



# The GreenThumb Print

GreenThumb News and  
Topics of Interest to Community Gardeners in New York City

August 2002

The bulletin of GreenThumb, a program of City of New York Parks & Recreation

## PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST VIA THE SOUTH BRONX AND NEW YORK CITY'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

**The story of three interns -- Nava (Israeli), Mohammed (Palestinian) and Kelly (American) -- working on rainwater collection systems in the Bronx during this time of drought.**

Nava:

*"A Palestinian, an American and an Israeli went into a community garden in the South Bronx... it sounds like the beginning of a joke? Well it isn't. This is the real truth and the start of a very interesting experience. (And by the way I am the Israeli...)"*

*3:23... Cars, horns, people, traffic lights, big sign-sandwich bar...  
3:24...subway, hip-hop, full volume, ice-cream man, sweat... 3:25...  
baby crying, houses, movies, smell of food, policemen... 3:26...  
sidewalks, T.V, cellular phone, Coca Cola can...Community garden...  
3:?? ... Time stops.*

*On our first week as interns at GreenThumb, Mohammed, Kelly and I had the opportunity to see some of the community gardens and meet some gardeners in the Bronx, in Manhattan, and in Brooklyn. I was amazed each time I got into a new garden by the beauty, the atmosphere, the smells, (the tastes...) and the friendly people in each one. New York is a crazy place, and it seems to me that these gardens are little pieces of heaven, creating islands of a different rhythm."*

Mohammed:

*"After visiting gardens around New York City, we found that most of the gardens have some water problems with the drought, they were not able to get water from the pump and so the gardens were drying up. GreenThumb had the idea of doing a project that would help gardeners to have water when they needed. This would happen by building Rainwater Catchment Systems by using gutters and drain pipes to collect water off nearby roofs, or off roofs of structures in the garden itself when it rains. This would especially help in the summer and the drought seasons. We helped gardeners build these systems in three gardens. I thought that the construction would be so hard, but with the help of GreenThumb and my partners it was so easy to build.*

*During this internship, we were engaged in political conversations, because when people saw a Palestinian, an Israeli and an American together they used the opportunity to ask a lot of questions knowing they might not have this chance again. When I came here, I knew that as a Palestinian I would be asked a lot of questions and be in many political conversations about the situation in the Middle East. We also had many conversations within the group. All the people we met were kind and helpful, and they wanted to know what is really going in that piece of land. Sometimes when they saw me with my Israeli partner they were amazed because they didn't believe that Arabs and Israelis could work together...or that there are Arabs and Israelis that still believed peace is possible. We do."*

*continued on page 4. . .*



Mohammed, Kelly and Nava having a great time at the GreenThumb Summer Solstice event.



Mohammed, Doron, Nava, Kelly and Dimas at El Batey Borincano, where a rainwater collection system was built and amazing rice and beans delighted international taste buds.

## A FOND FAREWELL

Come September, there will be a very noticeable void in the GreenThumb Office. Occupying a warm place in our hearts and the hearts of gardeners, GreenThumb is very sad and reluctant to announce the departure of Emma de Caires. Many of you are familiar with Emma from her days as the Manhattan Outreach Coordinator. You may have spotted her in one of the many community gardeners of Manhattan making deliveries, building garden structures, teaching garden workshops, or in Brooklyn planting and weeding as an avid gardener herself at Hollenback Community Garden. In 2000, with the inception of the *Plant & People* Grant program, Emma transitioned into the Grants Coordinator and her dedication to supporting gardeners was spread to all five boroughs. From food vouchers to deejays and lumber to plants, Emma took care of it all. Coordinating grants is no easy task. Anticipating materials to be ordered and bidding out contracts, to juggling deliveries for over 100 grants in 3 months time required diligence and a great deal of patience. We sometimes thought Emma had 8 arms to be able to handle her workload!

GreenThumb wants to give Emma a great big **THANK YOU!** for her years of service and devotion to New York City's community gardeners. GreenThumb wishes Emma the best of luck in all her future endeavors. She will be greatly missed!

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## A LETTER TO THE GARDENERS

As of September 2nd, I will no longer be working here at GreenThumb. I feel honored to have been given the opportunity to learn from and work with so many community leaders for the past four years. The importance of grassroots activism and pro-active community planning and determination are just some of the lessons I will take with me as I go into the next chapter of my life and beyond. Your courage, generosity, hope, and perseverance in a climate that is not always friendly are qualities that I admire in all of you. Although I will no longer be working at GreenThumb, I will continue to be involved with the community garden in my neighborhood, the Hollenback Garden in Brooklyn, where we work together to hold events, grow and share healthy food, and enjoy the beauty of a community space that we have created together. Please come and visit!

-Emma de Caires

## !IMPORTANT GREENTHUMB NEWS!

### PLANT & PEOPLE GRANT UPDATE:

In 2002, more than 125 school and community garden groups were awarded grants through our *Plant & People* Grant (*P&P*) program. The *P&P* Grant program supported scores of garden events including barbecues, children's arts and crafts classes, yoga and tai chi classes, horticulture workshops, and outdoor movie and film showings. Physical site upgrades and improvements including pavilions, benches, and brick pathways were also made possible through the *P&P* Grant. Gardeners from more than 200 garden groups attended our Grant Orientation Workshops in January, March, and June, and submitted thoughtful applications demonstrating their commitment to improving their communities through various garden projects. Reading and hearing about the projects has been a source of both pleasure and inspiration to the GreenThumb staff while administering a grants program that is often more than we could handle.

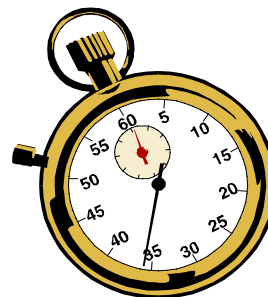
Unfortunately Emma's departure means that we must suspend the grants program for the upcoming period, which runs from October 1-December 31, 2002 with an application deadline of August 31st. We hope to resume the program for the following grant period, January 1 - March 31, 2003. Here's what you need to know about the upcoming quarter:

### NO GRANT ORIENTATION WORKSHOPS IS AUGUST:

GreenThumb will not hold Grant Orientation Workshops in August. A mailing will be sent out in the Fall for the next available grant workshops.

### NO APPLICATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED OR AVAILABLE:

We cannot accept new applications or distribute applications until further notice. Any applications received will be put into a folder until we resume our grants program. We cannot answer any questions concerning applications that come in during the suspension so we advise you to wait until we have resumed the grants program to submit an application.



**NOTIFICATION OF THE NEXT GRANT ORIENTATION WILL BE BY MAIL:**

We will inform all garden contact people by mail of the next round of Grant Orientation Workshops, which we hope will be in November. Your patience is appreciated and we ask that you DO NOT call until you have received notification either in the newsletter or by postcard announcing the Grant Orientation Workshop and the next deadline.

**CURRENT GRANT AWARDS WILL NOT BE AFFECTED:**

If you have already been informed that your group has been awarded a grant, you are not affected by this suspension even if an event is planned for later in the season (i.e. a Halloween or Winter Solstice party).

**SCHOOL-LED GARDEN UPDATES:**

If you are a School-led garden there will be a modified grant program for the Fall of 2002. In addition to the standard materials that GreenThumb provides, such as lumber, tools, and soil, a select list of resources will be offered based on need and availability.

Look for more info in the next issue (September) of the GreenThumb Print. School-led programs will also receive additional information in the mail describing the Education in the Gardens program (EIG) in early September. Please call our Education Director, Tim Rutgers at (212) 788-8080, if you have any questions.

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**E-GREENTHUMB PRINT**

You can now access the GreenThumb Print on our website at [www.greenthumbnyc.org/pubs.html](http://www.greenthumbnyc.org/pubs.html). The GT Print is posted online on the first of the month. So if you are anxious to see the latest edition of the GreenThumb Print and can't wait for the snail mail, simply get on the internet and be the first on your block to read the GT Print. Also available on our website are back issues of the GreenThumb Print. If you are missing a copy for your GT Print collection or to see the color version, check us out! [www.greenthumbnyc.org](http://www.greenthumbnyc.org)

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**GREENTHUMB GARDEN RULES**

Registration 2000 was a long time ago but the rules and regulations in the GreenThumb Gardener's Handbook you received at registration is still current. Please read, retain and abide by the following requirements:

**1. GREENTHUMB SIGNAGE**

The garden must post the new GreenThumb sign, which includes the name of the garden, and the name and telephone number of the GreenThumb contact for that borough.

**2. PUBLIC ACCESS**

The public must be allowed to:

- a. Become members of the garden, or names must be placed on a waiting list
- b. Hold events in the garden
- c. Attend events in the garden
- d. Visit the garden during open hour sessions

**3. OPEN HOURS**

Since the garden is a community resource, the garden must remain open to the public for a minimum of five daylight hours per week between the months of March and November. Public access hours must be posted outside the garden, along with the name and telephone number of the garden's contact person, or the name and telephone number of the GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator for the garden. The garden must be open during the posted hours.

**4. EVENTS AND PROGRAMMING**

The garden group is expected to hold at least one public event per gardening season.

**5. MEMBERSHIP LIST**

The garden group must provide GreenThumb with a list of all garden members, including addresses and phone numbers when available. This list will be used only for mailing purposes and to estimate the number of gardeners citywide.

**6. MAINTENANCE**

The garden group must keep the garden well maintained. This includes:

- a. Maintaining the garden and all plants and structures in a safe and usable condition, including all fences, raised beds, tables, benches, and other ornamental items.
- b. Keeping sidewalks, passageways, and curbs adjacent to and within the garden clean and free from snow, ice, garbage, debris, and other obstructions.
- c. Removing all trash from the garden.

**7. KEYS**

Gardeners must provide GreenThumb with a current key or combination to the garden. If the lock has been changed you must provide GreenThumb with a key as soon as possible. This will enable GreenThumb to deliver supplies more efficiently and assist in case of an emergency.

How they got here:

In 1997, I (Doron) was on Kibbutz Ketura (similar to a commune) in the desert in Israel. The program that I was attending was the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES)--their motto is "Preserving Nature, Building Peace." This is done by offering a wide range of university-level courses on environmental topics while bringing a diverse group of Arabs, Israelis, and foreigners (such as US and Canadian citizens) to the kibbutz as a peace initiative. We all arrived at the program with political, cultural, and religious differences. The power of the program is that despite our differences, we found commonalities through our work on regional environmental issues. Dialogue ensued--lines of communication were opened--and it was there that we found our path to peace.

This internship was in partnership with the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies and the U.S. State Department, as well as the governments of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. GreenThumb would also like to thank the Grail House--and Sharon and Mary Kay in particular--for housing the interns during their four week internship.

I felt honored to work with our three amazing interns--Mohammed, Nava and Kelly. And, as always, I was moved by the people of the city that call themselves "community gardeners"--for this is a title of a very special and empowered people that I have the pleasure of working with each and every day.

Kelly:

*"This month at GreenThumb was such an intense experience on so many levels that it is difficult to fully understand it all so quickly. I feel like it will take several days to remove myself enough from all the thoughts and experiences of actively working, collaborating our thoughts, and living together before I can appreciate the greatness of what this internship offered us on so many different levels.*

*On a personal level, it provided me with the opportunity to explore community gardening, which is something I have been interested in pursuing since graduating college. It was astounding to me to witness a governmental office empowering the community in such a sincere and personal way. All the field coordinators were truly concerned with the gardeners' needs and in tune with the unique situation of each garden. Visiting gardens and speaking to community members and Green Thumb employees really helped to broaden my ideas of the successes and obstacles inherent in community gardens. When I arrived, I wanted to believe that the gardens were peaceful oases in the city. Seeing some of the conflicts, power struggles, and development threats shattered this idealistic image, but convinced me more entirely of the value of the gardens. There is so much life in these spaces and the moments of conflict only make the moments of cooperation and community more valuable.*



The trio defies cultural, religious and political differences to join hands and work together at community gardens in the South Bronx.

*Another thing that struck me when visiting and working in the gardens was the welcome and acceptance we received in each one. Despite the fact that we had never met any of the gardeners before, they did not feel like strangers and did not treat us like strangers either. I felt that there was a sense of familiarity between us and the gardeners that sprang from a mutual love and respect for the land, and from the incredible community work done in each garden. There seemed to be a shared joy and friendly nature inherent in most of the gardeners, particularly when there was dirt under their nails and the smell of green on their skin. Nava, Mohammed and I were a trio that I'm sure was alien to many of the gardeners, but we were never treated that way. Differences seemed hazy in the gardens and everyone was simply another person who could share many wisdoms, experiences and opinions.*

*Working together on the organization and construction of the rainwater collection systems was an intense experience. This work manifested our differences in culture and personality rather strongly. There were moments of frustration when words were understood differently by each of us. There were disparities in our concepts of time and our understandings of how it was best to interact with gardeners or even to construct gutter systems and link barrels for water storage. Although these moments made our work sometimes difficult, in the end, they were strangely valuable. They forced us to grapple with the struggle of*

*separating cultural stereotypes from the realities of cultural influences. We also had to attempt to identify where culture ended and personality began and find ways to cooperate and live together despite these differences. When I consider the experience as a whole, the moments of frustration with each other, while inside plastic barrel saunas with gutter sealant in our hair or lugging pounds and pounds of tools and hardware onto buses, seems to fade to the background. The amazing accomplishments and intriguing conversations we had tend to dominate. One of my most content moments during the internship was riding an escalator to a subway platform after the summer solstice garden party. Nava licked a lollipop and had the fruits of summer painted across her cheekbone. Mohammed held a sunflower. I cradled a giant watermelon in my arms. At that moment I was very aware of the fact that anyone who saw us would recognize us as a slightly eccentric group, unified by the gifts of the garden, rather than as three very different individuals who are separated by culture, religion and politics."*

Nava:

*“Even though, I haven't gone out of New York City during this month, I feel like I have traveled all over the world. The salsa music, the Puerto Rican flag, the casita in "Jardin de la Familia," and the relaxed atmosphere confused me sometimes (given that we were in this fast-paced city) and I had to remind myself where I am. But I lost my orientation completely, after tasting the amazing rice and beans in "El Batey Borincano." When Margaret in the "Sunset Garden" was talking so much about Collard-greens, I felt like I was on a farm in North Carolina, and was asking myself what these vegetables are anyway (I have never heard of them before). I found out that the gardens could be a great place to meet other cultures and learn about them. It was an opportunity for me to work with Kelly and Mohammed, who as a Palestinian from Gaza, given the situation in our region, we cannot even meet normally, although our homes are only about 2 hours drive from each other.*

*Water is a big environmental and political issue in the place I live -- the Middle East. Generally, we don't have much rain, and in the summer we don't have any rain at all. Here in New York, when you plan an outdoor event you add the line "rain or shine"-in my part of Israel we don't have this expression, "rain or shine," it just shines. Water is a big problem in the Middle East, especially now, when the demand for water each year exceeds its possible supply. It got to the point where we started desalinating seawater! (An expensive and energy wasteful process of removing the salt from the water). So, in a way it felt like home when I heard that N.Y.C is now in a drought, and there was nothing more natural for me than to work on rainwater collection systems, and on education for water conservation. Less natural for me was to learn all the strange names of the things we needed to build the system such as: flange, down spout and goop. (If you want to know what these things are and how to build a rainwater collection system, ask for the manual at GreenThumb). I learned some other things as well, such as how to use a screwdriver (thank you, Dimas) and another way to collect water--just stand outside in a typical New York July day, and collect the water running off your body!”*

Mohammed:

*“During this internship, me and my Israeli partner, Nava, talked about doing a joint project which was about making community gardens in Palestine and Israel. People that we spoke to thought that there must be more important projects in Gaza or Israel to do other than to build a garden during this tough time. But we felt that this project could really lead to a real peace process. Through this project, people would be able to have conversations, get to learn about each other and know what is really going on. The garden would be a place where people could come and be equals. In community gardens, there are no borders between people, because everybody is sharing the same air, the same sky, and the same green areas. Community gardens are the only place that make people more open minded and allow us to accept each other to live in peace. When there is peace between citizens, there will be peace between governments. This is why this would be a path to peace--a direct way to getting back to the peace process.*

*I say that because community gardens play a very good role in our lives, we must keep these gardens and make new gardens in order that everybody can go and share ideas with other people in a very nice, green, peaceful place-- here in NYC, in the Middle East, and all over the world.”*



Mohammed and Kelly carefully selecting the proper materials for their project.



Nava, Mohammed and Kelly are all smiles upon completion of a catchment system at Sunset Gardens (or like a farm in North Carolina that Nava thought she was in).



Another catchment system completed by the collaborative work of Kelly, Nava, Mohammed and the gardeners of El Jardin de la Familia.



The interns take a break from collecting water to playing in the water. Canoeing together on the Hudson with Floating the Apple. Row! Row! Row!

# Water Conservation Guide

New York City is surrounded by water . . .

## **But**

The water we get in our taps is supplied from a limited source - reservoirs that collect the water from rain and snow falling in an area north of New York City. Since our water sources are limited, we should consider some simple conservation methods to ensure there is enough water for all uses, especially in the hot, dry summer. Here are some ideas about:



## **How to conserve water in your garden**

### **Use free water!**

Collect rainwater from the roof of a casita, garden shed or an adjacent building, or just put open barrels in your garden. Don't forget to cover them with a mesh to prevent mosquitoes. 1000 square feet of roof will collect 625 gallons of water if an inch of rain falls.

### **Use water saving irrigation:**

- Use a watering can, a bucket or any other hand-held container instead of a hose to water each plant individually.
- If you use a hose, equip it with a nozzle tip that can be closed easily or automatically when not in use.
- Use drip irrigation or sprinklers.
- Water from the root. Bury a piece of hose or a plastic milk jug (with holes poked in the bottom) in the bed's soil, with its bottom tip reaching the depth of the roots. Irrigate through the jug or hose opening.



### **Water cool!**

Water in the cool hours, before 9 am or after 7 pm, when the evaporation rate is low. Morning watering is best to prevent the growth of fungus on wet leaves during the night.

### **Reuse water from the sink if you can.**

### **Keep your soil fertile.**

Add compost to help it retain water longer.

### **Use Mulch.**

It reduces evaporation from the soil, and discourages weed growth. Put 2-3 inches of mulch: chopped leaves, straw, compost or paper over the soil surface.

### **Know how much water your plants need.**

You can plant them together according to their water need. Plants with deep roots are slow growing and need less water than fast growing, shallow rooted plants.

### **Plant in pots when it's possible.**

### **Keep growth rate slow and even.**

Don't over water and over fertilize in the beginning.

### **Choose drought tolerate plants.**

### **Choose the right timing.**

Plant crops in the most suitable season so they will not be reliant on extra water applications.



## DEP Opens Hydrants!

Due to the current drought crisis, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) temporarily suspended hydrant permits to community gardens. That policy has changed. GreenThumb gardens may now apply for hydrant permits if there is no other possible water source (neighbors, local churches, etc.). Gardens must continue to follow all DEP drought regulations regarding water usage (see June issue of GT Print). Instructions for obtaining a DEP permit will be sent to all garden contacts in early August. Look in your mail for more information.

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## Environmental Education Grants

Deadline: September 30, 2002

PG&E National Energy Group is accepting applications for its annual Environmental Education Grant Program. Grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000 will be awarded for innovative programs that encourage and support educating young people about the environment. Those eligible to apply for grants include elementary, middle and high schools and non-profit organizations that are engaged in educational projects related to earth science, conservation and the environment. Teacher training programs with hands-on student activities that focus on earth science and environmental education projects also qualify. This grant program will not fund capital improvements, construction or renovation projects, one-day events or political advocacy. The completed application should include a copy of IRS Letter of Determination indicating 501c(3) tax exempt status, profile of coordinator or director responsible for the proposed program and a four-page program narrative.

To learn more about the grant, including further details about eligibility, funding, grant restrictions, deadline, judging criteria and notification of grant winners, go to the PG&E website:

[www.neg.pge.com/grantProgram.html](http://www.neg.pge.com/grantProgram.html)

To request an application, email [grants@neg.pge.com](mailto:grants@neg.pge.com) or write to:

PG&E National Energy Group  
Environmental Education Grant Program  
7600 Wisconsin Avenue  
Bethesda, MD 20814  
Attn: Amy McWethy

**Remember! The deadline is September 30, 2002.**

## Harvest Festival Coming Soon. . .

Harvest time already?! It seems that summer only just arrived but soon, Autumn will be upon us and so will GreenThumb's Annual Harvest Festival. Let's see the fruits of your labor. Literally! Come on down and bring your best-looking and best-tasting fruits and vegetables that you so lovingly labored over through the summer. You might recall waking up first thing in the morning to see if those dreaded slugs ate more of your tomatoes, or rushing home to water the beans and lettuce that might have withered too much under the long hot summer sun or to guide your melon up along the trellis you designed especially for it. You weed for an hour every night and are so content in the garden until you start hearing complaints from spouses and children that you spend more time with the garden than with them! But we know we love being in the garden and that planting, mulching, watering and even weeding is so rewarding. GreenThumb wants to reward you for your love and devotion to your garden and the fruits of your labor. Enter your prize-winning fruits and vegetables in the Harvest Festival and you can show your spouse and children how all the time you spent in the garden has paid off with your collection of first prize awards!

The Harvest Festival will be held Saturday, September 14, 1PM - 5 PM. The fruit and vegetable judging will be held at the Cherry Esplanade of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden (BBG), while the festivities will be at **Mount Prospect Park**, directly adjacent to BBG on the Eastern Parkway side. Please look in your mail for more information about GreenThumb's Harvest Fair 2002.

### GreenThumb

God may keep these gardens  
Rows and water fountains  
Everything seems right  
Even if you looked left or right  
Nothing can stop greening this state  
Take a risk and don't hesitate  
Here everything looks wonderful  
Unlike the water system which is awful  
Many problems that you might face  
But with GreenThumb problems have no space

*-Mohammed, GreenThumb Intern*