



The Green Thumb Print

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

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

6/15 Garden Shares Compost Wisdom

Sheila McDevitt and Maureen O'Brien of 6/15 Community Garden are master composters. They are also skilled educators in residential waste reduction.

The composting duo started a composting site at 6/15 in 1994. The pair sought to include all community members in their composting project. Sheila and Maureen's success in establishing a grassroots community composting project earned them a grant to spread the gospel of composting as a means of waste reduction.

Sheila and Maureen hope to share their compost wisdom with fellow community gardeners through the Waste Prevention Community Coordinator Program (WPCCP) managed by Inform, Inc., a national environmental research organization based in New York City. The grant, made possible by funding from the City Council through the Department of Sanitation, is part of the Waste-Free Program of Inform, Inc.

As gardeners, Sheila and Maureen understand the importance of compost for the garden. As individuals, they also understand the incredible amount of waste that is generated in New York households. According to the Inform, Inc. website, New Yorkers generate 381 tons of yard waste and 1,430 tons of food scraps per day that can be recycled into compost and reduce the wastestream. To encourage others to compost and help reduce the waste stream, 6/15 started a composting membership that, "keeps people active in composting without being full garden members," explains Sheila. Of 6/15's 132 garden members, 20 are exclusively compost contributors. They also established relationships with neighborhood businesses that allowed them to pick up compostable materials such as horse manure from Kensington stables, woodchips from a local woodworking shop, or grounds from local coffeshops.

In December, Inform, Inc. provided \$630,000 in grants to 8 community-based groups with programs that "educate the public about waste prevention and establish residential waste prevention and reuse projects in New York City neighborhoods."

Last fall, when 6/15 learned that leaves wouldn't be collected, Sheila and Maureen mobilized and started a leaf drop-off. In the span of 3 weekends, the group managed to "divert 1.2 tons of leaves from the landfill," raves Maureen.

The composting duo has conducted many composting workshops at 6/15 including a "Pots and Plants" workshop where neighbors are invited to bring houseplants to repot in the garden and learn about composting. They have also held many kids composting workshops.

The grant will enable Sheila and Maureen to share their compost wisdom through outreach and education. They plan on helping other gardens set up compost sites and compost memberships, and to teach other gardeners how to conduct their own compost workshops. Sheila knows that, "community members can take a leading role in educating the public on compost." Maureen agrees that, "community gardens can serve as valuable resources to the community."

As a certified master composter trained by Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Maureen, "wants to educate fellow community gardeners on how to establish sustainable compost sites" in their gardens. Sheila hopes the compost sites, "can live in perpetuity," through their education and outreach.

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Kids play an active role at 6/15's successful composting site.

6/15 Green



Amanda W. of 6/15 Community Garden in Brooklyn happily feeds her bed with compost.

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As part of the grant, Sheila and Maureen also hope to establish "Waste-Prevention and Re-use Fact Sheets". Through work with block associations, they hope to provide a "knowledge share" of take-backs, swap shops, household hazardous waste collections, and other waste prevention activities that will support a sustainable waste prevention program.

Maureen and Sheila's work could pave the way for future programs. According to Inform, Inc., "the activities are being funded for one year and will serve as pilot projects that could be replicated in other neighborhoods if proven effective in reducing the residential waste stream."

Other grant recipients include Astoria Residents Restoring Our World (Queens), The Staten Island Botanical Garden (Staten Island), The Brooklyn Botanic Garden, St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation (Brooklyn), Lower East Side Ecology Center (Manhattan), and Sustainable South Bronx and Per Scholas (Bronx).

Maureen and Sheila are eager to share their compost wisdom and waste prevention tips and will be conducting workshops at the 19th Annual GreenThumb GrowTogether. If you would like to learn more about composting or increasing compost awareness in your neighborhood, then please attend dynamic duo's composting workshops. Vive la compost!

19th Annual GreenThumb GrowTogether

Saturday, March 22, 2003

10 AM - 4 PM

Hostos Community College
145th Street and Grand Concourse

Ingenuity in Urban Gardens

"Usually, we don't have benches in gardens because drunks and homeless come in to sleep and leave needles and stuff on the bench," laments Sebert Harper of Drew Gardens in the South Bronx.

Sebert and his fellow gardeners were unable to sit and enjoy the green space they helped to create and maintain. Frustrated, but determined, Sebert brainstormed on possible solutions.

He made some sketches and came up with a plan for a collapsible bench. The brilliance of the plan is its simplicity. There is not much construction involved. Sebert was able to buy a standard bench, did some calculations, brought it to a welder and voila, came up with a patented bench suitable for his garden.

When not in use, the bench can be folded up and locked to prevent unwanted use of the benches including drug activity, or accumulation of bird droppings and snow. The bench's safety feature prevents kids from getting injured as the dual bolt system is used to secure the bench in position when it is in use and keep the bench locked when the seat is raised. Sebert is happy to be able to sit back and enjoy the fruits of his labor.

Learn more about Sebert and his ingenious ideas at the 19th Annual GreenThumb GrowTogether where he will be hosting a kids workshop.



The collapsible bench has a dual bolt system that secures the bench in place when in use (above) and when raised to deter unwanted uses (below).



Got Water?

Barely any rain fell last spring and early summer. The soil was dry enough for a New York "dust bowl", and we were ill prepared.

Gardeners nervously monitored reservoir levels. Hydrant permits were suspended and DEP enforced restricted watering times. In the midst of a drought, how can community gardeners water their gardens?

The Water Resources Group (WRG) emerged out of the need for a sustainable water program for gardeners. Susan Fields, GreenThumb's Manhattan Outreach Coordinator, spearheaded WRG along with Lars Chellberg and Lenny Librizzi of the Council on the Environment of NYC, to help meet gardeners' immediate needs for water and establish longer-term sustainable water practices. According to Susan, "When we realized DEP would be restricting hydrant access we knew we had to do something to help gardeners now and in future droughts." Together with staff from Metro Hort and Green Guerillas, the WRG organized "Water Conservation and Rainwater Harvesting Workshops" in Brooklyn, Manhattan and the Bronx. They taught community gardeners garden survival skills - how to keep your garden moist with minimal water using mulch, compost and early/late day watering times. The workshops also explained how the DEP drought restrictions applied to community gardens.

GreenThumb and the Council also built rainwater collection systems in 4 community gardens in Brooklyn, Manhattan and the Bronx. In addition, GreenThumb's three amazing summer interns (featured in the August 2002 GreenThumb Print), Nava, Mohammed and Kelly built 3 more collection systems in the Bronx. Rainwater collection is an ancient practice that continues around the world today. Last summer, Susan visited community gardens in Seattle and realized it was an "untapped" resource in NYC.

The rainwater collection system allows for a reserve water source on site, which the garden can easily access. According to Lars, "you don't have to be dependent on hydrant water, you just have to turn on the valve," of the rainwater collection system.



Rainwater Collection System at 1100 Bergen Street Community Garden in Brooklyn.

The WRG have expanded to a larger membership after a successful first summer. Staff from Green Guerillas, Trust for Public Land, and Cornell Cooperative Extension have joined with the GreenThumb and Council members. The group warmly welcomes new members from community gardens, greening organizations or other interested folks. The WRG hopes to build more rainwater systems this summer. If there is a drought this summer, these gardens will be prepared; if there is no drought, gardeners will have a pleasant time watering from their on-site water source.

The Water Resource Group will be offering several workshops at the 19th Annual GreenThumb GrowTogether. They will include: [Catching Rainwater For Use In Your Garden](#), [How to Conserve Water in Your Garden and Make Your Life Easier](#), and [Come Hear About the New Water Resources Group](#). If you are interested in building a rainwater collection system, promoting sustainable planting and watering techniques or contributing to the Water Resources Group please come to one of these workshops!

Rats to Roses

Tamra Raven is a community gardener at Sheridan Square Garden. Everyday, people stop by to thank the gardeners for the beauty it brought to the community.

Inspired by the positive feedback and the threat community gardens faced from development during the past few years, Tamra wanted to document the treasure of these community gardens.

Rats to Roses is a half-hour documentary that celebrates New York City's community gardens and the dedicated volunteers who keep them flourishing. This film captures the stories of regular New Yorkers brought together by the common love of creating beautiful green oases. The half-hour film brings viewers into the vibrant world of these gardens and the people who are fighting to keep them alive.

"The film is a tribute to the gardeners and activists of community gardens," says Tamra.

Rats to Roses won four awards including the Communicator's Award of Distinction and the Showtime's Alternative Media Festivals' first prize.

RATS TO ROSES will be shown at the GrowTogether, Saturday, March 22, 2003 at Hostos Community College. You may also obtain a copy of the film by contacting Tamra at tamrave@yahoo.com or www.tamrave.com