

# Notes from a Garden Intern

## An Educational Resource for Fairfax County Vegetable Gardeners

The Edible Garden, tended by Extension Master Gardener volunteers, serves as a demonstration vegetable garden for visitors to Green Spring. Here we showcase the wide variety of crops that can be grown in Fairfax County throughout all seasons. It is approximately 70' x 40' with an 8-foot deer fence surrounding the garden. Adjacent to the Edible Garden is a small orchard outside the fence. All produce from both the Edible and Orchard Gardens is donated to local food pantries.

## Meet Tuan Truong



My name is Tuan Truong. I am currently the Urban Agriculture Intern working with Patricia Dietly on the Community Garden Plot program. I recently graduated from Northern Virginia Community with an associate degree in Horticulture Technology. I always had an interest in nature as a child. Due to moving around a lot growing up, I did not have a chance to explore my interest beyond the confines of books. As I got older, that interest never faded, and I decided to focus my future study on plant life. For the past two years I have been working hard on my degree, and now, nearing graduation, I am afforded the internship opportunity here at Green Spring. I am grateful for this internship as it allows me to employ the skills I have learned, as well as letting me get to know others in my community who have a strong interest in horticulture, gardening, and

plant life in general.

Tuan's Notes are presented in reverse order, with one weekly report per page. The most recent [Notes from a Garden Intern](#) appear on the next page. Scroll down to walk back to the beginning of the garden season, March 10, 2022.

August 4, 2022



Due to the current heatwave, the EMGs met early today to harvest their crops. They gathered a total of 92 pounds of produce this week from a combination of arugula, eggplant, pepper, and squash. The EMGs have harvested and donated 1200 lbs. of fresh produce so far this year.

Many crops that were planted in the past two weeks have sprouted and look remarkable, especially the okra and butternut squash. The EMGs put up a trellis for the butternut squash to climb (pictured).



Okra that was planted in mid-July has now grown up hale and healthy. The okra stem is a vivid shade of red (below).



July 21, 2022



The EMGs today harvested all the remaining carrots in the garden. They also harvested bell peppers, hot peppers, cucumbers, zucchini, and pattypan squash. Eggplants are still ripening and thus were not harvested this week.

*Clockwise from the yellow box at top right: cucumber and zucchini, pattypan squash, bell peppers, hot peppers*

In place of the carrots, the EMGs planted butternut squash seeds and parsnip seeds directly into the soil.

A small patch of pepper plants received a fresh batch of compost today, and tomatillos that that the EMGs planted at the beginning of summer are growing nicely.



*Tomatillos basking in the sunlight*

July 14, 2022



The EMGs met on Monday to harvest crops that were ready in preparation for the storm that came Tuesday. Today, as they reconvened, the EMGs cleaned up in the aftermath of the storm. They staked plants, such as the peppers pictured, which were uprooted by the storm.

With hot days approaching, the EMGs harvested and removed some older plants, like Swiss chard and kale. In their place, rutabaga and turnip were planted. Other crops that were planted in prior weeks - beans, eggplants, okras, and tomatoes - received some compost in their beds to improve the quality of the soil.



Today's harvest included cucumbers and eggplant (shown at left), kale, squash, Swiss chard, carrots, and peppers.

July 7, 2022



The Super Sugar Snap Peas saw its final harvest in the garden today and were taken out completely together with the trellises that supported them by the EMGs. Other crops harvested today were carrots, kale, peppers, potatoes, and squash.

Fingerling potatoes were callused over and planted in the ground back in mid-April. About a month later, they sprouted healthy green foliage. By the end of May, small pinkish-white flowers were blooming. Now, three months later, the EMGs finished harvesting all the potatoes.



The vegetative remains of the carrots, peas, and potatoes were cut up and put to good use in the compost bin.

Of course, the EMGs do not let garden space go unused. They had transplants ready to put into the ground as soon as the spent crops were removed.

The EMGs put up a few more fences along certain rows they know are prone to attacks by rabbits and other rodents.

June 30, 2022



Today was a big harvest day for the EMGs. They reaped in kale, Swiss chard, fingerling potatoes, carrots, Super Sugar Snap Peas, eggplants, and buttercup squashes. Some of the newly planted crops last week have sprouted, which prompted the EMGs to put up fences around them to prevent rabbits from having a free meal. Some of the Green Spring summer campers also came to help with harvest. The EMGs reserved a batch of peppers for them to pick.

*Clockwise from top left: Fingerling potatoes, peppers, Super Sugar Snap Peas, an EMG with buttercup squash and eggplant*

June 23, 2022



*Patty Pan Squash*



*Patty Pan Squash flower*

Despite the morning rain today, the EMGs met to take care of the crops, harvesting, and planting new seeds. Among the harvest today are large squashes, along with the usual kale and Swiss chard. Some kale was removed in order to make room for additional seasonal crops. The EMGs planted seeds for zucchini, green beans, and okra in their place.

As for developing crops, the Sugar Snap Peas are now filling out the trellises, and the carrot varieties have all sprouted. The foliage of both crops shows that they are in good health. The peppers now each have large fruits, soon to be ready for harvest.



*Super Sugar Snap Peas*



*Carrots*



*Hot Peppers*

June 2, 2022

Beyond the harvest of kale and Swiss chard today, activity in the Edible Garden was mostly directed towards watering and caring for new plants. Many eggplants and peppers that were planted back on May 12 are developing their fruits. Some varieties that develop at a slower pace are still at the flowering stage. The Super Sugar Snap Peas are not flowering yet, however, they are getting taller and climbing onto the trellis the EMGs made for them.



*Super Sugar Snap Peas climbing the trellis*



*Pinkish Eggplant Flower*



*Developing Eggplant Fruit*



*Developing Hot Pepper Fruits*



May 26, 2022



*Swiss chard being harvested*

Today the EMGs harvested another batch of leafy greens, consisting of collard, Swiss chard, and kale. There were signs of damage caused by an unidentified pest on some eggplant. The EMGs put together an insecticide spray, using a mix of dish soap and water, and sprayed the affected plants as well as the general surroundings. The eggplants and tomatillos that were nitrogen deficient last week have gotten greener, showing that the fish emulsion applied last week has done its work.

The Fingerling potatoes now are starting to flower (left), a small and delicate pinkish white bloom. The Sugar Snap peas (right) are getting taller, reaching above the base of the trellis, after a month of growth.



May 19, 2022

The EMGs divided themselves between plant treatment and harvesting today.

Some crops including peppers, tomatillos, and eggplants were yellowing, which is a sign that the soil is deficient in nitrogen. To address this problem, the EMGs applied some fish emulsion, which is the liquid remains when fish is processed for fish meal and fish oil. Fish emulsion contains a great amount of nitrogen. The EMGs soaked a healthy amount of the emulsion into the soil around the affected plants. In addition, the EMGs also pruned out yellow, drooping leaves to maintain the health of the plants.

For harvesting, the EMGs reaped in another large batch of Swiss chard this week, as well as a new harvest of rutabagas.

The Super Sugar Snap Peas and the two varieties of carrots the EMGs planted two weeks ago (on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May) are sprouting out. The Fingerling potatoes planted in March now have thick and vibrant foliage.



*Rutabagas laid out with a trowel*



*Fingerling potatoes*



*Fish mulch being applied to eggplants, with pea trellis in the background*

May 12, 2022

A large number of crops were harvested today, including Little Gem Lettuce, Bok Choi, Silverbeet Swiss Chard, and a number of Kale varieties. The latter two are leafy greens that can be harvested multiple times, unlike lettuce or bok choy. The EMGs picked the large and healthy leaves at the bottom of the plants and left the new growth to mature into another harvest.



*Little Gem Lettuce*



*Dinosaur Kale*

Many summer crops from the poly house were taken outside to be transplanted. They included many varieties of sweet peppers, hot peppers, bell peppers, and eggplants. Tomatillos were also planted outside today.



*Various crops ready for transplant*



*Black Beauty eggplant being planted*

May 5, 2022

*Bok Choy*



*Lettuce*



*Turnip Harvesting*



*Hakurei Salad Turnip*



Today in the Edible Garden, the EMGs harvested the first batch of crops planted this season, which included Black Seeded Simpson Lettuce, Bok Choy, and Hakurei Salad Turnips. The harvest was weighed by type of crop and all produce was donated to a new food bank in Annandale known as The Mission Center.



*Trellis for Snap Peas*

After the harvest, the EMGs proceeded to start new crops in the raised beds. They direct-seeded two varieties of carrot, Chantenay and Nantes Half Long. They also planted Super Sugar Snap Peas, setting up a trellis for the peas to climb as they mature.

April 28, 2022

Today the EMGs potted some seedlings that were big enough (about 2 inches tall) and took them into the poly house for continued development.

In the Edible Garden, there was remarkable growth despite the erratic weather as of late. During the recent cold nights (below 40 degrees), the plants already in the garden were strong enough that they did not need special care in order to survive.



Fingerling potatoes that were planted directly into the soil last month are currently doing nicely, having sprouted and grown to about 7 inches.



Some lettuces and bok choy were bolting, signaling that they are at the end of their lifespan and are ready to be harvested. By our EMGs' estimation, all lettuce varieties and bok choy should be ready for harvest by next week provided the weather is fair.

Pictured here is the Black Seeded Simpson Lettuce, planted late March. They now average about 7 to 12 inches wide.



In March, lettuce and arugula were directly seeded outdoors, while there was still potential for frost. This experiment proved to be a success. Both crops were harvested today.

April 14, 2022

Two varieties of potatoes were cultivated today: Dark Red Norland and Pinto Gold. They were cut and left to dry for 2 to 3 days, so that they would dry and callus over. In order to prevent pests and diseases, potatoes should not be wet when planted. An aspiring gardener may use organic potatoes from grocery stores, but otherwise seeded potatoes from plant nurseries are used for planting.



*These callus potato pieces are ready to be planted.*

Seeds were planted by the propagation team today:

- Oriental Poppy Brilliant Red
- Zinnia Giant Cactus Mixed Colors
- Cosmos Bright Lights Mixed Colors
- Slow-Bolt Cilantro

The first three are flowers that are being propagated for the Children Garden. Slow-Bolt Cilantro is propagated for use in the Wellness Garden.

Every third Saturday of the month our EMGs hold a workshop, open to the public, to educate about gardening. There will be a workshop this Saturday, April 16, so they did not actively work in the Edible Garden this week.

Saturday's workshop is about soil and composting. Everyone is encouraged to come and learn more about these subjects. The next workshop will be held on May 24. The topic will be supporting a garden for increased harvest.

Gardening Fact: Did you know that coffee grounds are great to use for compost?

Coffee grounds contains a great amount of nitrogen, one of the three main elements of fertilizers, the others being phosphorus and potassium. Nitrogen is necessary for growing many common leafy greens. The coffee grounds can be mixed into the compost bin with no special attention required.

April 7, 2022

Some seedlings were transplanted to individual containers and relocated to the poly house today:

- San Marzano Tomato
- Roma Tomato
- Tomatillo
- Bell Pepper
- Hybrid Hot Pepper
- Sweet Banana Pepper
- Kaliboo Cabbage
- Hybrid Italian Eggplant
- Chive
- Anise Hyssop

Due to increment weather today, the EMGs did not meet in the Edible Garden, however, the crops they planted last week seem to be thriving well.



*Various cabbage (left) and lettuce (lower right) varieties in the garden.*

## March 31, 2022

The EMGs propagated flower seedlings today:

- Profusion Cherry Hybrid Zinnia
- Mexican Sunflower
- Nasturtium

Seedlings that were transplanted into the garden beds today include:

- Kale
- Radish
- Little Gem Lettuce
- Black Seeded Simpson Lettuce
- Georgia Collard
- Beet
- Swish Chard
- Bok Choy

All of these plants were seeded about 2 to 4 weeks ago and kept in Green Spring's poly houses. They were taken out last Thursday to harden off. The sudden cold last weekend however, meant that some volunteers came in on Sunday and Monday to cover the plants against the cold.

Crop planting has been slightly erratic this season as the weather has been unfavorable, with storms from the Southeast affecting the weather of our region. The frost-free date this spring has been changed several times already to account for this weather pattern.

Did you notice that some of today's plantings are the same as last week? This is so that the harvest will not be ready all at once. During harvest season the crops will be picked in successive waves.



*Today, when transplanting, the EMGs found another Japanese beetle grub onsite.*



## March 24, 2022

The EMGs planted seedlings in nine of the raised beds today:

- Georgia Southern Collard
- Laurentian Rutabaga
- Nero de Toscana Kale
- Red Russian Kale
- Black Seeded Simpson Lettuce
- Parris Isle Cos Romaine
- Tatsoi Mustard
- Bok Choi
- Canton White Pak Choi

All of today's plants were seeded on February 7 and kept in one of Green Spring's hoop houses (a translucent poly structure kept at approximately 60 degrees). The seedlings were transplanted to individual containers after about two weeks, and again kept in the poly house. About a week ago, when nights were getting mild, the trays of small plants were taken outside to harden off.

How many seeds were planted originally? For each type of seed, a planting schedule was consulted to see how far apart the young plants should be located. With a little arithmetic that included the size of each bed, the number of rows for each vegetable was determined, as well as the number of plants in each row. Of course, some extras of each type were planted, just in case!



*Kale was planted.*

## March 17, 2022

Today was a rainy day at the Edible Garden. Only a few of our Extension Master Gardener volunteers were needed. Master Gardener Tim Bowers led the group in thoroughly weeding so that planting can begin next week.

EMGs watch out for deer, rabbit, and squirrel, which love Green Spring's produce. To address the problem, the EMGs are using granule-based deer repellent (dried blood) to keep away the deer and rabbits, for they abhor the scent.

While weeding, a Japanese beetle grub was identified. The Japanese beetle is a highly destructive pest throughout its entire life cycle. As grubs, they prey on grass roots; the extensive damage they can cause will let you pull out large patches of grass with no effort. As adults, they skeletonize the leaves of trees, shrubs, and vegetables, and even turf grass. They also consume fruits and flowers.

March 10, 2022

- Propagation – Seed sowing:
  - Sage
  - Dill
  - Borage
  - Broccoli
- Weeding – mostly crabgrass and turfgrass were encroaching
- Perennial Herbs are showing remarkable new growth
  - Fennel
  - Lavender
  - Thyme
- Cardoon shoots are emerging again after a long winter

In the Orchard: Unfortunately, a loquat tree, also known as Japanese plum, was attacked by deer looking for a meal last night, causing extensive damage. A replacement for the tree is warranted. Loquat is a fruit tree belonging to the Rose family, related to many better-known fruit trees such as apple, plum, and pear. Loquat fruit is sweet, and it can be eaten raw or made into tea or jam.