MARCH 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 January 26th IN PERSON at the UNT Health Science Center (UNTHSC) and also toured their campus community garden.

Meeting Recap:

- TAFB is gathering requests for their annual seedling giveaway. Priority will be given to their Community Garden Network partners.
- Lauren is working on creating more resources like a map and webpage for TAFB's Community Garden Network.
- It was noted that the TCFPC Local Food Map needs to be updated to include community gardens again.
- Greg Joel shared the Grow Southeast update from Jesse Herrera:
  - Tabor Farms is working on getting parking and storage at the farm along with repairing irrigation. Their next cohort of Farm Apprentices will begin soon led by Diamond and Jhamal.
  - Black Wall Street needs volunteers to help with just about everything and is looking for a volunteer farm assistant.
  - Amber is moving Opal's to a more biointensive method of growing and they are seeing great results!
  - Mind Your Garden has finished bathrooms and are looking to do more Healthy Hours soon.
  - The next Mindful Market at Texas Wesleyan will be on March 25th.
  - There are plans to get a farmer's market up and running in 76104 - stay tuned for more info!
- What resources are needed for local community gardens?
  - Irrigation guidance and instructions along with a list of experts to reach out to.
  - A list of organizations/people that do educational presentations.
  - Help recruiting and retaining volunteers.
- Mary Jo provided an update on school gardens:
  - Kaboom is still working with FWISD to install 25 playgrounds. Six have been completed so far. Some include funding for gardens/plant elements. Others have received donations to add the garden element.
  - Giving Grove installed an orchard at Western Hills Elementary. Diamond Hill will also be getting an orchard.
  - Mary Jo and Anne have applied for a federal grant to help fund garden educator positions at FWISD.

The next CGUA meeting will be on Thursday, March 23rd from 3:00-4:30pm. 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.**

Events & Classes

NEXT CGUA MEETING

March 23rd, 3:00pm
Location: TBD

TCFPC GENERAL MEETING

No General Meetings Until July 2023

SAVE TARRANT WATER

Gardening for Monarchs
March 16th, 6pm-7pm

https://savetarrantwater.com/events/

GROW NORTH TEXAS

Farm Recordkeeping for Growing Profits
March 14th, 6pm-7:30pm

https://www.grownorthtexas.org/events

MINDFUL MARKET

March 25th 11am-2pm

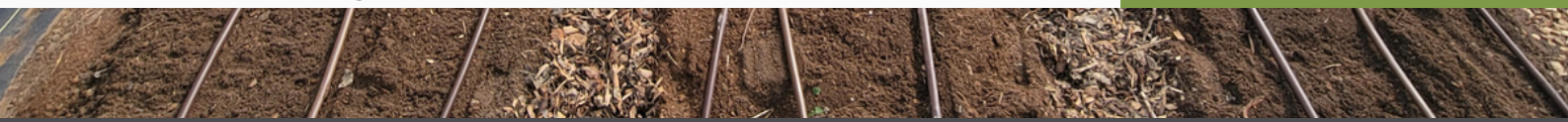
www.coactntx.org/mindful-market

COWTOWN FARMERS MARKET

Every Saturday 8am-NOON

www.cowtownmarket.com

Veterans Park, Grand Pavilion
8901 Clifford St.
White Settlement, TX 76108



"And the Spring arose on the garden fair,
Like the Spirit of Love felt everywhere;
And each flower and herb on Earth's dark breast
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest."

PERCY BYSHHE SHELLEY

THE JOY & EXCITEMENT OF THE HUMBLE POTATO

BY MARY JO GREENE

This week sees the end of my favorite activity on school gardens. By the end of Presidents' Day week, 14 school campuses, and over 1,200 students in Fort Worth will have participated in planting potatoes.

Growing the humble potato captures the imagination of students like no other crop in our gardens. From chitting (pre-sprouting) potatoes in classrooms in January, planting in February, hilling up in March/April to harvesting just before school finishes at the end of May, students can't believe that a piece of potato can produce more potatoes in a relatively short space of time. Dates like Valentine's Day, Presidents' Day, George Washington's birthday and Memorial Day are helpful markers to frame our school potato growing season. Admittedly, we will be harvesting slightly earlier than the ideal, but we will still manage a decent harvest.

In addition to the potato planting science in gardens, we invite classroom teachers to look at their schemes of work and see where we can apply cross-curricular learning. Alongside science, this season we have incorporated our potato planting into Early Years Literacy, Math (area and perimeter/spacing, etc.), Social Studies (Inca potato rituals and tradition), Art (rainbow colored potatoes), Food Nutrition, Health and History.

During our planting sessions, talk invariably falls to potato recipes and the realization that the humble spud is a major dietary staple world-wide. It is a natural and engaging way for our students to talk about their families, holidays and food traditions. It is a gateway to sharing cultural insights and pride; I must admit that my consumption of potatoes in February is huge due to daily discussions of delicious potato recipes!

It doesn't take long for each group and classroom to formulate a plan for their harvested potatoes. So far, the potatoes are destined to be used for end of school class potato parties, 5th grade graduations, family garden parties and a donation to the school pantry.

This is all very well and good, but as a garden educator, I know that the best is yet to come. I will never tire of the squeals of delight as students uncover potatoes out of the ground for the first time. Watching children claw out these nuggets of nature in child-like awe and excitement is why I do what I do. This joy is second only to watching them eat a home-grown potato, quite often for the first time. I can't wait for May to come, but in the meantime, there is plenty of garden learning to do.

My sign-off thought comes from Valentina, a 3rd grade student. "Hey, Mrs. Greene, from now on I'm going to get me some potato seed things every Valentine's Day... 'cos I love food and food is love." I'm sure you'll agree that Valentina will go far in this world!

MARCH TO-DO

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

Prepare your soil for warm weather crops by adding a layer of compost mixed with a slow-release fertilizer

Plant trees, vines, and shrubs, as this is one of the best planting month for them.

Start planting tomato seedlings, corn, cucumbers and beans at the end of the month.

Continue to harvest any remaining cool season crops.

IN THE NEWS

- USDA announces grants for urban agriculture and innovative production **https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2023/01/26/usda-announces-grants-urban-agriculture-and-innovative-production**
- University of Texas at Austin publishes study detailing how community gardens and urban agriculture positively benefit people and their environment **https://news.utexas.edu/2023/02/07/urban-gardens-are-good-for-ecosystems-and-humans/**
- A look at Fort Worth solutions to food scarcities, including farmers markets and community gardening **https://fwtx.com/news/don't-call-it-a-desert-a-look-at-food-scarcities-in-specific/**
- Local gardening non-profit details accomplishments and needs for future growth **https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/volunteer-group-backyard-vegetable-gardens-fort-worth-food-desert-need-funding/287-c5c307e2-540f-44bd-b7f1-cdce654c88f5**

Carrot Soup

Recipe from Hannah Lamar Gibson

This simple soup allows the flavor of your carrots to be the star. Harvest or pick up the season's remaining carrots and enjoy them with some crusty bread and a leafy green salad as you transition from winter to spring.

INGREDIENTS

- 6-8 large carrots, about 1 pound, peeled and chopped into roughly even pieces
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 C vegetable broth (or other stock)
- 2 T cream or coconut milk
- Salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

- Preheat oven to 375. Roast carrots until tender, 25-30 minutes.
- While carrots roast, sauté diced onion and minced garlic in olive oil in a heavy bottomed pot until fragrant and starting to brown.
- When carrots are ready, add them into your pot with the onion and garlic and add broth or stock.
- Bring mixture to a boil, then simmer for 10-15 minutes and remove from heat.
- Carefully transfer into a blender or use immersion blender to make the soup into a creamy consistency. Return soup to pot and add cream or coconut milk, salt and pepper to taste.

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SEASONAL PRODUCE FUN FACTS - MICROGREENS

Microgreens are kind of always in season because they can be grown completely indoors! They are a great option for quick income for a beginning farm or can be grown at home for a fresh supply of these delicious greens.

- Microgreens are young herb or vegetable plants that are typically 1-3 inches tall. They are somewhere between a sprout and a baby leaf vegetables.
- Microgreens can be grown in shallow trays in a soilless mixture completely indoors. You can also use plastic clamshells or other small containers.
- Some common choices for microgreens include: radishes, kale, broccoli, mustards, peas, sunflowers, wheatgrass, arugula and beets.
- Microgreens contain a surprising amount of nutrients in such a small plant! They add a great crunch to any soup, salad or sandwich and can even be added to smoothies and to top off your favorite dish.

Try growing your own microgreens at home or shop your favorite farmers market for some fresh, local microgreens!

For lots of great articles about microgreens, visit:
https://www.bootstrapfarmer.com/blogs/microgreens

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

Dig Deep Conference 2020
tarrantcountyfoodpolicycouncil.org/dig-deep-conference-2020

Tarrant Area Food Bank
youtube.com/user/TarrantAreaFoodBank

Tarrant County Master Gardeners
youtube.com/c/TarrantCountyMasterGardeners

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension
youtube.com/c/txextension

GREG'S TOP CROPS

Siberian Kale
Baby Greens Salad Mixes
Arugula
Radishes
Carrots
Beets

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

What is bio-intensive farming? We are asked that question frequently as we move our first third of an acre to bio-intensive farming versus the "tractor" farming we have done for the first four years at Opal's Farm. The simplest definition of "bio-intensive farming" is to use organic methods to achieve "maximum yields from a minimum area of land, while simultaneously increasing biodiversity and sustaining the fertility of the soil." (http://bionica.org/library/biointensive-method/)

When properly implemented, bio-intensive farming has the potential to:

- Use 67% to 88% less water than conventional agricultural methods.
- Use 50% to 100% less fertilizer purchased (organic, locally available – we use Texas Special from Silver Creek Materials here in Fort Worth).
- Use up to 99% less energy than commercial agriculture.
- Produce 2 to 6 times more food at intermediate yields (which increase over time as the method is practiced).
- Produce a 100% increase in soil fertility, "building fertile topsoil at a rate 60 times faster than in nature" (Worldwide Loss of Soil – and a Possible Solution Ecology Action, 1996).
- Reduce by 50% or more the amount of land required to grow a comparable amount of food.

At Opal's, the third of an acre that is being transformed this Spring has 134 twenty-five-foot beds. Most of these beds are for tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants but they also contain some of our carrot crop, radishes, greens, and lettuces/salad mixes. Each of these beds yield produce equal to what our 100-foot rows have done in the past. We hope to add more bio-intensive beds over the coming growing seasons.
Bio-intensive means just that – intensive. Management of these beds requires constant attention, but even the time spent on each bed is lessened as the soil becomes cleaner (less weeds) and healthier. The system is perfect for the home gardener or small producer like Opal's.

Building the infrastructure for bio-intensive farming is time-consuming. That's one reason we have not utilized it in the past. We've simply not had the labor to build and maintain these beds in the past. Now that we've added Amber Carr and Amanda Vogel to our staff, we are able to change our focus, knowing that once the infrastructure is in place, we never have to build it again! We'll be sharing our successes with you over the coming Spring and long-term plans are to have educational classes available to the community.

Side Note!
I would be remiss if I didn't tell you how much we appreciate the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). On February 23rd, they came en mass with engineers to help design a more efficient irrigation system for us. We already have drip irrigation for our bio-intensive section, but having more efficient water use over the whole farm is something we've been striving for since the beginning.

NRCS and its parent agency, the USDA, have begun to concentrate on urban agriculture and smaller producers in a big way. We can lead the way in developing practices and programs right here for future urban farms in North Texas. We would love to thank our Urban Agriculture representative, Michael Higgins, and our NRCS rep for this district, Michael Brookes, for the extra attention and help they are giving Opal's and urban agriculture throughout the metroplex!

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