

The Clinton Community Garden News



January 2008

P.O. Box 214, New York City, NY 10108-0214

Our Annual Membership Meeting is March 4, 2008 at 7:30 in the Fountain House basement. Refreshments will be served. At that time, we will be holding elections for Steering Committee positions. Please consider running if your schedule permits. We meet every first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. We will be presenting the John Carney Volunteer of the Year Award at the meeting, and we will be accepting plot renewal forms. We'll also be unveiling our new T-shirt design. Looking forward to seeing you there!

OUR GREEN FUTURE

Thirty-one years ago, community activists and environmentalists came together to turn a dead space into a green space. Photos from that time show a tree-less block with a sort of cavity between tooth-like tenements. That gaping hole was what our community garden once was. The labor that went into clearing the lot of old cars, household trash, and dead pets and carefully salvaging bricks pales only in comparison to the tenacity and ingenuity of that first wave of gardeners who succeeded in blocking the city's attempts to auction of the land, raising money through the square-inch campaign, and winning the support of politicians as well as the global gardening community. That gigantic effort led to the CCG becoming the first New York City community garden to receive permanent parkland status in 1984.

Now that our garden has grown up, it's time to build on that sturdy foundation. What will our garden's future be in the face of global warming? What *should* our future be as our everyday consumption edges us closer to that environmental disaster?

As a parent, gardener, and lover of wildlife, I look ahead and see two answers: educate and act. We must educate our community and ourselves and put what we learn into action in the garden and the other parts of our lives.



Garden founder Malory Abramson painting her famous Inchworm mural.

Throughout the past year, the steering committee has been talking a lot about more environmentally conscious ways to garden and at the same time how to inspire and involve gardeners and community members to care for the garden on this level. The discussion returns again and again to three basics: Composting, recycling/reduction of garbage, and water usage.

We've made great strides with improving our **composting** operation, thanks to the fine stewardship of steering committee member Kazuo Akane. Kazuo along with his wife, Yaeko, have worked wonders by giving the back bins the attention such a valuable resource deserves (Stephen Pier and steering committee members Lisa Cicchetti and Loretta Skedde have also contributed to this compost rehab campaign.) The end result is a black, fine-grained nutrient—a strikingly different substance from our former twiggy and seedy compost. Kazuo has demonstrated that our compost is as good as our composting methods.

Gardeners will find that stopping to read the compost Do's and Don'ts posted at the back bins—as well as chopping up materials and cutting off seeds and root systems—is time well



Crocuses peeping through, spring 2007.

spent. And it's just the right thing to do for each other as *community* gardeners and for the planet.

One idea we'd like to try is offering Composting 101 to gardeners during the summer. Please try to attend when you see this class posted. We hope gardeners will come away with a better understanding of how good composting works as well as a desire to participate in the process.

Recycling/garbage reduction is yet another one of those simple things that can make a huge difference if done correctly. First, garbage: Yikes! For half the year the CCG is *the* neighborhood lunch spot. Which is great but the downside is two big bins overflowing with garbage almost every day of the summer. This presents both environmental and personpower issues. A few dedicated volunteers—notably Tony Belgrave—have been keeping the garbage situation in check, but really this is every able-bodied gardener's job and the more of us who get on it, the easier it will be to control. That brings us to recycling and waste reduction. Just like composting, recycling has its Do's and Don'ts, and they're posted on the bins. Please recycle paper and non-bottle plastics at your home or office. As much as possible, come to the garden with a **"Carry In, Carry Out" attitude**. When people know they must take their garbage with them, they tend to create less garbage in the first place!

Water, Water, Everywhere, or is it? Many community gardens can

REMEMBERING BROOKE ASTOR, A CCG SUPPORTER

Although I don't remember the exact year, Brooke Astor visited our garden and was greeted by Ben (for whom the birdbath was dedicated). They sat together on the front stone bench, and Mrs. Astor remarked that this block looked as it must have in the nineteenth century. Mrs. Astor had a policy of always visiting the places where she gave donations, and she then gave the garden \$25,000 for a

Gardeners: Share your own green ideas and community garden goals. Bring them to the annual meeting!

only dream of the water system we have, but as easy as it is now to turn on a faucet and water plants, we could also be **harvesting rain-water** and at the same time preventing runoff, a major source of groundwater pollution and soil erosion. There are also plantings we could put in that can slow runoff and keep good soil from washing away. Rainwater harvesting offers a great way to protect a precious resource and an educational experience our whole community could participate in. Let the steering committee know if you're interested in helping get this project off the ground.

Finally, let's all think of our children, our grandchildren, our neighbor's children... They are the ones facing an uncertain future with so far meager-to-no support from our government. We are the ones who can help guide them to a green future starting now. —Anne Haas, CCG Steering Committee President

Volunteers Needed! Write us by mail or e-mail (ccgsc@clintoncommunitygarden.org), or ask about volunteer tasks (below) at the meeting.

- Bench upkeep
- Brick path
- Compost
- Front sidewalk maintenance
- Garbage & recycling
- Shed and tool maintenance
- Lawn care
- Front gate padlock team
- Web site support
- Data entry and other administrative support
- Public events: setup, take down, coordination
- Community outreach
- Newsletter
- Translation

fence and the water installation. Prior to her generosity, the front fence was made of rusty old chain link. For water, the super in the building east of the garden ran a hose from the basement, and we filled watering cans which we carried to our plots. We should always be grateful to Brooke Astor! —Pat Berger



Volunteers Tom and Stephen successfully construct a dry well.



Bee News

A year ago, steering committee member Lisa

Cicchetti began working with Sid Glaser, who is gradually retiring from beekeeping. Here is her report:

Learning how to keep bees has been an enjoyable experience, and I am fortunate to be mentored by Sid, a delightful and gentle person who has vast knowledge of the complex world of beekeeping. My initiation included hiving the new colony by "pouring" a box full of some 10,000 bees into the wooden hive that would be their new home. While the bees were still in their mesh-walled shipping crate, I had the opportunity to hold the box close to my ear to hear and feel their concentrated buzzing. As they adjusted to their new home, the bees were fed sugar water, every few days for six



weeks, until the end of June when forage in the garden and elsewhere was abundant enough to sustain them. Bees love many flowering plants, among them bee balm, chives, coneflower, foxglove, geranium, hyssop, lavender, marigold, and rose. The hive has grown steadily and the bees appear healthy and content. We were not sure whether the hive would yield honey in this first year, but indeed we did harvest 35 pounds which was distributed to apprentices, garden volunteers, steering committee members, and administrators at Project Renewal and elsewhere. Two other apprentices, Don and Sally, have provided invaluable help during the season. We have so far decided not to medicate the bees with synthetic inputs, though it may be challenging to maintain a domestic hive without them. We will continue to explore alternative methods that are in keeping with an inclusive view of natural systems. If you would like a list of resources and links to bee-related topics, e-mail us at cgg@clintoncommunitygarden.org.

A Bird Visits the Visitor

Last May, I came by train to New York from Bethesda, MD, to visit my daughter, Ann Belmont.

"Want to see the garden, Mom?"

"Oh yes, I'll bring my paints and pad."

I love to see that oasis on 48th Street. It's one of my New York treats. So, while Ann busied herself with her garden patch, I sat down at the round table at the rear, spread out my paints and paper, and observed the springtime garden with irises and pansies in the foreground and the trees in their first green. While I was sketching, I had, suddenly, a most unusual visitor—a wonderful bird, brilliant scarlet with black wings, a scarlet tanager, my first-ever sighting. I sat perfectly still while he perched quietly, back turned to me, for about 30 seconds. Then he flew off to a nearby tree. It was a rare privilege. —Nancy Belmont Dayhoff



Children's Garden News

The Maypole Festival organized by Cindi Clark and her family opened the Children's Garden season. This past year marked our first try at a Three Sisters planting. Following the practice of the Lenape and other Native Americans who once lived in this area, we made a mound and planted it with beans, squash, and corn. Gardener and storyteller Donna Couteau, right, conducted the ceremony before a rapt audience. Later in the summer, science writer and insect expert Jessa Netting led us on a bug hunt. This summer we will try an international garden and raising butterflies. Other possible projects include paper-making and origami. —Anne Haas



In Memoriam: The garden is saddened by the loss of gardeners Neil Schettler, Adam Honigman, and Daniel McDonald in 2007.

Organic Composting Basics for Clinton Community Gardeners

by Kazuo Akane (with Jane Greenlaw)

Composting is the art of managing an ongoing natural process for our own convenience and utility. It is the means by which organic material is returned to the soil for re-use and is accomplished by an astounding array of organisms. The key to successful composting is simply a matter of understanding the composting process and maintaining the appropriate habitat for the decomposers.

1. Composting involves collecting organic materials, chopping, mixing, compressing, turning, and watering the pile occasionally.

2. Spring and autumn are the best times to start the compost. Summer is the time the compost pile is working at its peak range of decomposition. We need to turn the pile for aerating and mixing the materials at least once a month in the summer.

3. Shredded organic materials heat up rapidly and decompose quickly. Chopping up large materials is always good for composting.

4. The temperature of the compost pile is important. Decomposition occurs most efficiently when the temperature is between 104°F and 131°F. The best timing to turn the pile is when the temperature is below 104°F or above 131°F.

5. Most weeds and weed seeds are killed when the pile reaches above 130°F, though some may survive. The best way to avoid problems is to compost weeds without root systems.

6. The most labor-intensive work is to turn the pile by hand. The simplest and easiest way to do this is to move the most decomposed materials from one bin to the next bin (at our compost area, we move left to right).

7. The most important process of composting is to pile the right materials the right way in the #1 bin. Gardeners should know what kind of materials are usable for composting (see the sign) and should do the following before placing them in the first bin:

- Cut off the root system from the material and put the root system into a garbage container.
- Do not pile the root system in the #1bin.
- Chop up the materials as small as you can before putting them in the #1bin.

In 2007, our garden was...

Studied by Sandrine Baudry, a doctoral student in American Studies in Paris. Sandrine spent most of the year with us, volunteering, painstakingly re-viewing our archives, and interviewing gardeners.

Filmed for a segment of German TV's Heim+Garten with biologist Markus Phlippen. (See our Web site for a link.)

Written about by Richard Reynolds in his upcoming book On Guerilla Gardening: A Handbook on Gardening Without Boundaries (Bloomsbury). The author spoke with Adam Honigman at length. Garden neighbor Dallas Francis contributed a glamorous photo from a garden BBQ.

Visited by MIT Advanced Japan Design Workshop, as part of their study of innovative neighborhood design.

... by Margaret Pitt from our "sister" garden, the Culpeper Community Garden in London.

... and by classes from nearby P.S. 111.



A Winter Garden

Steering Committee member Gretchen Gano and her husband, Steve, have been experimenting with a late fall/winter garden on the east side. Gretchen promises a report in the spring as well as info for gardeners who'd like to try this.

Current Steering Committee

Kazuo Akane
Ann Belmont
Lisa Cicchetti
Mark Dieffenbacher
Gretchen Gano,
treasurer

Jane Greenlaw,
correspondence
Anne Haas,
president
Nobue Hirabayashi
Loretta Skeddle