomatoes. It's always worth hanging on to those, keeping them watered and fertilized. You might just get rewarded with a second, smaller crop when the weather turns a bit cooler.



Now let's move on to a qualified success." Regular strawberries: grew and produced well. Unfortunately I was busy with other things when I should have been paying attention to daily harvesting of strawberries and so the slugs, birds, squirrels and turtles got most of my berries. I salvaged maybe a quart of them. Sweet Charlie and Camarosa were the varieties I planted. I give the edge to the Camarosa variety. I found this variety at Bob Wells Nursery in TX: <http://bobwellsnursery.com/index.php/berries/strawberries/camarosa-strawberry.html>



They produced a bit better than Sweet Charlie. At least the slugs seemed to think so. As of now, the plants are still thriving.

FULL CIRCLE CONTINUED



My plans are to dig them out of their raised beds and plant them in containers that can be elevated off the ground (placed on a bench or other raised surface). That should save them from the slugs and turtles and make it much easier to throw netting over them when the birds and squirrels are hovering around. Alpine strawberries: they're cute, charming plants and they bear tons of beautiful, tiny red berries which unfortunately have the texture of sawdust. At least the ones I grew did. Not a bad flavor but a very unpleasant mealy texture. So those will be composted in spite of the high hopes I had for them earlier this year. Perhaps the name **"Alpine"** should have been heeded. They might just need that cold climate to develop properly.

Now on to what didn't work.....

Globe artichokes. I had high hopes for these earlier in the season as the plants grew and flourished in their containers. However, the heat of summer did them in before they were old enough to bloom and set artichokes. Here it is, gasping its final breath. However, I am not going to give up just yet. Next year I'll get my seeds started earlier and get the plants set out earlier. The variety I'm attempting, Imperial Star, needs 85 days from the date of sowing the seeds to reach bearing age. Since I think they're going to have to be bearing no later than May in order to beat the heat, that means starting the seeds towards the end of January, getting the plants out early, perhaps as early as February, and then be prepared to protect them from any late freezes. So we'll see how that goes.



Sweet corn in containers: Thumbs down on this one. I chose a new dwarf variety of sweetcorn designed for containers (named "On Deck"-sounds good, doesn't it?) and the plants did sprout and grow well. However, the 'harvest' (if you can call it that) was very meager and the ears of corn were miniscule. I tossed them into a vegetable stir fry and chalked this effort up to a 'nice try.' In fairness to the seed developers, I only planted two containers with about 4 plants in each and I'm fairly sure one would need a bigger 'block' of plants to ensure proper pollination because that's how sweet corn works. On the other hand naming this variety "On Deck" is a tad misleading since most of us are probably not prepared to turn all of our deck space into a corn patch, And since I don't have the space anywhere in my garden to devote to a bigger block of plants our sweetcorn will continue to come from the market

The deciduous fruit trees have mostly survived the summer. I had 3 peach tree fatalities but they all came from one of those Burgess-type mail order nurseries that sells its stock incredibly cheaply and I didn't really have high hopes for those 3. They all sprouted and grew for a while and then abruptly croaked. I think an in-depth investigation would reveal they were grafted on totally inappropriate rootstock for our area but the nursery hasn't been inclined to answer my phone calls or emails so

I've written it off to one of those "I really knew better than to buy from these people" experiences. All of the other trees I planted back in March are doing pretty well, growing in 25 gallon containers. Two of the nectarines actually flowered and bore fruit that grew to a somewhat small size but ripened appropriately and didn't look half-bad. I know I should have pulled the fruit off of the baby trees rather than let it mature but I couldn't resist the temptation to see how the fruit would turn out. Alas, the squirrels got the last laugh on me (again) as they plundered the fruit just when I was thinking I should get out there and pick it. Some of the fruit trees are already showing signs of exceeding what I consider to be the dwarf or miniature status that all are supposed to be so I will be wielding the pruning shears this winter to keep them all in bounds. I'll also be checking for signs that it might be time to put a dormant oil spray program in place.





FULL CIRCLE CONTINUED



The blueberries thrived out in their new location in my Victory Garden. They were loaded with berries in May and June. Unfortunately I got very busy during harvest time and failed to get out there on a daily basis to pick the ripe berries and the birds made off with them. I got maybe 4 cups of berries when I normally get several quarts. So, I've moved the bushes back to the enclosed courtyard area where they not only look very nice as ornamental container shrubs but will be subject to my watchful eyes next May when they're at their peak bearing time.



Red raspberries!! They've done exceptionally well and as of this date (September 19) they are still bearing quite a few very tasty berries. I'm encouraged enough by their performance that this winter I'm planning to trim the plants way back, dig them up and put them back in the refrigerator in so they'll get their required chill time before being planted out again in spring. It's a fairly small amount of trouble to go to in exchange for those luscious red raspberries that cost about \$3.00 a pint at the store!



Stevia proved to be very easy to grow as I expected it would. The plant is in a large container and I'll give it some protection this winter and try to get it through to next spring. I don't use artificial sweeteners but I got my husband to experiment with crushing some of the stevia leaves and using them in his coffee. He reports that it is indeed very sweet but that he's going to stay with Splenda. And what can you do about that?



FULL CIRCLE CONTINUED



My Parisian Cucumbers did quite well and set a lot of tiny cukes that I could have harvested and made into pickled gherkins, which was my plan for them. But because other things demanded my attention this summer (are we sensing a theme here?), the tiny cukes stayed on the plants and turned into very big hard, yellow cukes that were not edible. I will try again with them next year.

Tea plant. I ordered one from a nursery in south Florida several months ago but they didn't have any ready at the time and by the time they offered to send me one (in very wet and hot late July) I was not prepared to take on getting a new shrub established. I may tackle this again in the spring.

So there you have it. The good, the bad and the downright ugly from the first year in my Victory Garden. Like most dyed-in-the-wool gardeners I am not discouraged by my failures and am bolstered by my successes. Enough so that I will be back at it in just a couple of months, always with the gardener's eternal optimism that next year things will be much better!



LINKS AND NOTES



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