

#34 March 2023

Green Thoughts

Conversations and ideas about growing at The Spring Gardens

This growing year has started off slowly. Usually, in Philadelphia, if you get seeds in the ground in mid-February there are enough warmish days to get you sprinting. Not this year. I planted

*Peas, Bees,
Tomato Advice*

semi-germinated pea seeds and they are taking their time poking through the surface. And it's not that any critters are eating the seeds. A few pioneer peas who got through to the surface first, paused waiting for some sun and milder days. A few days

*Pavilion
Proposal*

ago I covered the peas with polyethylene cloth that is translucent (85% of the sun gets through), keeps the soil a bit warmer and allows rain water to trickle in. The pea growth is accelerating (see photo below). By the way, if you plant ungerminated peas in the ground it's a good idea to plant them pretty deep because the dry seeds tend to float to the surface when the soil gets wet.

Thirty years ago I planted a sugar maple 3 blocks south of the Spring Gardens. It's now about 40 feet high with a diameter of 16 inches. This year I tried to tap it to get some maple sap that I could boil down into maple syrup. I drilled into the tree, a little sap came out and I put a tap in the hole and had a collecting bucket attached by hose to the tap. It was a very cold day, late January or early February when the temp stayed below freezing for 36 hours. Brr. But then it warmed up and mostly stayed above freezing. Word is that sap keeps running when there are alternating freezes and thaws. This year the temp has stayed mostly above freezing. I have succeeded extracting a mere eighth of a cup of sap. In the future I need to collect more - maybe a gallon? If anybody has successfully tapped maple trees in the Philly area please let us know and tell us how you did it. A friend from Vermont says it is pretty easy to tap maples up there. And then he added, I've heard of Vermont maple syrup but I've never heard of Pennsylvania maple syrup. Hm.



pea seedlings 26 march 2023

Bees

I don't want to jinx them, but the bees in the Langstroth hive on bee hill seemed to have wintered over successfully. The other day there was a mass of bees congregating on the sunny side of their hive. Later, near sundown, bees were individually homeward bound



bees amassing on the south side of their hive on
bee hill 26 March 2023

after a long day of scouting out the territory and perhaps bringing in some early harvest. None were venturing out from the hive.

Congratulations to resident bee lady Karen!

How do we know if the bees we saw aren't *new* bees recently installed? We don't know, but we looked at the catalog of a major bee supplier, Mann Lake, and they don't ship out new colonies until after the beginning of April. By the way there are several varieties of honey bee that are commercially available: Saskatraz, Italian, Carniolan and Russian Hybrid. Interesting and arcane.

Digging Tomatoes Deep, a suggestion

We received the following correspondence from former Spring Gardener Pat Schuyler:

"In a [viral Instagram](#) Reel, Sarah Christenson ([@silverchrysalis](#)) sarcastically complains about how annoying her tomato plant has become after a gardening [hack](#) worked *too well*. 'I did this, and I have a complaint,' Christenson says. The gardening [hack](#), which Christenson found elsewhere on the app, claims that you should bury most of your plant, leaving only a short portion above ground. In Christenson's case, it was a highly effective tip. "I planted them deep, fertilized them, and now they're just too big and healthy, honestly," she explains. "I prefer, like, just a little wimpy tomato bush like I used to have."

Christenson jokingly talks about how much [money](#) she has spent on plant stakes to support the well-developed tomato plants and how laborious it's been to harvest so many tomatoes. Even after the devastation of [Hurricane Ian](#) — which Christenson said was classified as a tropical [storm](#) when it hit her [home](#) — the tomato plants were still going strong.

How deep should you plant tomatoes?

For those of us familiar with planting and gardening, we know you're often told to dig a hole in the ground about the size of the plant's pot. But that's not the case for tomatoes.

As Mama Odie from "The Princess and the Frog" [sings](#), you gotta dig a little deeper. For the best results, place your tomato plant deep

enough in the soil so that about two-thirds of it is underground.

A deep burial helps your tomato plant by protecting most of the stem and all of the roots from frigid winter temperatures, harsh freezes, and winds. Additionally, having a good portion of the stem buried with a deep root system acts as an anchor that stabilizes your plant.

Another benefit of burying your tomato plants deep is that you won't have to water them as much. A deep root system allows your plant to access moisture and water stored deep in the ground. Not only can you save water, but you can also plant them in drier areas and still produce delicious tomatoes. Comments seemed to agree with the benefits of the hack.

"That's how I do it and love it! I don't mind all the tomatoes to stew and make salsa!" one user chimed in.

A different user gave a tip for dealing with the abundance of hearty tomatoes.

"Also cut off the long thin branches which will make the tomatoes grow to the center and they won't fall over from the weight," they wrote. If you try this tomato planting hack, make sure to arm yourself with enough [tomato recipes](#) to use up your harvest."

A Proposed New Structure

A new permanent structure is possibly in the works. This is for a “modest” all season building that is heated and air conditioned. It contains a conference room. The plan was approved October 2022. However, the Steering Committee of the Spring Gardens only learned of the plan in March 2023. It is big (to some people) and takes away part of the southwest lawn. It also permanently removes several existing plots. Look it over, see what you think and let us know.

Garden Pavilion Project

- In September 2022, SGCDC was awarded a \$110,000 grant from the Commonwealth Financing Authority (DCED’s Greenways Grant Program).
- This grant is for **partial construction costs** for the 4-season Garden Pavilion. **Additional funding will be needed.**
- The plans for the proposed structure were presented to the Garden's Executive and Design Leadership by Mary Holland of Cicada Architecture/Planning in April 2022, and **were approved.**
- Previous plans (repurposed shipping containers) by the Community Design Collaborative (Nov. 2014) were roundly rejected; a more attractive and compatible concept plan was needed.
- The purpose of the Pavilion is to make the Garden site usable for inclusive community activities year-round

Proposed Floor Plan



The purpose of the Pavillion will be to make the garden useful year-round.

The building will include:

- Bathrooms
- Storage room
- Produce washing station
- Kitchen facilities for events
- All purpose meeting room for meetings, classes, and social events.

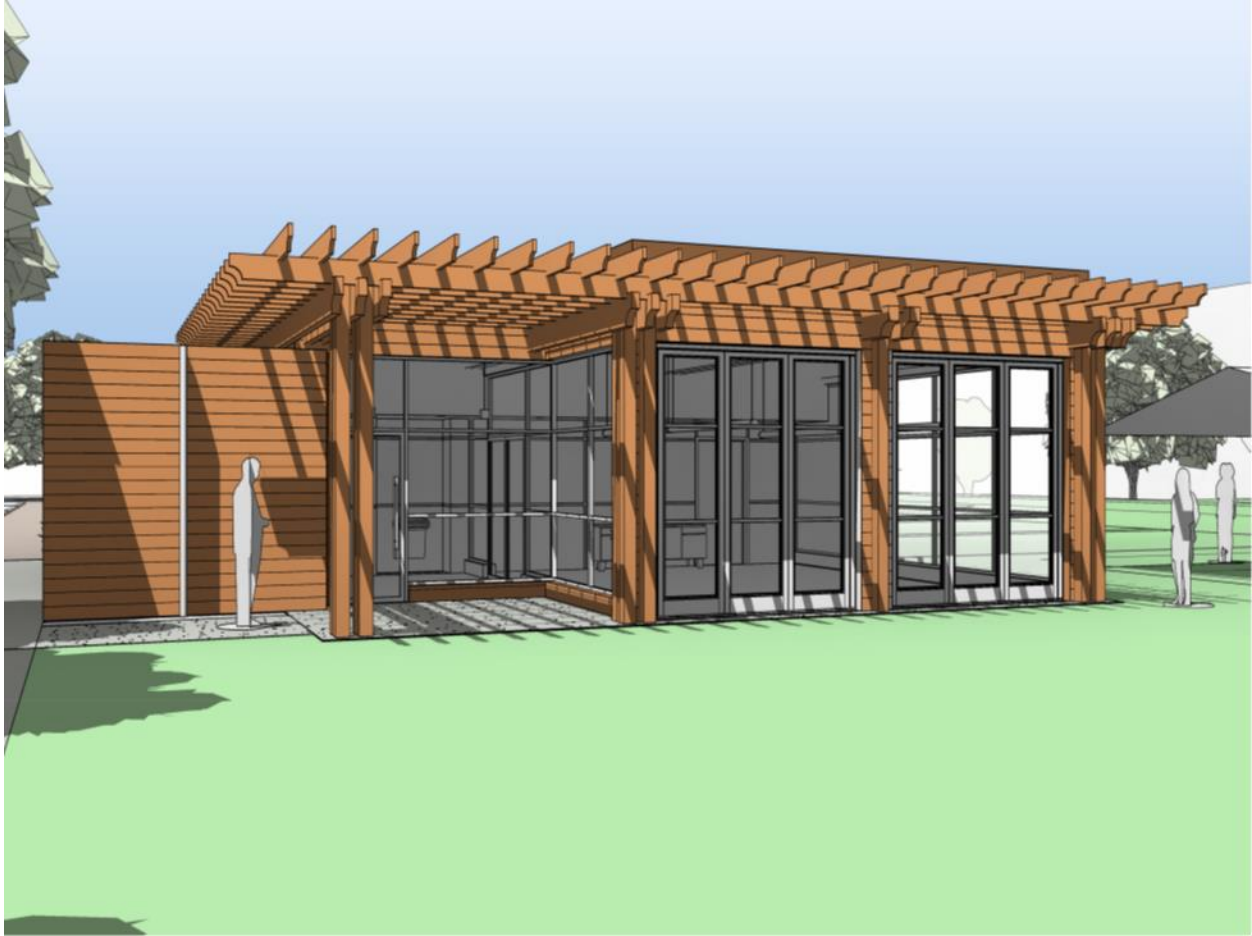
Central Location of Pavilion



The proposal

The proposal was a modest 4-season glass and wood structure with heating and air conditioning.

Other features include large glass windows that open to the outside, a produce washing station on the exterior, and one accessible bathroom that can be entered from either the interior or the exterior. (View: Looking west, from the orchard center)



Early reactions to the plan:

Is this a community garden for growing flowers and vegetables or is this a heated and air conditioned country club?

Why are we reducing the number of plots?

If there must be a Pavilion why does it have to be located to invade the open space of the lawn?

Why do we need an all-season structure?

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.

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