

IN THE GARDEN

Where People, Plants and Nature Meet

MORNING EYE CANDY



OUR MISSION

To inspire lifelong curiosity, understanding, and appreciation of nature through organic gardening, education, and demonstration, and to provide a place of beauty for Norcross.



A BLOOMING GOOD IDEA

By Deb Harris, gardening in bed #26

Whew, what a busy half year we've had in the Garden! It's been six months since we began planting, transforming an empty yard into a lively space where neighbors get together to garden, share tips and advice, and experience the simple joy of being outdoors.

The Garden features 35 raised community garden beds and an impressive compost program, with 90% of the Garden's scraps being composted. Here neighbors grow herbs, fruits, veggies and flowers, without the use of synthetic chemicals. It also serves as a gathering space for education, youth programs, and just for having a good time. Our Garden is also listed as a Gwinnett Master Gardener Project, so look for Master Gardeners now and then helping us grow.

The Garden is a unique and interesting community space that's helping build a greener, healthier, and more sustainable Norcross for us all. Stop by on a quiet morning, sit on a bench and just listen. It is a special place for reconnecting with nature. You are always welcome here.

Yep, the Garden is a blooming good idea!

WHY WE GARDEN

By Toni Ross Weir, gardening in bed # 14

I grew up on a farm in Central Georgia. By the time I was born, my grandparents had stopped tending to animals, and the acres of our farm were full of peas, butter beans, and soybeans. My granddaddy flew a crop duster to tend to his crops, and some of my earliest memories are of waking up to the sounds of his plane flying over our house as it turned for another pass over the fields. My granddaddy also drove a little green John Deere tractor and a huge combine, a machine used to harvest soybeans. I grew up riding them with him on the weekends. I was thrilled to spend all day in the fields, riding up and down the long rows of plants. After the harvest, all of the soybeans would be loaded into large trailers that I would jump and play in like some kids played in ball pits at McDonalds. We had two industrial pea shelling machines in the barn, and my family spent hours and hours picking the refuse out of peas we collected in plastic basins at the base of the machines. I treasure these memories.

As I grew up, I spent less time in the fields and the barn, and eventually, my granddaddy stopped farming. Instead, he planted pine trees in long rows where the peas and beans grew before. I moved away from the farm to Atlanta, then Austin, then Houston, and then back to Atlanta. I always lived in the city, and I wish you could have seen my face the first time I went to a sushi restaurant and paid \$4.50 for a tiny bowl of what they called "edamame" (which I knew were just fancy soybeans).

When my son was born in Buckhead, I knew he would have a childhood that was quite different from my own. We rarely spent time outside, and we didn't have much of a yard to grow anything. The closest we came to freshly grown fruits and vegetables was visiting our weekend farmers' market. Even when we moved to the Norcross area, I knew he probably would not be exposed to farming or growing food or other plants. When I saw that the Discovery Garden was opening, I leapt at the chance to expose him to urban growing.

So, we rented a garden spot and started learning. We talked about what we might want to plant and watch grow. We dug in the dirt together and visited every few days to monitor the progress. As we watched our plants grow, he started seeing things he recognized: "Is that lettuce? Is that the same broccoli we eat at home?" We lost some plants in the deep freeze and talked about what happens to some plants when it gets too cold. We are learning that farming skills are not hereditary, but I still

like to think my granddaddy would be proud of our efforts. Sometimes I wonder if my son will remember the days we spend in the garden like I remember the days I spent on the farm.

One day, I picked my son up from his pre-K class, and as we crawled into the car, he shared excitedly, "I have something for you!" I turned and saw a big smile, and his eyes gleamed with pride. He reached deep into his pocket and then extended his hands with something small pinched between his finger and thumb. He dropped it into my hand. I looked at it and then up into his eyes with what must have been a confused expression. "It's an apple seed! I saved it from my apple at lunch! We can plant it in the garden!" His excitement was contagious. We drove directly to the garden and "planted" it right away. I was thrilled to see that he was making his own connections between the food he eats and the work and growth happening in the garden. As he grows, he may not have the rich farming experiences and memories I have, but maybe he will remember the patch of dirt in which we planted his apple seed.



PEPPERS UPPERS

By John Outler, gardening in bed # 23

I blame my mother. She's the one who got me hooked.

Mom started growing hot peppers several years ago in her garden, and after savoring the sweet, hot, fruity funk of her Habaneros I never looked back.

Peppers are just one of the genera from the extraordinary *solanaceae* family, which comprises potatoes, tomatoes, and eggplants from the *solanum* genus, peppers from the *capsicum* genus, and gooseberries, ground cherries, and tomatillos from the *physalis* genus. Even tobacco and petunias are in the family!

Most of the peppers we know and love are from the *C. annuum* species, including bells (yawn), jalapeños, Anaheims, pimientos, and cayennes (among *many* others). But the real hotties are from *C. chinense*, which includes Habaneros, Scotch bonnets, and ghost peppers, among other head-exploding varieties that every year push the Scoville numbers farther into the stratosphere.

But whether you're in it for the heat or the flavor—or both—few garden plants are more gratifying to grow than the capsicums. If you want to grow from seed, most varieties are eager sprouters, though some may need a little extra heat applied to the sprouting medium to get them started. A sprouting mat works beautifully, but I also found the top of a toaster oven set to "warm" to be a good stand in when starting my ghosts. Also, be patient. Most seeds will break ground within several days after sowing, but don't give up on the laggards. My fataliis waited *several weeks* before poking up through the soil, much to my delight!

And don't forget to slowly introduce your seedlings to the sun. This is called "hardening off," and it just means putting your seedlings in a sunny window for a couple of hours a day, then slowly moving them into more direct sunlight until they can tolerate all-day full sun. Thankfully, peppers are sun lovers, and they don't require too much effort in this regard.

Of course, for those among us without the time, patience, or space to fuss over tender seedlings for weeks (or months), our friend Bonnie awaits us with enough variety to satisfy most palettes. Bonnie plants are robust, disease resistant, and ready to send out bountiful flowers just a couple of weeks after transplanting.

Either approach will result in eager growers that can produce surprising bounties. And when you've had your fill of fresh peppers, you can dry the rest. Dehydrators work well, but I've also used sunlight and, once again, my trusty toaster oven set

to about 125 degrees to dry both Habaneros and cowhorns (which takes two to three days). Once dried, store the peppers in a clean, tightly sealed jar. They will keep for years this way if they've been properly dried.

But what you really want to do with dried peppers is make what we call "pepper oleos," flavored oils that are so versatile and tasty you'll wonder how you ever lived without them. And they couldn't be simpler to make. For hot peppers just be sure to use gloves or wash your hands thoroughly afterward if you do the work bare handed. Separate the pepper skins from the seeds and stems and place the skins in a clean blender. Pulse the skins until you achieve a consistent, medium-fine powder. (At this stage you may want to wear a mask if you're working with hot peppers.) Transfer the pepper powder into a tall jar large enough to hold one part pepper to two to four parts oil. Now just add grape seed oil at a ratio of about two to four parts oil to pepper by volume. Mix and allow to settle. The oleo will take several days to develop full flavor, and you can help the process by occasionally shaking up the jar like a snow globe.

Our favorite so far is our cowhorn oleo. Cowhorns are medium-hot peppers with fantastic, smoky-sweet flavor; we use the oil at the top for a mild touch of heat and flavor on eggs, shake up the jar for more concentrated flavor on greens or chicken, or dig down into the delicious sludge at the bottom for a to-die-for drizzle on burrata cheese.

Here's to sharing and preserving the incredible bounty we're all bound to enjoy this summer. I hope you will also share your recipes and culinary discoveries from this extraordinary plant that fills our summer months and beyond with so much great flavor.





SPRING HERBS

By Nona Johnson, gardening in bed # 1

Spring is here and the bounty is plentiful with a plethora of fragrant and flavorful herbs. Believe it or not, many people are a little intimidated by fresh herbs and often opt for dried herbs, but when they are in season, why not partake in their abundance? We have so many to choose from! From chervil to mint and cilantro to thyme, we have quite a harvest. So let's dive in!

One of the herbs you'll see in season are chives, which have a mild onion flavor that is great with potatoes, seafood and eggs. Dill is another yummy herb. It offers a grassy-anise flavor that is delicious with cheeses, salmon, cream sauces and veal. Dill is very aromatic and can simply be used as a bed for fish to cook on to impart the flavor without actually chopping into the herb. Marjoram is the quieter cousin of Oregano and has a sweeter and milder taste. Pick a few leaves from the stem and toss in some olive oil and lemon juice for a great marinade for chicken. Marjoram is also really great on spring vegetables like corn, carrots, cucumber and peas.

My favorite herb is tarragon. The mild anise flavor is aromatic and delicate and is a classic addition to crustaceans, especially lobster. Think about a rich béarnaise sauce dripping off a butter poached lobster tail. Amazing right? Rosemary is a commonly used herb that most of us are familiar with. It is a woody herb that is very aromatic and can be overused pretty easily. It's a great herb to add piney flavor to stews and marinades. You can add a few chopped sprigs to your potatoes this BBQ season to brighten and add life to the standard "tater salad". Parsley is pretty much the head honcho of herbs, in my opinion. Whether you use flat-leaf or the curly, it is readily available and the most widely used. Parsley adds a freshness to anything you're cooking. By adding chopped parsley to mushrooms, you'll create a balance of brightness and earthiness. Parsley can

be used in almost any recipe to give it life and a extra little pick me up. Game, poultry, seafood and fish all benefit from this grassy goddess.

So don't be afraid this Spring, grab some fresh herbs and play around with them. You'll be surprised how easy it is to jazz up a meal. Pick your favorites, and give them a good wash by holding their stems and rinsing under cool water. To dry your herbs, and yes, you must dry them (it helps with cutting and chopping them later), toss them in a salad spinner and let it rip, or you can blot them dry with a paper towel. When you're ready to use them, make sure your knife is really sharp, for a fresh clean cut that avoids bruising those pretty green leaves.

THE GARDEN'S BACKYARD

By Josh Bare, Councilman and Garden Advisor

We had a great workday in the phase two lot next door to the Discovery Garden Park. We've decided to affectionately call it the garden "Backyard." Our garden designer Sean Murphy with B+C Studio is getting close to presenting us with a plan for extending the garden that way. This plan is based on feedback and input from the garden board and members. Some of the elements will most likely include a fire pit and events lawn in addition to a small walking trail with educational signage.

Look for more Backyard workdays where we will be doing more to prepare that area for expansion! As soon as we get the initial designs we will be sharing them with everyone for comments and questions and further input.



CONNECTIONS

By Jon Hollon, gardening in bed # 22

One of the first things my fiancé and I decided to do after moving to Norcross from Boston in April was to join the new Norcross Discovery Garden Park as newbie gardeners. New to Georgia, new to Norcross, new jobs so why not become new gardeners as well? A community garden was perfect since the house we loved and eventually purchased had a relatively small yard. We jumped at the chance to snag one of the plots in Norcross Discovery Garden Park when they were posted. One funny little detail is the stress I experienced when we found out which plot we'd been assigned. I do recall saying a couple of times "I hope they don't put us in front, I hope they don't put us in front!" So we were pretty nervous when we found out we were right up front! And to add to the stress our neighbor gardener in the plot next to us - let's just say he's no slacker! No pressure right!?

Things are feeling a bit less shaky at this point, but we're not winning any awards (yet), so when asked to write this article I hesitated as I've only got one meagerly successful growing season under my belt. I had to think about what I might offer in terms of insight to my fellow gardeners; it certainly wouldn't be gardening advice! I say that with one notable caveat and that is YouTube!! As a newbie gardener, I cannot overstate what a great resource this truly is! Our first search was "how to harvest broccoli" even though it seemed quite simple – just cut it off when it looks big enough to eat right? When you take the top off, you should leave the plant intact, and side shoots will start popping out within a couple of weeks due to the shock of losing the main stalk, who knew?! My other YouTube nugget is garlic scapes! What the heck are scapes anyway? Microsoft Word keeps putting the red squiggly line underneath the word 'scapes' so clearly it's not familiar with them either! Scapes are the little green shoots that pop up above ground, and you're supposed to trim them off when they bloom to send more nutrients down to the garlic bulb so it can get larger. The real nugget of knowledge here is that you can eat them! Cut the green shoots up just as you would chives and use them in any dish as a chive substitute except they have that great garlic flavor. Fantastic in eggs! Two tips from a newbie gardener, I did have something to offer after all even though you likely already knew what scapes were.

Humor me; it's the neighborly thing to do 😊.



You may have guessed that feeding our family was not the main reason we decided to take up gardening; we'd be a very thin family if that were true. In truth, the concept of the community garden resonates with me on many levels. I'd regularly passed the Baar Community Allotment Garden in Switzerland when I commuted there with my previous company and was intrigued by the sense of community that beautiful place seemed to represent (at least from my vantage point on the passing train). In the growing season, there would always be a few folks out there working and chatting with their fellow gardeners. The size of the allotments was quite large compared to what we typically see in the

United States, and they all included a little garden 'hut' as well, and I'm told by my Swiss colleagues that the 'huts' can be quite nicely decked out! They seemed to reflect the personality of the gardeners with flags and gnomes of all types and sizes everywhere. In truth, being new to the community what attracted us to NDGP was the immediate 'connectedness' that we were hoping would come with being part of a newly established community garden and we haven't been disappointed! I've been reading about community gardens popping up in New York City, and in other metropolitan areas some are formal and organized like ours here in Norcross and others are less so such as the 'guerilla gardens' that are popping up in the most unlikely of places. If you google 'guerilla garden' and look at all of the images that come up, you'll see exactly what I mean. In any case, for us, the take-home message on community gardening be it the large allotment gardens in Switzerland or a guerilla garden in an empty lot in NYC or our own beautiful NDGP is not necessarily that you get to enjoy what you grow and you can spend less at Publix; it's about community, and it's about connectedness within that community. Connectedness is the opposite of so many negative aspects of modern society so as newbie gardeners we welcome the veggies and the flowers, but as new Georgians, we truly appreciate the 'connections' we've made in our new city as newbie gardeners at NDGP!

UPCOMING SPRING EVENTS

JOIN US FOR A CREATIVE EARTH DAY

From Garden to Canvas

Artist checkin by 9:30am

Kudzu's plein air artists will spread out across the Garden for a brush with nature this Earth Day. Watch them in action and enjoy fun activities throughout the day. Finished art will be available for purchase at a Garden-Styled Happy Hour.

- *Nature Tales* with Norcross Librarians at 9:30am. Join the fun with your little ones - stories, songs, a garden stroll and a light snack.
- Face Painting by Kudzu artist from 11 to 2
- Grab a canvas & join in from 11 to 3
- Hourly art demos from 11 to 2
- Kids recycled art workshop at 1pm
- Food Trucks from 11 to 3
- Garden-Styled Happy Hour (bring a beverage or light appetizer to share) at 4:30pm 🍷 🍷

Sunny Annuals & Herbs Container Garden

10:30am

Local Garden & Flower Designer, Mary Delia Poynter, owner of Container Gardening of Atlanta, LLC, will show you how to plan your container garden, from planting techniques to design tips for seasonal color. Then create your own container garden under her guidance. All plant material, soil and a 12" to 15" clay pot will be provided (or bring your own).

Fee: \$65 including all materials
RSVP required to deb.ndgp@gmail.com

SMOKIN' IN THE ALLEY



MAY 21 • SKIN ALLEY • 6 PM

Enjoy live music and a family-style meal featuring the freshest seasonal finds. Raise a glass to the Best BBQ in Norcross and dine under the stars on Skin Alley.

BBQ JUDGING at 6 pm | **DINNER** at 7 pm
45 South and Mojitos 'cash bars' open at 6 pm

Live Music from The Burning Sensations • Activities for Kids • Buffet Dinner

TICKETS: Adults \$35; under 12 years \$5

Proceeds go toward furnishing the Discovery Garden Park
MAXIMUM 175 GUESTS • People's Choice Competition. You will be the judge!

BBQ COMPETITION: Test your skills against other backyard grill masters as you compete to win the prize of "The Best BBQ in Norcross".

BBQ CONTESTANTS: Contact Laura Rogers at 404.578.1234 or email lmr30307@gmail.com

RSVP: Deb Harris • deb.ndgp@gmail.com • 770.490.2318



Tickets go on sale April 24 Get yours before they sell out!

Enjoy live music and a family-style meal featuring the freshest seasonal finds. New this year is the People's Choice BBQ competition - you will be the judge! Then we'll raise a glass to the Best BBQ in Norcross as we dine under the stars on Skin Alley. *Don't miss it!*

Tickets: \$35 - contact deb.ndgp@gmail.com

THROUGH THE GARDEN GATE: A LOOK AT RECENT HAPPENINGS

We are excited about what we have accomplished and will continue to accomplish in our first year in the Garden. From Garden and Cooking Classes, Homeschoolers Mornings, Nature Tales, Garden Dinners, Community Happy Hours, Work/Play Days, Annandale Garden Therapy, and more - the Garden is building a vibrant circle of friends and projects dedicated to making Norcross a greater greener place. Join us!





There is an amazing synergy happening in the Garden, all the right people at the right time. Thank you all for being part of it. Hold on tight - we're ready to Grow!

Meet the Garden Board

Deb Harris, Mary Delia Poynter, Marilyn Meacham, Beth Tynan, John Outler, Marcus Schwab, William Makson, and advisors Josh Bare, Mary Beth Bender, and Cate Kitchen.

We'll see you in the Garden!



NORCROSS
DISCOVERY GARDEN
PARK

Thank you to all the wonderful community leaders, donors, sponsors, volunteers and the City of Norcross who helped make the Discovery Garden Park a reality!

DOGWOOD SPONSOR - \$6,000

Advanced Disposal

ROSE SPONSOR - \$4,000

WestRock

TULIP SPONSOR - \$1,000

The Gary L. Brace Family
Vulcan Materials Company
Waste Pro

LILY SPONSOR - \$500

EagleRock Distributors
Container Gardening of Atlanta, LLC

DAISY SPONSOR - \$250

Patton's Meat Market
The Rohrabough Family
Ruthy Lachman Paul
Tanya Moore
Cardinal Lake Pottery LLC

FRIENDS OF DISCOVERY GARDEN PARK

Purchasers of 214 Tribute Bricks
Meryl and Bob Wilkerson
Al and Barbara Karnitz
Norcross Masonic Lodge
45 South Cafe
Norcross Downtown Development Authority
Anna Balkan
Annandale Village
The Market
JP Harrington
Jerry Brown
Rob and MaryAnn Girard
VSOP Olive Oil Taproom
Josh and Amanda Bare
Amazing Volunteers
Sizzling Peach, LLC
Pam and Jeff Hopper

BECOME A FRIEND OF THE GARDEN

Become part of the Garden family and help us continue to enrich the community through the discovery, enjoyment and celebration of the natural world that sustains us.

For details, contact Deb Harris at deb.ndgp@gmail.com.