

# DIGGING IN

At Troy Community Gardens  
Madison, WI

## Community Gardening: What's it Worth?

By John Bell

With a passion for gardening and a 26-year membership in the community of Troy Gardens, I've never felt a strong need to measure the experience in dollars and cents. Good food, strong friendships and the pleasure of physical labor in a remarkable setting—these and other rewards have been far greater than the financial costs.

Still, I'm enough the son of a father who came of age on an Iowa farm in the depths of the Great Depression to wonder now and then: how much money would it take to buy a season's worth of what I grow in my two plots at Troy?

A chance to answer that question came last growing season from taking part in the research of Vince Smith, a UW graduate student who did much of his doctoral work while serving on the board of Community Groundworks, known originally as the Friends of Troy Gardens.

Vince's study, "The Socioeconomic Value of Community Food Production: A Landscape Approach," is an extension of his interest in the relationship between people and place. His master's degree from Oregon State University explored the ways that children form their beliefs about the environment; his term on the Community GroundWorks board ended in January, and this fall he will join the faculty of Southern Oregon University in Ashland.

The raw data for his research was collected early last fall from 38 Madison-area urban agriculturalists—home gardeners, those with plots in community gardens and leaders of educational gardens. Throughout the growing season, growers kept records of their costs for inputs (seeds and seedlings, hay, row cover, soil amendments, etc.), varieties and weight of crops grown and the amount of time they spent in gardening. They weighed their yields on scales that Vince provided with funding from Annie's, Inc., makers of organic, kid-friendly foods who donate \$75,000 annually to projects that involve sustainable agriculture.

Vince received 264 grower surveys and held 53 in-depth interviews with growers and other key participants. I was one of those "citizen researchers," meeting Vince at Troy in early summer to learn about his study and in September for an interview about my season of gardening. A few weeks later, he sent me these figures for my individual plots:

- Total weight of produce grown: 460.31 pounds. (*I grow a fair amount of potatoes and squash, both summer and winter, but their weight last year was offset by a poor crop of onions and a meager yield of tomatoes.*)
- Gross value of the crops I grew: \$1,017.05
- Net value (*less cost of inputs*): \$1,002.05

### WORK DAY

**SATURDAY**

**July 16**

**9 AM -12 NOON**

If it is raining on July 16, the work day will be changed to July 17, 9 a.m.

Hnub ua haujlwm pab dawb yog 7/16/11, 9 a.m. txog 12 teev tavs, yog los nag muab pauv rau 7/17/11 9 a.m.

### Día de Trabajo

El Sábado 16 de julio

9 a.m. -12 medio día

Si llegara a llover el 16 de julio, el día de trabajo será cambiado para el día 17 de julio 9 a.m.

My plots also showed a net value of \$2.54 per square foot of garden space and a value of \$31.29 of food produced per hour of labor. However, I began my record-keeping after the growing season had started and did not report my plot rental fees or the cost of seed potatoes and a few packets of seeds. (Against the advice of every knowledgeable gardener, I tend to keep seeds almost indefinitely.) Neither does the net value include the costs of driving to the garden from our home near Tenney Park, and the hourly value doesn't account for the time spent in driving or growing most of my own seedlings. Nevertheless, my hourly rate

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## What's it Worth?

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of compensation came out to be much greater than I'd expected.

Vince's interviews with growers revealed insights on the reasons why we garden and the tremendous increase of interest in gardening among Madison residents and Americans generally.

Throughout much of their history, community gardens have provided a source of grow-your own produce to needy families and a means of increasing food production during times of war. Most community gardens in Madison were developed (and many of them are still supported) by the Community Action Coalition of South-Central Wisconsin,

whose overall mission is the support of low-income residents.

The interviews suggest that today's community gardeners are more motivated by the quality of the food they grow and their pleasure in gardening and consuming what they grow. Asked to rank their reasons for gardening, 90 percent of those interviewed with community plots gave greatest importance to fresh food, followed by enjoyment of the activity by 84 percent, health (71 percent), therapy (67 percent), concern for the environment (64 percent), money saved (32 percent), availability of garden space (26 percent) and food sales as little as 2 percent.

(As a rule, food grown in gardens with a CAC component to their history is

intended for consumption by the families and friends of those who grow it and may not be sold.)

I'm content to have a sense of the economic value of my gardening, and I certainly hope that Vince's research will have important consequences in raising the level of support for urban agriculture. But what I value most about gardening can't be easily reduced to numbers. Healthy, delicious food is an obvious benefit, but my time at Troy is also about a bond with the land and my fellow gardeners, a connection that for all the years continues to thrive.

See notice below about Vince's upcoming Public Lecture: "Growing Your Own: The Socioeconomic Value of Community Food Production."

### PUBLIC LECTURE



## "Growing Your Own: The Socioeconomic Value of Community Food Production"

Presented by **Vincent M. Smith**, Ph.D. Candidate

**Friday, July 8th at 1:00 p.m.**  
**175 Science Hall**  
**550 N. Park Street**

Home gardening, community gardening, school gardening, and other community-based food production initiatives abound in and around Madison. However, the value of these community food production systems for practitioners and for the community as a whole is not yet well understood. What are the motivations and barriers to participation? How much do these gardens produce in terms of pounds, calories, and dollars? Is the food what is of most worth? Community Food Production will be explored in the Madison area with a specific interest in its current socioeconomic value and its future potential.



## GOOD FOOD GARDEN PARTY

**Saturday, September 10**

**Community GroundWorks is 10 years old!** And we're throwing a party for it: the **GOOD FOOD GARDEN PARTY** at Troy Gardens the evening of Saturday, 9.10.11. Purchase a ticket for a catered dinner prepared by some of Madison's best chefs. After dinner, a free celebration on the lawn with music, dancing and lots of fun for everyone! Stay tuned for ticket information later this summer, and save the date - 9.10.11 - for the **GOOD FOOD GARDEN PARTY at Troy Gardens.**

## Gardener Issues - July 15-31?

**Jill Schneider**, Garden Coordinator, and **Kurt Schneider**, Equipment Subcommittee Leader, will be on vacation July 15-31. Questions in their absence should be directed to Jamie Pratt at Community GroundWorks (240-0409 or [jamie@troygardens.org](mailto:jamie@troygardens.org)) or Pahoua Thao (628-4501) for those needing Hmong interpretation.

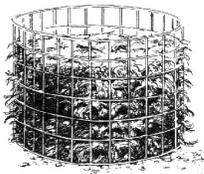
# Summer School for Gardeners

We've gathered together some learning opportunities you might be interested in over the summer months. Each work shop is sponsored by a different group. See below for cost information and how to register.

## Growing Organic Tomatoes Successfully July 13, 2011, 6 - 8 pm Troy Community Farm



This hands-on class is all about tomatoes! The class will be held at Troy Community Farm and the adjacent community gardens. We will focus on growing a successful crop of organic tomatoes. Learn how to prune tomatoes correctly by practicing on the farm crop, see our four favorite types of tomato trellising in action, learn about our favorite varieties for Madison and discover the best organic practices for controlling diseases and pests. Class takes place at Troy Gardens, 502 Troy Drive. Please meet at the striped tent at the front of the land. Presented by Megan Cain and Claire Strader of Madison Farm-Works and Troy Community Farm. Cost for Willy St. Coop Owners is \$15 and \$25 for all others. Please register by stopping at the Willy East Customer Service desk or by calling 251-6776.



## Basics of Composting August 20, 2011, 10:30 am Troy Community Gardens

Joanne Tooley, a Troy Community Gardener and Master Composter, along with Joe Muellenberg, a Youth Nutrition Educator at UW Extension and Master Composter, will be leading this work shop about basic composting techniques. Troy Community Gardeners are encouraged to attend this work shop to learn about ways to compost garden waste within their own plots. The work shop is free and Troy Gardeners will earn volunteer time for attending. This work shop will be held in conjunction with the regularly scheduled Troy Community Gardens work day (9 a.m. to noon). Those wishing to attend the work shop can gather at 10:30 under the striped tent near the yellow shed for the work shop. You do not need to register for the work shop. Hmong interpretation will be provided.

## Food Preservation Workshops Madison Area CSA Coalition

Are you interested in preserving some of the local bounty for the winter season? In these workshops, we will discuss and demonstrate food preparation, techniques, and storage of seasonal fruits, vegetables and herbs. To register for the classes, email Gini at [gini@macsac.org](mailto:gini@macsac.org) or call the Madison Area CSA Coalition (MACSAC) office at 608-226-0300.

### Dehydrating Vegetables, Fruits, & Herbs - \$15

Sunday, July 17, 10:30 - 12pm, Willy St. Co-op East, 1221 Williamson St.

### Water-bath Canning - High Acid Foods - \$25

Sunday, August 21, 4-7pm, Lakeview Lutheran Church, 4001 Mandrake Road

### Pressure Canning - Low Acid Foods - \$25

Sunday, August 28, 4-8pm, Lakeview Lutheran Church, 4001 Mandrake Road



## Top-Rated Natural Methods for Controlling Common Garden Pests

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**Aphid:** Insecticidal soap, attracting beneficials, horticultural oil

**Armyworm:** Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), handpicking, row covers

**Asparagus beetle:** Poultry predation, neem, handpicking

**Blister beetle:** Poultry predation, neem, handpicking

**Cabbage root maggot:** Crop rotation, beneficial nematodes, diatomaceous earth

**Cabbageworm:** Bt, handpicking, row covers

**Carrot rust fly:** Crop rotation, beneficial nematodes, diatomaceous earth

**Colorado potato beetle:** Poultry predation, neem, handpicking

**Corn earworm:** Bt, horticultural oil, beneficial nematodes

**Cucumber beetle:** Poultry predation, neem, handpicking

**Cutworm:** Rigid collars, Bt, diatomaceous earth

**Flea beetle:** Insecticidal soap, garlic-pepper spray, row covers

**Japanese beetle:** Handpicking, row covers, milky spore disease

**Mexican bean beetle:** Poultry predation, neem, handpicking

**Onion root maggot:** Crop rotation, beneficial nematodes, diatomaceous earth

**Slugs:** Handpicking, iron phosphate slug bait, diatomaceous earth

**Snails:** Handpicking, iron phosphate slug bait, diatomaceous earth

**Squash bug:** Handpicking, good garden sanitation, neem

**Squash vine borer:** Growing resistant varieties, crop rotation, beneficial nematodes

**Stink bug:** Handpicking, good garden sanitation, neem

**Tarnished plant bug:** Handpicking, good garden sanitation, neem

**Tomato hornworm:** Bt, handpicking, row covers

**Whitefly:** Insecticidal soap, attracting beneficials, horticultural oil

The above information was excerpted from the recent article **Organic Pest Control: What Works, What Doesn't**, written by Barbara Pleasant in the June/July 2011 issue of MOTHER EARTH NEWS.

The entire article can be read at <http://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/organic-pest-control-zm0z11zsto.aspx>



## Upcoming Events

### Growing Organic Tomatoes Successfully

Wed., Jul. 13, 6 - 8 pm (see details on page 3)

### Community Gardens Work Day

Sat., Jul. 16, 9 am - 12 noon

### MACSAC Food Preservation Workshops (see details on page 3)

Sun., July 17, 10:30 - 12 noon

Sun., Aug. 21, 4 - 7 pm

Sun., Aug. 28, 4 - 8 pm

### Savor the Summer Festival & Hmong/Lao Gardener Cooking Demos

Sat., Aug. 6, 3 - 7 pm (see details on this page)

### Community Gardens Work Day and Composting Work Shop (see details on page 3)

Sat., Aug. 20, 9 am - 12 noon (composting work shop at 10:30 a.m.)

### Gardens Bike Tour (sponsored by Community Action Coalition; details in August *Digging In*)

Sat., Aug. 27, 9 - 1 pm

### Good Food Garden Party at Troy Gardens

Sat., Sept. 10, time TBD (see details on Page 2)

For more info about these events, please call the Community GroundWorks office at 240-0409.

## Savor the Summer Festival & Hmong/Lao Cooking Demos

Saturday, August 6, 3-7 pm  
Troy Gardens

In addition to the usual fun and good food at Savor the Summer this year, we have decided to combine the Hmong/Lao Food Event with Savor the Summer. Hmong and Lao community gardeners will prepare traditional dishes, with the opportunity after each demonstration for people to ask questions about the dishes. And, the best part, you'll get to taste each dish.

We'll also have other volunteers prepare dishes from veggies donated by you the day before the event. If you have any veggies to share for this feast, please leave them under the striped tent on Friday, August 5. If you'd like to help set up or clean up after the event, Troy Community Gardeners can earn Timebank hours or volunteer hours toward their 3 hours/plot volunteer time commitment. Contact Marge Pitts to volunteer ([margepitts@sbcglobal.net](mailto:margepitts@sbcglobal.net) or 770-4344).

Savor the Summer is brought to you by Northside Farmers' Market, Troy Community Farm and our own community gardeners.