

Pinehold Gardens Field Notes

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Winter, 2012

A DAY IN THE LIFE

As we write this winter has finally arrived. The lack of winter thus far has been a good thing. It has allowed us to put up a new greenhouse — more on that later — build the doors for the pole shed, clean up the fields of drip tape, fencing and posts (well, almost) and sneak in a number of social occasions of the sort we usually don't have time for during the growing season. But now with the snow, everything changes. Our outdoor work becomes confined to even a narrower window of opportunity and a narrower scope of work. Our emphasis more often than not turns to indoor work — and leisure.

SURVEY RESULTS

One of the things we've already started to do is to take a closer look at the very successful online survey that we posted a couple of months ago. Out of the 160 members, more than 100 responded to the survey. That gives us a pretty good feel for the year. The good news is that according to the vast majority of respondents we are doing most things just about right. Of the folks who specifically addressed overall quantity in the boxes, the too-muchers (four comments) slightly out voted the too-littlers (three comments). And no, to one respondent, we have not changed the size of our box.

We've worked very hard on trying to figure out just what is a good amount of food to deliver each season, keeping in mind the cost of share as well as members' abilities to really consume the food. It seemed like we were getting it right at least for most of the weeks.

Of course there were a number of you who wanted more or less of somethings — one of the most popular "more of" vegetables was carrots. We agree. And we are going back to sowing raw carrot seed rather than pelleted seed. Pelleted seed has a clay coating that makes it easier to plant these otherwise very tiny seeds but also slightly inhibits germination. We are also going to try new soil crust-breaking tools and overhead irrigation to help with germination. With more success in germination we expect to deliver more carrots this year. On the list of "less of's" the clear winner is turnips, an unfortunately much maligned, useful root vegetable. Perhaps we need to do more educating about seasonal foods — greens and root crops in particular.

One good suggestion that we are going to consider for the next season is to find a way for members to share produce from their box that they may have tried at one point but know they won't eat it. One method would be to use an exchange box at the dropsites. Another suggestion is to offer a way for members to get more of specific items. We do offer Market Dollars for those who want to purchase more of anything we have. But perhaps we, too, could add to the exchange box if there is just a plethora of a crop one week that needs to be harvested.

WEST SIDE STORY

One of our most troubling issues was ending our Wauwatosa and Vilet street dropsites. We have dear friends and long-time members that have used those sites and for them alone we wished we could have

kept delivering to them, but each season it made less and less sense. Membership was simply not growing in those areas, while membership at other sites was, and we had to make a decision that we wished we didn't have to. If a way could be found to get the boxes to a Wauwatosa-area site without us having to make a special trip, that is something we would consider. We might be interested in creating a worker share position, for instance, that involves pick up and delivering of the boxes.

FACILITIES UPDATE

One of this winter's big challenges was completing a new 30-foot-by-72-foot hoop-house by Dec. 16. The weather, with some days in the 50s and plenty of sun, really helped us meet that deadline. The deadline was set by the USDA, which contributed a grant of about \$4,000 toward this \$20,000-plus hoop-house. This is no ordinary hoop-house. This structure rolls on tracks, back and forth, allowing us to roll it over crops we've established outdoors to protect them indoors when the season calls for it. We particularly want to thank all the folks that helped make us meet that deadline, especially David's nephew Josh Komassa who added his considerable skills in handling tools, construction knowledge and youthful strength to help us meet the project deadline on time.

THE NEW SEASON

It may not seem like it, but the new CSA season is fast approaching. We want to make sure that all of you, our 2011 members, have first right of refusal for membership in the

2012 season. We have extended this right until March 1. We would like to have a good idea of where we are with the membership rolls before we attend the Local Farmers Open House on March 17 at the Urban Ecology Center. There is a new brochure and sign up form on our Website, www.pineholdgardens.com, that can be easily printed out, filled out and sent to us. Remember we do have an assistance fund, worker share opportunities and flexible payment options.

Our best marketing, like many small businesses, is word of mouth. So if you know of anyone who maybe interested in joining a CSA, please tell them about our Website, or the Local Farmer's Open House.

WINTER RESPIRE

A pair of owls very early one morning were calling back and forth to each other rapidly, staccato-like, in very close proximity to each other. It is mating season for owls. The calls were far different than the more languid hoot-hooting typical of Great Horned owls. These were wooing calls and by the tempo, somewhat urgent wooing indeed. Spring has arrived, at least for some. The mating of the owls may be the first sign that the year doesn't grind to a halt when all else is frozen and snow covered. But there are others as well. The sun lingers just a little longer in the evening now and days are getting longer. The urge felt by the owls will soon rise up in the squirrels, and then all manner of birds and beasts. The winter doesn't stop life. Life, if anything, is just catching its breath.