

DIGGING IN

At Troy Community Gardens
Madison, WI

Gardeners are Blogging

I know. Some of you are thinking, I barely have time to garden, who has time to blog. Okay, so you're not really agonizing over it, but I hope you can find time to read the postings. Community GroundWorks has had a blog for quite a while now with very little, if any, input from the community gardeners. That has changed starting this season. The call went out to gardeners to write about their experiences at Troy Community Gardens, and the gardeners have answered. A handful have stepped up and will be writing posts and earning volunteer hours for doing so. The first couple posts by Kate Sullivan are now available (<http://www.troygardens.org/who-we-are/blog>). Bookmark this URL and visit it frequently. Not only will there be postings by fellow gardeners, there will be postings by the Community GroundWorks' staff and interns. It's a wonderful way to become familiar with all



Community GroundWorks and Troy Gardens have to offer.

Here's a sample of one of Kate's first postings:

"The moon and stars were brilliant the night two weeks back when my husband Clyde and I hustled out to Troy from our School Rd. home after spacing out garbage and recycling duty for the first time this season! Thanks to good neighbors the bins had been taken to their rightful place for emptying the next day. We marveled at our spot in the world, void of cars and noise outside of our feet shuffling under the stillness of the dark night sky, critters and the gardens. We smiled at each other and said, my aren't we lucky..."

Kate and her husband, Clyde, are second year gardeners at Troy. In addition to Clyde's rototilling help and Kate's blogging, they also volunteer to

WORK DAY

**SATURDAY
June 18
9 AM -12 NOON**

If it is raining on June 18, the work day will be changed to June 19, 9 a.m.

Hnub ua haujlwm pab dawb yog 6/18/11, 9 a.m. txog 12 teev tavs, yog los nag muab pauv rau 6/19/11 9 a.m.

Día de Trabajo

El Sábado 18 de junio
9 a.m. -12 medio día
Si llegara a llover el 18 de junio, el día de trabajo será cambiado para el día 19 de junio 9 a.m.

take the green and brown bins out to the street for emptying each Thursday evening!



Volunteer Work Day Leaders Needed

By Jill Schneider

Have you worked with volunteers in the past? Are you a natural leader or looking to gain some leadership skills in a low-stress environment? Perhaps you would like to be a volunteer work day leader for Troy Community Gardens.

Each third Saturday morning of the month (Apr.-Sept., plus Closing Day in Oct.), the community gardens has an

organized work day for the gardeners to earn their three hours of required volunteer time per plot per season. Many of you have attended these work days and are familiar with the types of tasks volunteers tackle. We mow, weed whip, pull weeds, paint picnic tables, yank out invasives, repair hoses, pick up trash and generally maintain the gardens.

The current work day leader (me) could use a break, so I am inviting gar-

deners to attend the June work day to see how things work. I hopefully will convince a few gardeners to try their hand at running a work day and earning volunteer time for doing so.

It helps to have two or three leaders at each work day, so one person can stay centrally located near the shed and assign tasks to groups of volunteers, and the other leader(s) can take groups of

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Work Day Leaders

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volunteers to each project and explain what needs to be done. Often times these jobs are self-explanatory, but occasionally we have tasks that need a little leadership to get things going. In addition, there are a few gardeners who speak both Hmong and English and can be re-

cruited to help facilitate communication with the Hmong-speaking gardeners at each work day.

Leading work days has some hidden advantages too. You'll get to know your fellow gardeners for starters. And, you'll become familiar with other areas of the Troy Gardens property as volunteer tasks often take place in the Natural Areas (e.g., woodland, herb garden), the Kids'

Garden, around the CSA farm, and at the Mendota Apple Orchard (on the property of Mendota Mental Health Institute).

If you are interested in learning what it takes to lead a work day, please join me at the June 18 work day. Things get started at 9 a.m., but I'll be there about 8:30 if you'd like to get a brief orientation about that day's tasks.

Learn about Traditional Hmong and Lao Dishes at New Event

We are in the beginning stages of planning a unique event for the community gardeners. At the All Gardener meeting last fall, we asked the Hmong and Lao gardeners in attendance whether they would be interested in preparing traditional Hmong and Lao dishes while fellow gardeners watched, asked questions and then joined them to sample the dishes. In return, they would earn volunteer time for preparing the dishes and planning and hosting the event.

There was significant interest among the gardeners, particularly the non-Hmong/Lao gardeners who were eager to learn about the Hmong and Lao food culture and taste what are sure to be delicious dishes. Some of us have been lucky enough to taste a wonderful soup and other dishes at past Spring Registration events, courtesy of Mao Lor and others.

If you are interested in helping to plan for this event or if you are a Hmong or Lao gardener who would like to participate in the planning and preparation of the dishes, please contact Jill Schneider (608-241-1821 or schneiderjill@charter.net). We anticipate having a kick-off meeting in July to choose a date for the event and to start working out the logistics.

Community GroundWorks recently received a grant from Evjue Foundation in support of the community gardens. The grant application included a description of our plans for this event. Receiving the grant will help make this event a reality. Everyone we've mentioned it to has been excited about the idea; perhaps it will become an annual happening.



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.**

The miracle of row cover . . . and good timing

The word is spreading. If you start a second crop of spinach late in the season, covering it with a layer or two, or three or four, of row cover prior to putting your garden to bed for the winter may pay off in the spring!

One of our gardeners pushed the envelope even further last year by just planting the seeds right before the cold weather, and this spring he was rewarded with a large, healthy bed of spinach – in late April!



Shortly after first harvest in May!

Keep this in mind when you are out planting your fall garlic or tidying up your beds for the winter. Take those leftover spinach seeds, sow them into one of your beds, cover with a thick layer of row cover and hope for a deep layer of snow. Perhaps in April you'll be rewarded for your late season efforts.

Companion Planting With Vegetables and Flowers

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Each spring, I grow legions of onions and shallots from seed, and my biggest challenge is keeping them weeded. Last year, I planted pinches of arugula between the short rows of shallots, and the leafy, fast-growing arugula smothered any weeds and showed remarkably little damage from flea beetles, which often plague it. The arugula was ready to harvest just when the shallots needed room to grow. In a eureka moment, I realized I had discovered a vegetable companion-planting partnership I could use year after year to make my garden healthier and more productive.

The idea of “companion planting” has been around for thousands of years, during which time it has become so besmirched with bad science and metaphysics that many gardeners aren’t sure what it means. The current definition goes something like this: Companion planting is the establishment of two or more species in close proximity so that some cultural benefit, such as pest control or increased yield, may be achieved. Historically, North American and European gardeners have based many of their attempts with companion planting on widely published charts, which were mostly derived from funky chemistry experiments using plant extracts in the 1930s. But it turns out many of the plant partnerships listed in these “traditional” companion-planting charts don’t actually work well. Reaping the benefits of companion planting is possible, though, as long as you look to time-tested crop combinations. (See our chart of [Proven Companion Planting Combos for spring, summer and fall.](#))

Companion Crop Combinations

In North America, Native American tribes from the Northeast to the Southwest developed highly specialized intercropping techniques to grow the “three sisters” — corn, pole beans and squash. (There is a fourth sister, sunflower, but she didn’t make it into the early stories.) Three sisters gardens vary in shape, size and planting style (raised mounds in the East and North, recessed waffle beds in the Southwest). The three (or four) sis-

ters technique works because the crops cooperate rather than compete with each other for light and root space. The corn supports the bean vines, the squash shades out weeds, and the roots of the different plants get along nicely below ground.

But what about all of the other vegetables you want to grow? An experienced gardener from China wouldn’t be surprised by my success with onions and arugula, because intercropping of vegetables is the traditional way to garden in China’s most fertile regions. Plant associations that work well are shared among neighbors, as everyone has learned that intercropping is more efficient, reduces weed and pest pressure, and lowers the risk of crop failure. Chinese intercropping practices use a broad range of crops, which makes them easy to replicate in a diversified organic garden.

Agricultural researchers have noted that the paired plants in Chinese intercropping practices usually differ in height, maturation period and rooting habit. In addition, many gardeners in China grow the following intercropped vegetables back-to-back during the course of the growing season:

- Onions with leafy vegetables, followed by green beans and Chinese cabbage or spinach
- Potatoes with leafy vegetables, followed by green beans and Chinese cabbage or spinach
- Spring kale with radishes, followed by celery and tomatoes
- Spring spinach, followed by lima beans and tomatoes
- Double rows of corn alternated with single rows of peppers
- A double row of garlic with spinach down the center
- Strawberries with watermelon

Using Plants to Manage Pests and Weeds

Some gardeners use companion planting to deter all manner of garden pests, such as planting hedges of marigolds to deter rabbits or using rattail radishes to confuse squash vine borers. In our online

[Pest Control Survey](#), the gardeners who reported the most success with companion planting to discourage pests used a single technique: “growing tons of flowers,” with borage, calendula, dill, sweet alyssum, and herbs such as basil, garlic chives and oregano named most frequently.

Several scientific studies have confirmed these and other flowering plants help reduce pest problems, particularly if your garden is troubled by early-season aphids or other small sucking insects, which are primary food sources for hoverfly larvae. Hoverflies are active, early-season aphid predators (before aphid-eating ladybeetles take over later in the season). Scientists have found that hovering in midair requires so much energy that hoverflies tend to stick close to nectar sources, so if you lure them in with the right plants, they’re likely to stay all summer. Cilantro (coriander) and fennel flowers are strong hoverfly attractants, as are Greek oregano, sweet alyssum, and many other herbs and flowers.

You can also use companion planting to draw the attention of birds, which eat a wide variety of garden insects. In a recent study conducted at four organic farms in Florida, sunflowers interplanted with collard greens, kale, summer squash, tomatoes and five other vegetable crops doubled the number of insect-eating birds that visited the garden plots. The birds used the sunflowers as hunting perches, then hopped down to feed on cabbageworms, grasshoppers and other small insects, including flea beetles. Could there be an easier, more beautiful way to reduce pest problems before they start?

Finally, one of the finest benefits of finding plant associations that work well for your garden is using them to keep weeds under control. Slower-growing, upright plants (such as onions and parsnips) can be nursed along with companion crops of baby greens, which are much more rewarding to pull than weeds. In some situations, however, even weeds may become desirable companion plants. Several MOTHER

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Companion Planting

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EARTH NEWS readers have reported using redroot pigweed as a trap crop for cucumber beetles and Mexican bean beetles. In some locations, wild mustards can work as trap crops for flea beetles in spring.

Companion planting for pest control purposes deserves close scrutiny and the willingness to trust your own experience over what you read in books. Planting basil with tomatoes sounds good, but the pairing does little to deter tomato hornworms (its intended purpose), and the basil eventually suffers from light deprivation. The combination also fails below ground, where the two plants grow on the same schedule and therefore take up nutrients at the same time. Radishes and cilantro may be wiser choices as pals for your tomatoes, because each make a quick crop before the tomatoes need more space, and a few radish or cilantro plants

can be left behind to attract beneficial insects as they flower.

Measuring Success

Agricultural researchers use a simple formula called the land equivalent ratio (LER) to measure the overall success of intercropped plantings. The LER balances space and production costs with yields. For example, cauliflower is a slow-growing crop that needs a lot of space, so it has an LER of 1. But if you grow lettuce between cauliflower plants (as researchers did in a recent study in Pakistan), the LER per square foot will rise significantly. Space planted with a dominant crop (broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes) and a companion crop (lettuce, radicchio or sorrel) will almost always have a higher LER than space with a crop grown by itself.

Some gardeners grow companion plants in adjacent rows, and sweet corn is a champ in this role because of its ability to provide filtered shade to neighboring

plants. In China, crowder peas, green beans and peppers are all popular crops to sandwich between rows of corn. In many hot climates, corn grown along the south side of potatoes provides shade in hot weather, which helps keep the soil cool and moist while the potatoes are making their crop.

Working with companion plants requires experimenting in your own garden, using the crops your family likes best, and allowing for an increase in leafy greens because they are such versatile companion plants. (A couple of chickens or rabbits will gladly feast on whatever your family can't use.) Gardeners sometimes say the plants in good intercropping associations "just seem happy" — a worthy goal for any organic gardener.

Longtime MOTHER EARTH NEWS contributing editor [Barbara Pleasant](#) provides authoritative reporting on topics essential to helping you grow your own food as sustainably as possible.



Upcoming Events

Community Gardens Work Day

Sat., Jun. 18, 9 am - 12 noon

Community Gardens Work Day

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

Savor the Summer Festival

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

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.

Plant Sale 2011 Nets Over \$750

Wow! Once again the Plant Sale Subcommittee comes through with another very successful plant sale to benefit Troy Community Gardens. The sale, held May 22 in front of Pierce's Northside Market, netted \$752! That's a lot of plants!

Thanks to all the volunteers and especially Marge Pitts for taking the lead and for turning her porch and spacious deck into a full-blown nursery in the weeks leading up to the sale. It's going to be a long couple of months waiting for those first heirloom tomatoes to ripen, but it'll be worth it.



Savor the Summer Festival

Saturday, August 6, 3-7 pm
Troy Gardens

Save the date for our annual Free Community Garden Feast. In cooperation with the Northside Farmers' Market, Troy Community Farm and our own community gardeners, we will prepare a free buffet supper at Troy Gardens. If you have any veggies to share for this feast, please leave them under the tent on Friday, Aug. 5, and we'll make tasty dishes from whatever we get. Free ice cream cones, too, while they last!



Music will be provided by the Boys & Girls Club Black Star Drumline. This is a great family fun event and everyone is welcome whether you are a Troy gardener or not, so please plan to come, eat and Savor the Summer at Troy Gardens.