

#33 November 2022

Green Thoughts

Conversations and ideas about growing at The Spring Gardens

Looking back These are the times that test our soils. By now the summer gardeners have decamped from their plots after covering them with canvas or salt hay or leaving them bare. The rest of us persist knowing there are plants still growing, albeit more slowly, more covertly. Weeds, like hell, are not easily conquered. We trust that the more vigorous the weeding the more glorious the subsequent harvests.

Annual Meeting of the members of
The Spring Gardens: 11 AM Saturday
19 November St. Andrew's Church
19th & North St. Please come.

It has been a good gardening year. We have heard no horror stories. Tomatoes, beans, kale, cucumbers, squash, beets, radishes, spinach, bok choy, raspberries, strawberries, okra and lettuce were all in the mix in our incomplete list. You name it, we collectively have grown it. The dahlias and zinnias and marigolds have been beautiful. Except for a droughty spell during a mid-summer heat wave we have had rain spaced out nicely. The new water supply system, thanks to Russ and Con, has been a pleasure to use. A few leaky hydrants need tweaks. And we even learned a new geological word relevant to subsidence - "piping."

We tried growing potatoes for the first time, just as a test. They were easy to cultivate and were ample producers. The potatoes in the markets where we shop are more than double the price they were last year. Surely with the harvesting of the commercial fall potato crops the prices should have come down. But no. Why is that? We Googled it. The usual suspects showed up. Supply chain issues, the pandemic, labor disputes. While the retail prices have more than doubled the wholesale prices have only gone up about 15%. Hm. Maybe I'll add potatoes to my growing list for next year. Yukon Gold indeed.

*Potatoes; crying in
the Gardens;
artichokes; soil temps
for germination*

We had tomatoes into November (see below). And people have grown fall crops of peas and lettuce. If you planted bush beans in early August, you got a fall crop. If you planted mid to late August (me) you got beautiful bushes full of flowers but it is probably too late/too cold to produce beans. But hope against hope I have covered the plants with a polypropylene cloth and we will see.

Artichokes revived

Readers of Green Thoughts know that the official growing range of artichokes is beyond the zone where we live and garden. It

gets too cold here in the winter. And yet, we artichoke fans persist in trying to figure out how to grow them here. They are delicious and they are perennials. So if we can get them going we might grow the same plants for

many years. Maybe not as easily as those of us who grow asparagus. For asparagus, we have little to do from year to year but make sure the roots are covered with nice topsoil. I also talk sweetly to them and remind them how lucky they are to reside in sun-drenched Spring Garden.

The Wrights, in the plot next to ours have had an artichoke plant for the last four years and it has yielded fruit each year. That is getting serious about cultivating artichokes.



artichoke plant with dried out brown stem but new side shoots are emerging

I had a glorious artichoke plant that yielded nice artichokes in 2021 and survived the winter of 2021-2022. That wasn't a great test of its hardiness since the winter was fairly mild. However, by early summer 2022 the plant again produced fruit. But then things went down hill.

In mid-August my artichoke plant withered away. It lost all its leaves. The stem turned brown and as far as I could tell, that was that. I said to myself I won't persist trying to grow artichokes. But I didn't dig up the seemingly dead plant. I just left it in place



and there were subsequent regular rains. A few weeks later I could see healthy looking green side shoots (top) growing from the edge of the dead stem at ground level. That meant the roots of the plant were still healthy. And since then

the plant has continued to grow. (see lower left). My interest in growing artichokes has revived.

Oh fickle me.

Crying in the Gardens

I was weeding my plot one day, minding my own business. 30 feet away I spied a woman talking to two kids, a girl and a boy. I didn't recognize them and they weren't dressed for gardening. The woman was wearing a floral dress and the girl, about 9 years old, was wearing a pink dress with white lacy frills. The boy, about 8 years old, was wearing clean blue pants and a fitted cream-colored shirt. The woman was speaking in a foreign language I didn't recognize (from the Baltic?). She had a plastic tote bag and was handing out what looked like different colored blocks to the two kids. I continued my hunt for bind weed. Suddenly I heard the boy start to wail uncontrollably. I don't know what set him off. Was he given the wrong block? Did the woman say something unkind? The boy stepped away from his companions and staggered tentatively along a path toward the plot next to mine, still howling. He walked onto the plot and continued crying. He didn't trample the plants but it wasn't clear what he might end up doing. I thought I should respond in some way. In a fake, authoritative, voice I called out: *"There is a rule here. No one is allowed to cry in the Gardens!"* I never thought that would succeed, but it did. Amazingly, he

stopped crying and ambled back to the girl and the woman.

So I went back to my weeding. A minute later the girl walked over to me and asked, in unaccented American English, “excuse me, is there really a rule that says you can’t cry in the garden?” What a wonderful question. Should I keep up the pretense that there were crying rules? No, of course not. This girl was already developing a keen sense of what in the world is true and what is bullshit. So I responded. “No, I just said that so he would calm down. There are no rules like that here.” She nodded. I asked if the boy is her brother. “No.” Is he your cousin? “No.” She was also developing a sense of discretion. Don’t gratuitously give out information to strangers. She volunteered nothing. She is well on her way to being a bright, fine citizen of this country and maybe of this world.

The development of figuring out what is true and what is unlikely starts very early -in prelinguistic infancy. Babies will stare longer at things that seem anomalous than things that are routine. In a classic experiment, infants were shown a box with a transparent side. They could see the box contained mostly red marbles with just one or two white marbles. The box was then rotated so the baby could only see an opaque side of the box. The experimenter withdrew a marble from the box. If the withdrawn marble was red, the infants didn’t waste time staring at the box. However, if a white marble was withdrawn from the box the infants stared at the box for a lot longer time. As if they are dealing with a seeming anomaly. A huh? moment The experiment had the same outcome if the box contained mostly white marbles and the experimenter withdrew a red marble.

It’s a long way from babies seeing anomalies in picking colored marbles out of a box and 9 year olds seeing through assertions of real and fake rules. But it’s a continuum.

The perils of late harvesting

Like all growing seasons, there were ups and downs. Two of my tomato plants made it into November. Nice foliage, several tomatoes. Yay. During the above 70 degrees warm spell

the first week in November two of the tomatoes on one of the plants started to turn color (see photo on right). Two days later I decided to pick the tomato on the left



and let the second one continue to ripen on the vine. The tomato I picked continued to ripen indoors. We made wonderful BLTs



with slices from that left tomato (see photo on left).

A few warm days later I went to the plot to harvest the second tomato figuring it would be sensational. Instead, it was gone. Not bitten into, not on the ground, just stolen. I had a momentary frisson of anger and dismay but I understood these things happen. If I knew who did it and could prove it, I would have taken action. But there was nothing to do and I quickly got over it. The plant that those tomatoes were on was located immediately adjacent to a narrow north/south path. Someone must have casually filched the tomato as they ambled by. Lesson learned. In the future I'll put my tomato plants far from any path. So the thief will have to be more overt tramping in our plot to steal our crops. I continue to think bad thoughts for the anonymous, faceless filcher. Oh, and they also stole a lovely orange colored ripe bell pepper. Nothing is sacred.

Pat Schuyler's latest discovery Pat found a chart on the Food Gardening Network showing the optimum temperatures for planting seeds of various varieties (upper right).

See you at the meeting this Saturday, 11 AM?

| Plant | Minimum Temp. | Optimum Range | Maximum Temp. |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Beans | 60 | 75-85 | 85 |
| Beets | 40 | 65-85 | 95 |
| Broccoli | 40 | 60-85 | 95 |
| Carrots | 40 | 65-85 | 95 |
| Cucumbers | 60 | 65-95 | 105 |
| Eggplant | 60 | 75-85 | 95 |
| Kale | 40 | 60-85 | 95 |
| Lettuce | 35 | 60-75 | 85 |
| Okra | 60 | 85-95 | 105 |
| Parsley | 40 | 65-85 | 95 |
| Peas | 40 | 65-75 | 85 |
| Peppers | 60 | 65-75 | 95 |
| Radishes | 40 | 65-85 | 95 |
| Squash | 60 | 85-95 | 105 |
| Tomatoes | 50 | 65-85 | 95 |

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Please send your ideas, thoughts, suggestions and observations to:
e.gruberg@temple.edu
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