

#15 September 2019

Green Thoughts

Conversations and ideas about growing at the Spring Gardens

After the Normandy invasion in western France in June 1944, U.S. and allied troops raced towards Paris and beyond opening up an important front in the war against Germany. The roads

*The View
From Above*

were full of troop carriers and trucks laden with massive amounts of supplies. Officials found that on clear days at late afternoon there would be many more motor vehicle accidents than at other times. Why then and not late at

*Plot
Design*

night or very early in the morning or under foggy or rainy conditions? It was perplexing. It took a clever neurologist to solve the mystery.

He knew that the French were notable for precision and a sense of order. That tradition went back to Descartes, and even before. It even applied to planting shade trees on country roads. Their esthetic called for keeping all the trees in a row spaced equally apart. This neurologist had once experimented with stroboscopes, devices that flashed light periodically at whatever frequency the user wanted. [It was a Frenchman who invented the first electrically controlled strobe in 1917 and it was later improved with the use of electronics by Harold Edgerton at MIT in 1931.] The neurologist remembered that within a certain frequency range of flickering light, some subjects got woozy and even manifested symptoms of mild seizures. As vehicles sped along those French roads in late afternoon the sun was low in the sky. The sunlight was periodically shaded by the trees, and so the light would flicker, strobe-like. The neurologist suggested that susceptible drivers were getting dizzy. He figured out the flickering frequency as a function of the speed of the vehicle. He determined what frequency range was most upsetting. The solution was very simple – avoid that frequency range by posting an unusual speed limit. Vehicles were required to go less than 25 mph or greater than 50 mph. Afterwards, there were less accidents.

This is a long and circuitous way of beginning to talk about design of our garden plots. It is interesting to see how people have done in TSG. One canonical type of design we can call the “French” type where all plants are planted with very regular spacing along straight rows. If you have ever been to Versailles and look out at the rear gardens it has that quality on a grand scale. The other garden approach, if you have watched Masterpiece Theatre, is less geometric, we can call this the “British” type. (Who knows what British design will be like if Brexit ever goes through?) In this issue we photographed our plots from a drone. The photos were taken in mid-August when most of our plots have plants that have grown so fully that the underlying design is obscured. But it is a start.



First, here is the whole of The Spring Gardens seen from several hundred feet above and slightly from the south. It was photographed late in the afternoon. How green and lovely it is! North St is on top and Wallace St. is below. 18th St is to the right and 19th St. is to the left. From north to south TSG is about 200 feet and from east to west it is about 450 feet. Doing the math, TSG is about 2.6 acres.

On the next pages are closer looks so we can get an initial taste of the variety of ways of how some of our fellow gardeners have shaped their plots.







A Sink Hole Filled

If you remember from a previous issue of Green Thoughts, we mentioned that a sink hole had begun to develop in the deepest part of center field in the baseball field of Roberto Clemente Park just south of TSG. That sink hole has been filled in with topsoil. While the drone was in the air we took a photo of what had been done:



Wallace St. is on top and 19th St is to the left. That oblong brown patch is the filled-in sink hole. Notice the patch is not circular probably because it conforms to an underground stream bed that runs north-south. A part of the infield is at the bottom right. Just to the left of the infield are sets of symmetrical patches where the grass has worn away. That is where people have been playing volleyball.

By sending the drone up higher we could photograph the whole area from TSG (top) to the Enon Baptist Church (bottom). In previous issues of Green Thoughts we had described the sink holes in the parking lot to the north of the church. We also, showed the eastern part of the north face of the church after it had partially collapsed last year. Now it is repaired and covered with white stucco. We also mentioned that part of the western area of TSG is undergoing subsidence. We think it is not merely coincidence that these different sinking places are aligned.





Above left: Two members of the punk band Pearl Harbor and the Sneak Attacks. The fellow on the right is Nick, the owner and operator of the drone. He took all the aerial photographs. Above right: Pearl H. herself.

From the mail bag.

Disappointment follow-up

Hi Ed

I remember us talking about gardening disappointments and I have certainly had my share from picking the wrong size plant(s) to fill an empty space to having seeds or plants that refuse to grow.

I think I told you that I found it odd that I did not seem to be able to grow green bush beans on my plot; however, this year my green beans did very well with my 1 10' row yielding about 4 lbs. of beans. Alas, I think the beans are done and need to go to the compost bin.

We also spoke about our poor results with eggplants. I never had trouble with them before but something seems to make their leaves lacey in the TSG and they don't do well. I bought eggplant seeds this year, but it is probably too late to plant them.

I try to forget my garden misfortunes and move on to the next planting. Every year I try to plant something new. This year's choices are bok choy and white radishes. The white radishes went to seed too quickly and I was only able to harvest a few of them. The bok choy is less than an inch high, but seems to be doing well.

See you soon.

Jack

Goodbye to Pat and Ernie Schuyler

We are sorry to learn that Pat and Ernie Schuyler are moving to another part of Philadelphia. Pat was a frequent contributor to Green Thoughts and a grower of many varieties of hot peppers. Ernie was a distinguished botanist at the Academy of Natural Sciences.

When Ed and Ann's kids were young they went to the Greenfield Public School on 23rd and Chestnut. Between the building and the street was a high wall that hid a "secret garden." The garden space had been neglected. There were only weeds growing there. Before resurrecting the garden, the kids in one of the classes collected all the varieties of weeds that had established themselves. The weeds were dried and we made an appointment to see a docent at the Academy, a short walk away, to help us identify the plants. When we arrived the docent was unavailable but Ernie, ahem, Dr. Schuyler, filled in. He took us up to the herbarium on the top floor which is off limits to the public. It holds more than a million varieties of dried plants. He then patiently and knowledgeably matched the plants that the kids had brought over with individual plants in the collection. What a wonderful, enlightening morning.

We wish Pat and Ernie the best at their new home.



The western part of TSG looking south. 19th St. is on the right.

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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