

#20 June 2020

Green Thoughts

Conversations and ideas about growing at The Spring Gardens

Polar vortex in May? When we live just 35 miles north of the Mason Dixon Line? It seems so long ago, but only six weeks have gone by since that May cold snap. In Philadelphia the mean

*Now and
next year?*

high temperature for early May is 71 and the mean low is 51. You can suppose that this is safe weather for planting and growing tomatoes. You don't expect we will have a day where our high

*The TSG
Periphery*

temperature is lower than the mean low temperature. And it was Mother's Day besides. Is nothing sacred? This was record-tying cold, in the mid-30s. Whatever happened to global warming? Phooey.

To protect our tomatoes from the predicted cold we covered our plants in diverse, ingenious and amusing ways (see below). Some plants got stressed. Some plants did better than others. Over-all it was better to cover the plants than not.



Zip lock bag covers



Bell jar covers



Cloth covers casually arranged



Joe's big galoots. Uncovered but unharmed



Quonset hut tunnels



Do nothing and cross your fingers

My Sun Gold cherry tomatoes did better than a red cherry tomato variety. Were the Sun Golds really cold resistant or were there “microclimates“ within my plot? I don’t know. And Joe Trout’s much bigger tomato plants of many different varieties grown in a greenhouse –two foot long galoots –all seemed fine even without covering them. Perhaps size matters. To get real answers one has to do randomized studies. In the early 20th century Karl Pearson and later R.A. Fisher invented the classic statistical tests that we still use in farming/gardening to compare various varieties for their hardiness, productivity and ability to fight off pests. Analysis of variance, p-values, standard deviation etc. were all developed by Pearson or Fisher. Generally you need large numbers of plants to say anything definitive, i.e., significant. So we can spout off about the hardiness of our few plants without too much fear of contradiction. The Steering Committee of TSG would discourage someone from turning the whole area into an experimental plot. [Once in

a while you can have small numbers but still reach significance. Consider the case of Muriel Bristol a proper English woman who claimed that she could tell if brewed tea was put into a cup before or after milk was poured in. Eight cups were prepared, four with tea poured in first, 4 with milk poured in first. The chance of randomly guessing which cups were which is 1 in 70. Anything where the probability of success by guessing is 1 in 20 or lower is considered statistically significant. Miss Bristol got them all right and Fisher concluded that she was likely to know whereof she spoke. I have a niece, Diahna, who has channeled Miss Bristol and can reliably distinguish Jif peanut butter from three other brands.] Statistical tests are now used in all scientific fields, even epidemiology. So when people claim a particular drug works on some disease, let's say, Covid-19, by shooting from the anecdotal hip, and they don't have any use for science nor use statistical tests, they shouldn't be taken seriously. But if they have lots of power and a bully pulpit, they can assert that, say, hydroxychloroquine really can fight off the coronavirus. Unfortunately that can be distracting and cause dangerous outcomes. At least for a while. Does anybody out there want to buy 100 million surplus doses of chloroquine sitting in warehouses somewhere? If so, I'll throw in the Brooklyn Bridge too. No extra charge.

So what have we learned from the 2020 Mother's Day cold snap to apply for planting for next year? What are *you* going to do? Be on the safe side and wait until mid-May to plant tomatoes? Or look at 2020 as an anomaly? Which it is. To paraphrase Kierkegaard – gardening [and life] can only be understood looking backward but we garden [and live] looking forward. So, no easy answers. Paraphrasing Hemingway – cold weather breaks all tomato plants but some tomato plants get strong at the broken places. While most of my tomato plants are now fine, I have one forlorn tomato plant that hasn't gotten strong. It is stunted and hasn't grown. After all this time it may be starting to turn from brown to slightly green. But truth be told, it looks pathetic. Should I euthanize it?

Speed of Germination

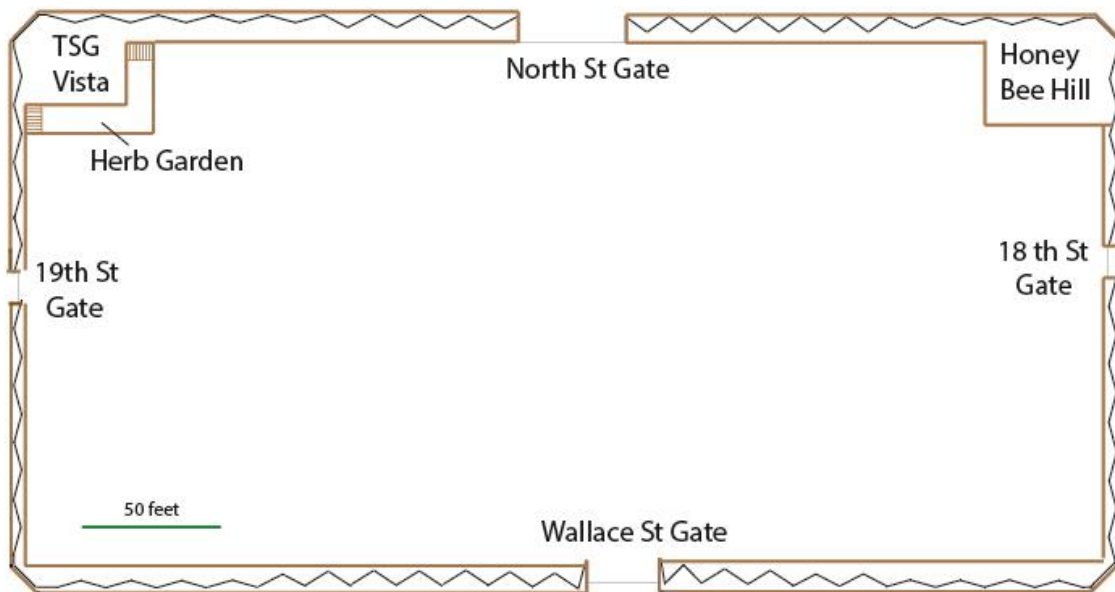
I have planted three kinds of beans this year: a type of bush bean, a type of pole bean and a south Asian gita bean (the gita bean seeds were saved from last year's crop). In this warm June weather a high percentage of the seeds have germinated. It is interesting to note that while I have only one kind of bush bean I have new bush bean seeds purchased this year and two year old seeds. The latter germinated equally well but they took longer to get going.

On the periphery

Fellow gardener Ann Northrup reports to us about what is going on within the TSG but beyond our plots.

A whole city block without concrete or asphalt and little traffic noise, The Spring Gardens is magical. And part of that charm is its beautiful perimeter gardens, which further muffle and disguise its edges. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of a tour with gardener/designer/botanist, Doris Stahl, who showed me 4 special areas she has recently been working on. You can see the over-all map of the periphery illustrated below. This issue features the three year old Herb Garden (northwest part of the periphery). In subsequent issues of Green Thoughts we will explore The Native Plants Garden, The Hydrangea Garden and the Honey Bee Hill Rock Garden.

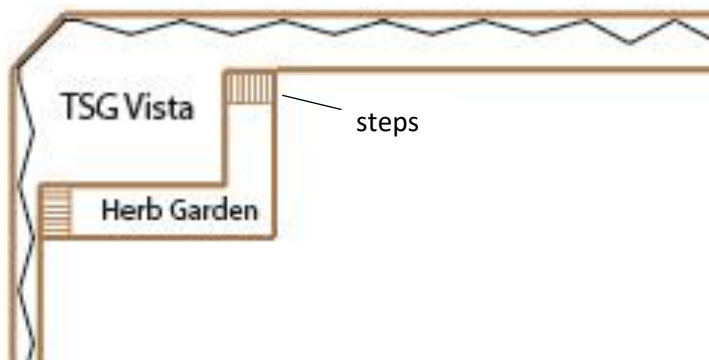
We start at TSG Vista, the raised pine grove and resting spot in the Northwest corner. The lower bed on its Southern slope is the Herb Garden. As we walk around a gentle breeze wafts spicy aromas from the many plants as they steep in the sun. Roughly from West to East are: Comfrey, (medicinal), Borage, Basil, Santolina, Lemon Balm, French Tarragon, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Lemon Thyme and African Blue Thyme, Parsley, Rosemary, Chamomile and 3 kinds of Sage: Golden, Purple and Cooking Sage. Keep checking back, as there is more to come. She will re-plant lost Chives and Bay Laurel, and plans to add the beautifully scented Lavender and Verbena Bariensis this year.



The Spring Gardens periphery.
Corrugated lines show the cast iron fence

The culinary garden is for everyone! Take a little, give a little back – either donate seeds or more herb plants or water and weed. Please do not pick small plants like the recently replanted basil, thyme and tarragon. Give them time to grow and spread. Everyone is invited to taste the edible, all perennial herbs and spices growing in the beds and to use them for cooking!

Doris and her Horticultural Committee care for all the common perimeter spaces inside the fence, and if you are interested, they are always looking for new members. If you have a special plant you would like to add to the perimeter gardens, please contact her and they will try to help you find the best space for it (doristoby@gmail.com).



Comfrey (medicinal Herb)



Foreground: left, Purple Sage, right, Garden Sage Background: left, Lavender



Pesto Basil



Lemon Verbena (medicinal)



Dill



French Tarragon



Rose Thyme



Parsley



Golden Sage



Sage and Oregano



Santolina -herbal medicine, natural dye, flavoring for sauces, moth repellent



oregano

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

Some back issues of Green Thoughts can be found on The Spring Gardens Website under Resources