
The Garden at Fritz 2021

Summarising Year Eight

Richard G - September 28, 2021



2021 - Year Eight

A summary of the eighth year at the Garden at Fritz - growing fresh produce for local food banks. Once again, the volunteers enabled us to exceed, albeit slightly, the achievements of preceding years.

What did we grow and distribute?

Food Category	Total Weight (lbs)	West Island Mission	West Island Assistance Fund	On Rock
Tomatoes	1176			
Aubergines	124			
Peppers	201			
Courgettes	732			
Cucumbers	113			
Squash	906			
<i>All Cucurbitae</i>	<i>1751</i>			
Pole beans	202			
Onions	63			
Donated apples	226			
TOTAL (lbs)	3743	1447	662	1424
Retail Value (\$\$)	\$8882			

* *Note:* Total weight (3743lbs) includes produce sent to other, smaller recipients such as St-George's Church in SAB and the Solidarity Markets

- Other food donated included several boxes of purslane and bags of basil
- Retail values estimated from posted mid-season online prices at Metro supermarket

Overall:

Total weight gathered = 3734 lbs. (3735 *in 2020* - 3345 *in 2019*)

Estimated Retail Value = \$8882 (\$8340 *in 2020*)

This shows remarkable consistency with last year in weight harvest and an increase on 2019. The additional retail value this season thus probably has less to do with amount harvested than inflation and the rising cost of food overall since Covid arrived.

The installation of the washing station was a tremendous success and our thanks go to the person who donated the sink and to Oliver and Ron for building the facility.

Having the delivery system and allocation between food banks coordinated in advance by Francoise, aided by Patricia, made the operation run much more smoothly. Not being able to harvest at weekends as food banks told us they could not take delivery on the days had an impact on some of our volunteers. Perhaps the situation in future years will allow us to revert to a Saturday and Wednesday harvesting schedule but that is dictated by our customers. Our produce is “fresh” and, working with clients, we try to get it into the hands of families on the day it is picked.

Tomatoes:

The number of plants grown (approx. 150) was about the same as the preceding year but the weight of fruit at 1176 lbs was down on 2020 at 1707 lbs. Suggested reasons for this may include:

- An exceptionally hot and humid summer - tomatoes prefer hot and dry to hot and steamy.
- Different varieties. This year we concentrated on larger “field” tomatoes than in previous years than the small salad and cherry varieties. Last year and the preceding year we planted a lot of *Jaune flammé* which are very productive but prone for falling off the plant as soon as ripe and throw out many side shoots which were hard to control,

sometimes blocking the walking space between rows. Productive varieties that are at least a bit resistant to blight should be trialled as well.

- We put greater effort than in previous years into pinching out side shoots. This encouraged the plants to produce larger and better quality tomatoes but at a lower weight. It also made the picking process easier for our volunteers which is important.

- During the last three years the tomato plants have suffered from fungal blight (black and withered foliage) in the latter part of the season. This year with exceptional, and perhaps in future more normal, high heat and humidity this could have been an even worse problem. However, the sterling work by our summer student Oliver, in removing lower leaves from plants once fruits had set and thereby increasing air flow made a considerable difference and the plants proved to be healthy and resistant. Note - we must sure that we grow blight-resistant varieties whenever available.

- Because we picked out the side shoots so consistently, our plants were well spaced. If we allow a maximum of two *early-developing* side shoots per plant next season we can fill the gaps a bit and probably increase crop weight a bit.

- Further note on blight (copied from last year's garden report: *Fungal spores are spread by splashing water. We should stay away from the garden while foliage is wet from dew or rain and avoid overhead watering, especially watering in late afternoon or evening so that water can evaporate from the leaves. Do NOT overwater - very important. Remove all plant debris at the end of the growing season so the spores have nowhere to over winter.*

Aubergines and Peppers:

We grew more plants this year than we have before. These were fruits that the food banks had requested due to their high value and the difficulty they experience in sourcing them elsewhere. Both are late developing food crops which need a long, hot and sunny season to reach potential. Peppers should be left on the plants as long as possible until they turn red or yellow depending on the variety - coloured peppers have a considerably higher value.

During the late August period when humidity was high we experienced some rot and fungal growth in a number of peppers which were removed quickly and disposed of. Once

we reduced the regular watering this problem rapidly disappeared. See notes on irrigation below.

Productivity was acceptable but could have been better had we fed the plants more - they are what is known as “gross feeders”.

Pole Beans:

This year, after seven years of bent and aching backs we opted to grow pole beans instead of bush varieties. Once into production they have had a surprisingly long season of repeated pickings. Last year we grew 500 lbs of bush beans against this year's 202 lbs ... however that was in double the area so actual production is broadly comparable and there is no denying that pole beans are easier to harvest.

Suggest for next year considering increasing the land devoted to pole beans by, say, 50% and decrease the space between the pole towers.

Cucurbitae:

A very successful season again with almost no problems from squash vine borer both larvae or from squash bugs. Our annual crop rotation will have helped with this but it is likely that the varieties of plants we grew conferred some resistance.

Cucumbers got us off to a good start but their season is short - if we give up and plan to next year I would either stop growing cucumbers or else try to grow them as climbers rather than sprawling on the ground.

Courgettes - highly productive and harvestable relatively early in the season before the main squash start to ripen.

Squash - predominantly butternut variety which was productive and mostly disease/pest free. Start to be harvestable about the time the courgettes are tailing off.

Irrigation:

Daily watering regardless of precipitation is easy to provide but not necessarily the best practice. Over watering, especially for peppers and tomatoes can encourage fungal problems. This needs a summer student to oversee or else a rota of volunteers willing to visit the garden daily.

Pests:

Either we have been lucky this year or else our varieties have been resistant ones. Rabbits are around but have not shown much interest in what we grow - perhaps this has something to do with the resident foxes?

Storage:

We now have a lockable and weather proof chest on site. This will store the scales and bags of fertilizer etc as well as some of our tools during summer and our irrigation hoses etc in winter.

Next Year:

Ideas ...

1. Divide the tomato plot into three or four separated areas as an additional means of blight control
2. Look at options for us to grow early vegetables varieties and late vegetables varieties so that we have an extended season?
3. Identify new volunteers and bring them on board.

