
NYACK COMMUNITY GARDEN

October-November 2020

Weeds, Glorious Weeds

In the spring, weeks before my lettuce seeds yielded their gorgeous greens, I was preparing my freshly-picked salad. I was gathering dandelion leaves from all over Nyack on my daily evening walks (masked, of course, and collection bag in hand.) After that, it was garlic mustard, which was growing abundantly, there for the harvesting. (This I threw into my salads as well or cooked up like spinach). And mugwort, with a slightly funky taste, but still nutritious when cooked, and, apparently commonly found and foraged in parts of Asia. I first took note of mugwort when I noticed a family from Korea who were harvesting it by the armful in Congers Lake Memorial Park. I had to try, too – it is good in a soup or cooked, mixed into a tomato sauce. I have also fried some up with scrambled eggs.

Another weed I look for when I can, are stinging nettles. They do sting, so beware. I try to wear my gloves when I go out deliberately to pick them. But they're great when cooked up, and do not sting any more once cooked. And they're highly nutritious – especially high in Calcium, Vitamin A and even protein. I find them growing all along the Croton Aquaduct Trail in Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow.



Garlic mustard



Stinging nettle

As for our garden: there are 2 completely edible weeds that most of us pull up and discard instead of harvesting and eating. One is wood sorrel. When I was a kid, I used to crouch in my backyard and munch on wood sorrel leaves as if I were a bunny. They have a delicious sour flavor and they grow abundantly in my plot. The other weed that grows throughout my plot is purslane. Purslane is highly nutritious, being one of the few plants that contain omega-3 fatty acids (like fish). We should be getting our omega-3s from purslane instead of fish, because fish are being depleted in the oceans at a alarming rate. I throw the leaves of purslane into my salads. They don't have much flavor, but they sure are healthy.



Wood sorrel



Mugwort – green on upside of the leaves and grayish/silver on underside of leaves

For more information, you can certainly check out Paul Tappenden's newest book specifically about Nyack – "The Edible Plants of Nyack." He is a resident of Nyack and the county's forager.



Dandelion leaves (the flower and the roots are also edible)

And one other observation: this seems to be a good year for mushrooms. I am not much of a mycologist, and Tappenden, who knows his mushrooms, does not include them in his book. You really do have to know what you're doing with mushrooms because some are truly poisonous. But in approaching the garden gate the other day, I noticed 2 large and gorgeous mushrooms – big, round, white, with intricate patterns all over them. I didn't pick them, and looking again a few days later, it was clear that no one had picked them, because they were already starting to disintegrate there in the grass.



But I looked them up and believe they were these: Gem-studded Puffballs (although I don't have the confidence to know for sure). If they are these, they were completely edible, and sure were beautiful!

For all of these, keep in mind that if you are prone to allergies, you should proceed with caution. I have never had a problem with any of them, but I have no food allergies. And some of them are thought to have some medicinal uses as well (particularly Mugwort) for which I do not vouch. Also remember, if you try any of them, wash them well before eating or cooking. And don't try any mushroom unless you know for sure what kind it is.

These are difficult and uncertain times for many. While we are experiencing abundance in our garden, others are experiencing scarcity. We should all become familiar with the edible weeds. Because we certainly don't know if we ever will need to rely on them ourselves. And another reason to take note of the weeds, they remind us of how awesome the whole natural world is – and we are just a part of it ourselves.



Purslane

--Kathy Schwarz

Benefits of Community Gardening

We all enjoy our time in the Nyack Community Garden, which is why we all return, year after year, and why the waiting list to join is always full! Since the advent of community gardens (described in the July-August 2018 newsletter), social scientists have studied the benefits of community gardens on participants and on their surrounding communities. As a sociologist with access to academic articles that are often hidden behind university paywalls, I wanted to share some of these research findings to see how we measure up to these studies.

Researchers in leisure studies have found that community gardens serve as a site for sharing knowledge, such as learning how to garden.¹ As one interviewee in their study put it, “I couldn’t do it myself because I didn’t know how to do it.” As a new gardener, she needed to learn from other community garden members to learn the basics of gardening. Another finding was that the social aspect of gardening helped to attract new gardeners and keep them coming back: “I know, personally, when I’ve done things when there has not been any fun, I won’t go back. But if there’s a little bit of fun, I’ll be like, ‘Hey, this place is great.’” Participants reported making new friends through the community garden, and expanding their local social networks of other people who live in the area.

Public health researchers have found several positive benefits to gardeners’ mental health.² Their interviewees reported that the community garden provides a sanctuary: “garden has a lot of things going for people who are in stressful environments of today and who want to get away from pressures.” The mental health benefits also come from the sense of achievement of growing their own food: “There is a thrill in seeing something grow and being able to eat produce.”

Additionally, the researchers found that many participants responded that working in a community garden benefits their physical health, stating that “it’s more interesting than going to the gym and walking up and down on the treadmill.” And, of course, everyone responded that they enjoyed the better tasting food that came from their own gardens. On that note, a study conducted by social workers also found that community gardening benefits the nutritional health of household members, even if they did not personally participate in the gardening.³ Everyone gets to enjoy the bounty!



¹ Glover, Troy and Diana C. Parry. 2005. Building Relationships, Accessing Resources: Mobilizing Social Capital in Community Garden Contexts. *Journal of Leisure Research* 37(4): 450-474.

² Kinglsey, Jonathan, Mardie Townsend, and Clare Henderson-Wilson. 2009. Cultivating Health and Wellbeing: Members’ Perceptions of the Health Benefits of a Port Melbourne Community Garden. *Leisure Studies* 28(2): 207-219.

³ Draper, Carrie and Darcy Freedman. 2010. Review and Analysis of the Benefits, Purposes, and Motivations Associated with Community Gardening in the United States. *Journal of Community Practice* 18(4): 458-492.

This final image was developed by public health researchers seeking to create a visual image of the variety of benefits to participating in community gardens.⁴ Which benefits have you enjoyed? Which benefits would you like to enhance in future years in the garden?



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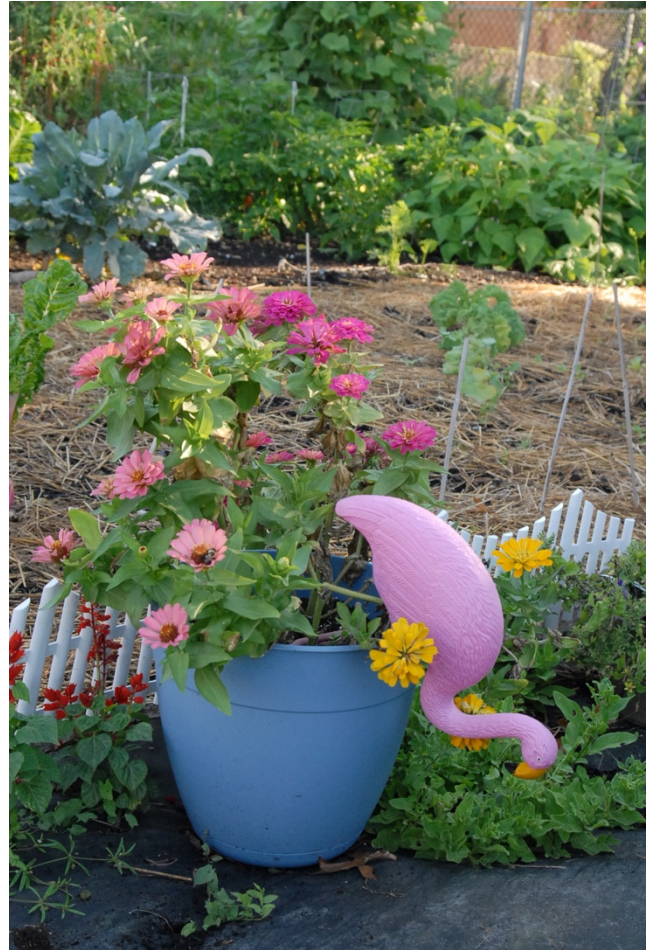
--Liz Cherry

⁴ Egli, Victoria, Melody Oliver, and El-Shadan Tautolo. 2016. The Development of a Model of Community Garden Benefits to Wellbeing. *Preventive Medicine Reports* 3: 348-352.

2020 Garden Photos from Nancy Jagelka

The 2020 Garden Contest and Potluck Dinner were both canceled due to COVID. Normally, these annual events serve as celebrations of our gardens' beauty and bounty. To commemorate our beautiful gardens this year, gardener Nancy Jagelka has shared some beautiful photos from the garden. Please enjoy!





2020 Dates to Remember

Mondays, around 10am Plant A Row veggies in cooler will be given to food bank

Sunday, Nov. 8 Garden closes, all items removed and plots restored to state they had on April 5

Saturday, Nov. 14 8:00 AM sharp: Winter prep clean-up

News you can use!

Feed the birds!

Leave flower heads, especially zinnias, on the plants after they die so birds can eat the seeds. When you clean up your plot, save those for last!



Kids in the Garden?

There are now child-friendly gloves and tools in the shed, donated by Rockland Country Day School. Thanks to Laura Pakaln for coordinating the donation!

Coming or going?

Please don't forget to lock the gate.



Give a hose a chance!

Don't forget to turn the hose off after use. Then open the nozzle and drain. Thanks!



A Message from Your Newsletter Team

It's your newsletter so please send us your garden story or let us know what you want to read about. We'd love to hear from you.

Liz Cherry elizcherry@gmail.com

Kathy Schwarz Katherine.schwarz54@gmail.com

Andrea Joyce angbeck@mac.com

Hilary Rosen hilary.rosen@yahoo.com

Photographs by Kathy Schwarz, Nancy Jagelka, and other images sourced via Wikimedia Commons.

Notes from the Board:

We are heading in the direction of going all organic in 2022, and we will be talking about that next season in preparation. More information to come next year!

Please notify us at nyackcommunitygarden@gmail.com if our garden information has incorrect information for you such as wrong name spelling, email, phone number, plot number, committee assignment, or address OR if you change any of these.

While we do not email revised lists every time an update is made to all members, the up-to-date information is always posted on the bulletin board on the door of the shed.

Nyack Community Garden Executive Board

John Dunnigan (plot 16)	co-president	pickwickbooks@gmail.com	358-9126
Jill Remaly (plot 37)	co-president	jillremaly217@gmail.com	358-3427
Marie Dilluvio (plot 15)	treasurer	mvenus1220@aol.com	358-5877
Laura Pakaln (plot 32)	member	lpakaln@verizon.net	358-0593
Michelle Morales (plot 1)	member	mzmichelle@hotmail.com	(347) 770-2198
Yodit De La Cruz (plot 35)	member	yoditgg@gmail.com	664-0282
Elvin De La Cruz (plot 35)	member	ausfall00@gmail.com	270-3792

NYACK COMMUNITY GARDEN - East side of South Franklin Street - between Hudson & Depew Avenues
PO Box 864, Nyack, NY 10960

Email: nyackcommunitygarden@gmail.com - Website: nyackcommunitygarden.info