

#11 2018

Green Thoughts

Conversations and ideas about growing at The Spring Gardens

I have been growing green beans for many years. They are a reliable, tasty, warm weather crop.

Beans

They produce in large numbers. This year has been particularly good. So far in 2018 we have harvested them for about 2 months. We eat them raw, as a snack, or in salads and also steamed as a nice vegetable compliment to a main course. But I haven't really thought much about beans. I have been very conservative. Year after year I grow two basic green bean forms – bush type and pole type. The beans look and taste about the same. Nothing wrong with that, but let's do a little exploring



Other Beans

This year I decided to talk to fellow Spring Gardeners about what they are up to. A good place to start was with neighbor Teddy Sanchez. He grows 4 different types of beans, for their seeds, in large amounts at the western end of the Gardens. I have learned a lot from him. His mom still does a lot of cooking with the beans that he grows. Here is what I have gleaned so far about his four types of beans (in the future I'll try to get some of his mom's recipes):

gandalez (also known as gandules beans or pigeon peas) – these are grown throughout the Caribbean including Puerto Rico. They have a slightly nutty flavor, and they go great with rice;

red beans similar to kidney beans or pinto beans;

frijoles also known as pink beans;

white beans. It is hard to keep track because they come in many varieties. The

basic ones are:

navy beans are also known as haricot beans or pea beans. They are used to make Boston baked beans and Louisiana-style white beans and rice. They are so-called because it was a food staple of the US Navy (although I remember in camp as kids we would sing the marching song– “the Navy gets the gravy but the Army gets the beans, beans, beans,...beans, beans, beans.”)

great northern beans are used in French cassoulets (stews of beans and various meats)

cannellini beans are used in minestrone

baby lima beans are also known as butterbeans

Teddy tells us that this year all the bean varieties except the gandalez produced really good crops. Teddy thought that there was too

much rain at the wrong time for the gandalez.beans



Teddy's frijoles

I have been eating beans my whole life. I am old enough to remember as a kid being served limp, dull-colored green beans that came in a can. It was a revelation when fresh frozen Birdseye green beans were first sold at the local A&P. Infinitely better looking and tasting! Also, my mother made a wonderful homemade bean and barley soup with white beans. I would eat it with Ritz Crackers.

As kids we ate canned Heinz vegetarian baked beans. It is a kind of comfort food prepared by Heinz in a thick sweet tomato sauce. I still eat it occasionally today. It is a side for various meat dishes, particularly cold cuts. It is also a great complement to beef

tongue. But nobody under 60 eats tongue these days. They can't get past the name.

I didn't have Mexican food growing up but later I discovered refried beans aka



frijoles refritos. Where were they hiding? They go great with enchiladas and everything else for that matter.

When I lived in Nigeria, on the west coast of Africa, I was introduced to a bean dish called moinmoi. It is made from local beans that are soaked overnight, then pulverized into a thickish dough and shaped into something the size of a softball then salted and peppered and stuffed with chopped green peppers, or tomatoes, or prawns or hardboiled eggs or some combination. The moinmoi is steamed until the dough gels. It is sold by venders on the streets all over southern Nigeria. Delicious. I have made it here in Philly with white beans. A Nigerian friend, Niyyi, thought moinmoi was more tasty when made with genuine Nigerian beans. He brought some bean seeds from Lagos (don't ask me how) and I planted them. The plants grew beautifully. They were sturdy, bush-like, 3 feet high beauties full of foliage. But they never produced a flower. Was it the difference in soil? Maybe the beans required a laterite type. Or the length of days were too long here compared to the tropics?

Fellow gardener Anne Cook recently introduced us to still another type of bean – gita. It is from south Asia, it grows pole bean-like. The vine can soar taller than 6 feet

high. It produces very long and thin beans so it is also called yard-long beans. It has its own delicate taste and you can eat them right off the vine.



Anne's gita beans on the vine

If any of you would like to share your wisdom about beans please let Green Thoughts know. We are just scratching the surface.

What was that slithering by?

In the last issue (#10) we mentioned seeing something that might have been a snake in TSG. Now we have confirmation from our



ever-vigilant photographer/gardeners.

Barbara Gold wrote in with a photo (above) headlined **Proof of resident snake**

She said *"Taken summer of 2016, I think"*.

Then Meredith wrote in regarding the possibility of a snake

“No rumor. We definitely have snakes in the Garden. They are very small and very docile brown snakes (Storeya dekayi). You can read more about them in [this Parks & Rec post](#), and I have included a photo of one I found in my plot this spring.” [2018]

Thanks for another good read.

*Best,
Meredith*



We wrote back to Meredith:

Hi Meredith,

That was a sensational photo of the snake. Did you tell it to not move and say cheese?

I thought it could be a professional photo but the snake was surrounded by what looked like salt hay...

And Meredith wrote back

The snakes have a tendency to freeze in place when disturbed, which makes taking photos easy but also means you need to be

careful when using a hoe. For example. I picked her up and relocated her to a safer place after I took a few shots.

From friend Ken near Miami, FL

Thanks for the delightful Green Thoughts! This morning I happened to ask someone who works in my building, whose wife runs a local organic farm/CSA called Bee Heaven Farm, what they grow in the summer. He replied that it's only avocados and mangoes, with the sun too intense to grow anything else. It's hard to believe, but I guess they know whereof they speak. Trader Joe's keeps us in nice fresh produce, as does Whole Foods, but I do envy your being able to grow wonderful summer crops. As far as nicotine being a ligand for ACh receptors "by coincidence," I'm sure the evolutionary biologist in you would argue otherwise.

Ken raises some interesting points. Why don't they grow fresh produce in Florida in the summer? There shouldn't be anything intrinsically impossible about growing tomatoes and beans and corn in the hot muggy summers down there. Especially if you had the right varieties. My thought was that in the summer Florida commercial farms would have to compete with farms in the north that are much closer to the big markets in the north and northeast and so have lower transportation costs...But isn't there a large enough local market for such produce in Florida during the summer?

As we mentioned in the last issue, limb muscle fibers (and many neurons too) have

receptors that tell the muscle fibers to contract (or neurons to fire). The receptors are sensitive to both the neurotransmitter acetylcholine and to nicotine (in high enough concentrations, neo-nicotinoids, nicotine-like molecules, can be quite toxic to bees). They are called nicotinic acetylcholine receptors. We mentioned that “by coincidence” both vertebrates and invertebrates have very similar types of receptors. That was loose speaking on my part. There are likely to be strong evolutionary reasons that have kept acetylcholine receptors sensitive to acetylcholine and nicotine too. So “coincidence” was a poor choice of word.

From the Mail Bag

Thanks, Ed. As usual very informative

Trish

On the sweet potato front

Hi Ed,

I have to share this photo. This is about half my harvest. I'll wait a few weeks to pick the other half. A couple of them are as big as cantaloupes. Such fun!!!

Liz Vaughan



Please send your ideas, thoughts, suggestions and observations to:

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that address can also be used for getting on the mailing list for **Green Thoughts**, or getting off.

Prepared by Ed Gruberg

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