

Transcript Q. Community Garden

So that's the compost and this is what it looks like after it's been sifted. You know, we get all kinds of food scraps that are pretty gross.

Yeah. This is like the clean, the clean stuff?,

Yay this is good stuff. Really good stuff.

Do you have a garden yourself?.

I have my backyard. Yeah. Right. Yeah. I do a little bit.

And how do you say you could be part of this garden?

How do we do what?

How do, how are you involved in it? Or you said you could be either....

I was involved since 2012 when it started. I, um, I do little, I built the plantes is I built the shed, the greenhouse and the table. We had another table, but it was kind of small and it needed some repair and it didn't really fit in the tables over there. It was donated by one of my neighbors. It was a glass top, the glasses there. Green thumb gave us the table and that's a tent in that box. We don't know just what to do with it yet, but, um, Yeah. And then we could do a, we have a permit to open a hydrant for water, but we do use rainwater mostly. And this share at the top, we collect rain water, and it goes in here. And as a primary source of water, we just had to repair this, you know . I take that off in the winter because the water settles in here and it went to the freezers and it'll crack the plastic PVC. And that's just what happened. I took it off and somebody must have put it on for some reason. I don't know why. And it cracked. And last week I just repaired. It had a difficult time getting the parts, believe it or not.

Yeah, it seems like...

I ordered the parts from home Depot. They said it was ready. I went and picked it up. And then when I opened the bag. There was one of these missing and it was like \$5 or something. They said we only had one I'm like, oh, so I went to three different plumbing, supply places to get another one. One place they charged me. I think it was \$16. And on my way home, I said, I can't do. I got, I went back and returned, get my money back and then found another place that had it for \$10. But. Anyway, it's full now,

How much water do you think? Like...

I think, I think it's like 500 gallons in there.

And do your thing, you use it like in a month or like how?

Um, well, you know, thank God. It rains quite often. It usually like we fill it like the beginning of the season. Like now it is full. I filled it from the fire hydrate. And then, um, maybe toward the end of the summer, we may have to fill it again.

Oh, okay.

You know, it's not, it's not bad.

That's pretty good.

And you said this was, uh, this was where you put, start putting the compost?

See people bring compost in buckets. Oh yeah, that's cool. And sometimes we have. Yeah, we have food scraps. Some of the food scraps we give to the chickens. They like, oh,

And what was the history of this? Or you said you were a part of starting it in 2012 . And why did you get involved or like what's?

Well, I mean, there were few of us on the block that liked to garden that liked to grow our own vegetables and stuff. And this was like an empty lot. It was an eyesore, you know, And, um, you know, we clean up the block. And a lot of the neighbors, like the girl you met earlier, um, she lives in the neighborhood, but she lives in a apartment building and, you know, people don't have outdoor space, you know, and a lot of folks, you know, join just for that reason so they can come sit.

Um, sometimes we have barbecues, there's a grill, a donated grill. We bet it's right there. Anyway. Um, we'll have social events. We have be done early because we don't have any electricity. We have, uh, we bought stuff for solar energy, but no one knows how to hook it up.

And why would you, why do you get money from, to buy from?

Grants. If you look on the fence you'll see, we've have been awarded citizens committee. I don't know if you're familiar with citizens committee, you can write a grant and if it's accepted, they give you like a thousand dollars or whatever. So that's how we find little pet projects. You know, we've been wanting electricity for awhile. It's difficult in a winter to feed the chick. Well, not to feed the chickens, the chickens need water, but the water freezes.. And we've tried different methods with not to freeze. Uh, I remember somebody said we'll put tennis ball in the water and the wind will blow the tennis ball around and the water won't freeze. Didn't work. That didn't work. Um, so there was another something I saw. There's a, there's like a heat fan you can purchase. It's like under a hundred dollars. There's a grill. We found that the chickens do they survive during the winter. We put that plastic up to keep the wind, but it's going to come down.

They're not cold?

No, they are fine . They, they, they do all right, but like, you know, we'd have to clean, um, need to clean that coop out. And that's one of the projects or the first projects we'll do when

the weather really breaks. Um, there's a few other things we need to clean up the plots. We need to move that, those wood chips in the front and move them because when the truck came, they just dumped the wood chips on the sidewalk and inside the gate. So it was like, oh, that was a job to move the wood chips, them out. He couldn't use the, we did it with buckets. And wheel barrels, but the wheel barrels had a hard time maneuvering and they would get stuck stuck in chips.

Yeah. I noticed I found your guys' Facebook page and I noticed that as a photo is huge pile of wood chips

yeah. Yeah. We put the blue top on the sidewalk. This is the second time we had to do that. Third time. Cause twice we have wood chips and once we had soil and it was like, we had to get everybody. It was a mass project about

how are you organized? Like you said we, like who are we?

Um, there's a few members that then, you know, been with the garden from the very start, think you might've met. Lillian talked a little bit in summers. She's my next door neighbor. And between the two of us, we pretty much. I guess we could say the longest members, we have a lot of young folks that move into the neighborhood. They get involved and then they move, you know, um, we've had this year is not bad, but previous years we've had large turnovers and members, but there's always a waiting list of people who come into the neighborhood and want to get involved. So, you know, we always get a good, pretty good decent supply.

What does it do to the gardeners? Like turnovers? Like what does it do? Like it's a little interruption, but, um,

we get over, we get bias, you know, somebody picks up the slack, you gotta do what you gotta do. And you said you could be either a gardener, uh, some, uh, the, uh, gardener, which would entitle you to, uh, uh, it's about a half of a flat, uh, But even the people that aren't members there's communal plots like the big plot in front, I mean, anybody can, you know, put stuff in there and reap the rewards. And there's small little plants is on the side. These little bit tangled ones. Those are a communal plants. If anybody wants to plant something, as a member you can. We had a over here, if we had a guy, well, there was two of them. They made their own beer, so they were growing hops. The beer wasn't that good. But it was, it was fun to watch the process. Well, Um, one moved back to Massachusetts and the other move to Jersey

and who lives in this neighborhood? Actually. Now you've been here since you said, when?

I moved here in 1980 who lives in this neighborhood? It's like the UN um, when I first moved in there, it was just basically, you know, black African-Americans, but slowly, I mean, it wasn't that slow. It neighborhood changed like in the last 10 years or so we've had, you know, Caucasians, Asian. You know, the rents have gone up. So, yeah, and a lot of the, I know about four houses here were owned by African-Americans and when they pass their siblings, their, um, sons and daughters sold the house. A lot of them regretted because it goes south

and it's dead down there. There's nothing to do much and they want to come back, but they can't afford it.

That's tough. Yeah. It's expensive. ...

And now you've been like, I mean, a part of this from the very beginning. What are the things, one of the things you're most like proud of or happy about? Um just meeting, new folks, working with folks. You know, we always have a project, you know. I think it's early this week. Um, like we empty the water barrels during, for the winter. Cause they will crack. So we put out on an email, whoever, you know, Facebook and the group email that the barrels need to be filled. You know, it was planting season is just about upon us. And, uh, I don't know who did it. I still don't know who did it, but somebody came and filled the, uh, all the barrels because I was going to come with one of the girls who said she would help. And I came over that morning and were all filled. Like who did it, we don't know, but they were filled. so I don't know. It was Wednesday. It was one day when we decide, oh no, it was Friday, Thursday or Friday. Cause I had to fix that. And then I feel that the big tank that takes like almost an hour. The hose, the cart there, you have to go down the block, open hygiene, hook it all up, open the hygiene, and then snake the hose in the garden. And it's, you know, , it's a project. I did it by myself, but you know, usually it helps with two or three people.

I see there are also from Green Thumb the barrels?

Yeah. Yeah. They, they give those away. I think they will pickle barrels.

What does that mean?

You know, pickles, pickle barrels, and every once in a while, they'd give them away. They used to give them away. I haven't seen it lately to any, anybody who wants them. My neighbor she had it for like three years and now she plans and hooking it up to my gutter that comes off my roof. So she can have water rainwater for her, her plants.

Do you have any communication with Green Thumb or? Yeah, we communicate. And there is a liaison that comes by every once in a while. He's his name is Gregory. He's with the parks department of the government. He'll come and he'll inspect and make sure, you know, everything is going smoothly and we have the open garden hours. Um, I think is here for the Open garden hours. Everybody does like an hour at some point during the week, but mostly on the weekends, you know, we try to keep the garden open from nine to maybe one on the weekends. And during the summers, you know, we'd get a lot of visitors. I was in here I think it was a couple years ago. I was in here by myself doing something it was during the week. And all of a sudden I felt something know. The car was filled with kids from, um, it was a Hebrew Orthodox, um, I guess a day camp and the, to instruct to adults, you know, they came and asked me, is it all right? I said, well, y'all in there already. Sure! And we love company just don't eat anything, you know, but they, were fascinated. And then last summer, every week we had a group from the local YMCA. They have a day camp program and the kids, you know, they were, they couldn't get on trains or buses to go anywhere. So they had to because of the pandemic. So all the trips, the outings were local walking and the director asked me, would it be all right if. You know, she could send, you know, groups of

kids on, I think it was Tuesdays and Wednesdays. I said, no problem. And they enjoyed it. They got to play with the chickens. You know, these kids, you know, city kids, they don't check it. They don't know where they come from. They come from the supermarket where they, they looked at the garden, they were fascinated. And then they, you know, they brave, they were picking the chickens up. If they could catch them, you know, it's not easy.

Did you grow up?

I grew up in Harlem. I grew up in Harlem. Um, and. I for after college, my first apartment was in a barrio that's east Harlem. I kind of outgrew that apartment and I was looking for a house.

And do you have any, have you just learned it by doing it? The gardening?

Yeah, my grandmother, I used to visit my grandmother when I was kid. She lived in Florida. She had a backyard with a garden. She grew collard greens and strawberries. I remember getting up early in the morning, getting, picking strawberries and having cornflakes and strawberries. I was, and we have this, this is a strawberry field. Yeah, it was beautiful. So strawberry fields forever. But I met a guy yesterday who he's going to take the plot half of this plot. So he's going to move the strawberries over to one side so he could have, he can grow his stuff, but he has to add some more soil chemicals.

I noticed, uh, are you involved in running the Facebook? No, no, that's mostly Lillian and some of the other members. I don't, I mean, I have a Facebook account, but I'm not doing everything. Spread the wealth, you know.

Um, but what do you think if you could like tell people about community gardens? What we would like to tell them? You know, put everything on paper, make sure everyone has a role, um, you know, get a lot of input from the members, you know, don't be a dictator.. Um, and just be open-minded about it, you know, have fun, do some social events because it pandemic, we haven't had any real social events two years, but I'm looking forward to this. Hopefully we'll have some cookouts. Yeah.

How has it been with the pandemic? I mean, um, according to Greentown, we could, we didn't have any open hours, you know, we didn't want people in here spreading COVID. Um, yeah, it's it, it has an impact most definitely .

It looks like new houses too over there?.

Those are new. Um, we've had some, I call them predatory developers. Um, there was one vacant, there was one house they tore down, but the developer, for some reason, I think it was like the middle one. For some reason, they went down like over 30 feet below the sidewalk. For what reason I don't know. But it caused the other two buildings to like collapse. Um, in fact, his white house, a woman lived there with her three kids. She had to leave because the steps, the side of the house was cracking. The steps that led upstairs. They were like shifted and they were cracking. So she had to move for like three months. Because of what they did, but they fixed it. This was the first one they built. And then we see the second one was the one on the left and then they just finished the one in the middle. Yeah. And somebody building a house down the street on my side, it's not taking that time. I think

that finance themselves. So, you know, they'll do, they'll do something, have it done. And then they'll wait a few months collect, you know, get funding, get the money, save up their money and they'll do something else.

I don't know when it's going to be completed. But if you, if you look, you'll see a house, you see the frame, the steel beams. Um, but I talked to the owner, the owner, she said she is going to be a greenhouse. They want to have solar panels. They were going to do a whole lot of environmental friendly stuff. So looking for it, she seems like a good neighbor.

It's a new, it's a new neighbor?

Well, yeah. she is Caucasian. Um, she lived in the house on the corner. I don't know where they were from and while they were building, you know, I guess they'll move in once it's finished, but I have no idea when it's going to be finished. A lot of the folks here lived in the neighborhood, you know, not directly here, within a five or six block radius...

if you should describe, because now I'm recording this so you can listen to it on the website. Um, and it was fine. I'm putting on the website?

Yeah.

Um, if you just describe this place to somebody who can't see it,

Well, it depends on the time of year and it's summertime it's lush.

Uh, we trees that were growing and we cut them down cause they were shading us. And when we first got the garden, this house wasn't there. That was a lot. But we had big problems with them when they built it. They were, when they stuck on the side, they were dropping, um, kind of creed all in our gardens. So, you know, we call ed Green Thumb and they came and stopped it. So they were pissed because we held up their development for like maybe three months.

I know I'd asked them, there's a lot of community gardens around in Brooklyn. Um, are they, if the next two residential houses, they get electricity from the house. So we asked, they said, why your building, would it be, you know, could we get one outlet. Did you put an outlet like over here. I mean, and you can play it on the same circuit with the common lights, the hallway lights and whatnot.

And, um, the contractor said, oh, that'd be easy, no problems. Sure. You know, but it never happened.

So that's why there is no eletricity still?

Yeah.

So what are you going to do about sunlight if there comes a building on this side too?

If we get enough. I wish we can cut that tree down. That street was very small and we should have cut it down years ago, but we never did. So now it's huge. We cut our budget trees down. Uh, there were two trees here we cut down. You can still see there's a stump next to the grill. I don't know if you could see it from here. It's done right away. And I guess we'll knock it over the summer, but it took, it took a lot, there were a lot of trees over here when that was a lot and we cut those down his left. So when they built the house, they had a lot of clearing do, but it was funny. It was so much, um, so many weed trees and shrubs that were over there where we went over there to cut the trees down. There were like three or four abandoned cars that we couldn't even see because of the growth.

Is there anything like now you've been working with community gardens for quite a while. Is there anything you would like curious to know about community gardens?.

Um, no, not really. I think all these years finally figured, figured most things out. Um, you know, there's this certain things that, you know, what should we be getting electricity, you know? Um, as you come in, if you look to the right, there's a pole that's sticking up, that pole is where we're going to put the solar panels. We figured out all the equipment that is in the shed. We purchased it, that our orange tool box is for the, whatever we bought it for the, the solar solar panels. Um, I don't know if we're going to get batteries or what, but that's, that's what that's for. We just need to find some, I do like, oh, Just have to do some research, which I'm not really looking forward to. I mean, it was hard enough....

(looking around and small talking)

But we didn't realize under the wood chips with the summit. And it was like maybe this thick and we had a hard time. So we said, hell with that, we're not using that too. As a sign up to, we dug a hole enough and then, you know, put the pole in level it and filled it. So it's not going anywhere. It's an infrequent.

If you meet other people from community gardens. Do you feel like you're part of like the same?, It is a community, you know, we will go and visite other gardnes. Some of the gardens hold workshops on various things. In fact, there's a number of workshops coming up. Um, in different bottles. So you get a chance to go visit, you know, learn other methods. Um, I got a lot of requests to help build raised beds. I got a request to go and help repair some beds, which I blend. Um, there's, uh, four green projects and this . Button that. It's a big, pretty big development and they have a community garden and they have beds or like shots. So I went over there and gave them a hand. That's nice. Yeah. We try to help out. I'm just hoping that somebody has a workshop on solar energies that I could go. We could go and get some ideas. Um, Green thumb, my parks department, liaison Gregory. He told me about a few places and he was supposed to get in contact with them to see when would be a good time to visit, you know, to meet with whoever was in charge of it, to find out how it's done and give us some technical assistance.

But you're still waiting.. You seem like a patient guy, right?

I worked in a school system with 33 years. I have a lot of patients.

It was actually funny. We found, so we looked at this, I do it in a part of a group. Um, every found like the sip coats and like the different gardens. And then we visualize it on a map rather than most community gardens and there's was a lot in the Bronx, in the Brooklyn area. And then for some reason, there's also a lot in east village. Yeah, it's really funny...

a lot of them are on the roofs of buildings.

That was interesting to see where they actually, but maybe it's because one of the, I visited another community garden. Now, one of the first ones, apparently. Liz Christy. Yeah. Yeah. Down in Chinatown?

yes just above Hudson.

What do you use the folks for?

That was my neighbor, just to, I don't know. She used the forks. That's where she plants stuff. So she'd pull up the weed. What you think is a weed and it's really something. She's planting a lot of stuff. This is my backlight. I just bought seedlings to put in, but I haven't done it yet. I'm waiting to get my manure to work it in. This is Rosemary. Now this has been here for like maybe four years, but it doesn't look like it's coming back. Parts of it coming back, like, what are you going to plan? You said. Well, if it doesn't come back fully, I'm going to pull it up and, and plant something else. But like I said, this, this was like four years. It was, it was doing good for four years. And now is it have Rosemary is going to, I wonder why maybe a tough windows. It wasn't this one, it wasn't that bad. I mean, we've had worse.

It was really great to seeing your garden. It's been really nice to hear about it.

I mean, you had to come back like, June.

I got a little girl at home. Maybe I should bring her. I don't live in the neighborhood, but I can come.

Yeah. My granddaughter she's like, she was really little, she used to come. I just put her in with the chickens and she liked to she'll put the food in her hand, they'll eat out and she's just tickled thing. And there was some little girls that live on the block. They would come over and they like the chickens. It's really educational. The kids like to, uh, they like to learn. They like to see new things to know where their food comes from. Yeah.

Why are you a part of this community garden? Why are you a part of it? I just like doing it. It brings joy and then you get a chance to eat fresh food, organic food for free. It's um, it's, it's rewarding, you know, just to watch a seed. You put a seed in the ground. And then, you know, months later you have strawberries, you have tomatoes, you have cucumbers, you have squash. I mean, that was a big joy. I planted some squash here and somebody said, man, you better get that before it gets, if it grows too big, the seeds are tough. It's like not, not very good eating. And I remember I it's, it's a lot of flowers around a lot of leaves because I remember I picked it up. I cut it and they were like six others. You couldn't see. I'm like, oh shit. And that was, that was fun. It's really, you know, it's, there's a lot of surprises, you know... every day you come in, there could be all kinds of new stuff to see. .