

PDX Garden Stories

Interviews with participants in Growing Gardens Home Gardens Program

Portland, Oregon

Interview with Nadia

Conducted by Kent Hudson, Emily Garner & Francisco Puentes

Portland State University, Urban Agriculture & Food Systems Capstone, Spring 2015

Faculty Instructor: Nathan McClintock, PhD

N - Ok so I always plant flowers up here, my father hates flowers. He is the oldest of six. I was raised here in Portland and... yeah my father always grew...stuff and so I've been around it all my life. And then their father and I purchased this house four years ago and when we got it the same house and got the backyard started and so I was like this is perfect this is what I need because I definitely wanted to start my own garden but I hadn't realized how clueless I was, having been raised by my folks and having a garden and so when I went to Fix-it Fair is when I came into contact with Growing Gardens and realized I could use them as a resource.

E - So after you got started with Growing Gardens that was your first experience gardening on your own?

N - Yes yes, as an adult.

E - Awesome, that's so great. So what was the fair you were at that you?

N-The Fix-It Fair?

E-Fix-It Fair? What is that?

N-Have you.. ok, the Fix-It Fair, I believe they have them biannually and they are generally in random places, I went to one here in North Portland I believe but they have them in ne and east countyish area and they are generally at a school and it a day, a saturday, from 8 to 3ish they just have a community common and all these resources are there so just so you just so you know what resources are available here in the city so various places like PGE and portland water sewer and all your main utl. with programs that help describe that you know if you're a family in need these are the programs that will help assist with finances theres gg is there there is also folks, a lot of gardening stuff, learning how to compost learning how to cut your own trees, like amateur aboretumist, cooking with your kids weatherizing your home so there is a whole variety of workshops to choose from and they serve you lunch and there is childcare for the for free and there is free lead testing for the kids and yeah I went to three over course of a couple years lol. I think I found a flyer at the library and that's how I heard about it.

E & K-sounds like a valuable resource, mmhmm

E- So when you heard about Growing Gardens what was your experience dealing with them and how did the program work for you?

N- the program seemed fairly simple the app process was fine it was very easy fill out if you are on wick or some type of assistance then you will qual so they came with volunteers and they helped digged two garden plots out and that was really great because I got to see them do it and do the process and now I have five garden plots and so I was able to the same process with the other ones so that was great and so

the first year you have a mentor which I suppose...useful...it was really hard for me to use her in way that I found was useful and beneficial to myself and my family so I would like some kind of tweaking with that. I always find that mentorship is great and def needed past that one year mark and I don't know if that necessarily means growing with that same mentor through year two and year three but having someone touch base with you and call you up, those reminder calls would be great.

E- think that's something the program wants to do is help families like you. So was it mostly you contacting your mentor when you needed assistance?

N- no that was another thing I would never do that. I think there was times where she needed to meet with me three times or come for a home visit and I missed one of the potluck dates and that was hard. So I think better communication like texting would be better.

E- And so it looks like you have a little compost pile growing back there?

N- yeah yeah so we started a compost thing I don't know compost we had a right and so its nice that the city composts now so im like "eh do I really want to compost" lol (turns away to address her children).

K- So in terms of gardening how has it affected your life?

N- the biggest impact it has had is the.....the welcoming aspect of go outside and get your hands in dirt..for myself and my boys you know in terms of finances and like using the produce and everything else like that is coming. It's hard for me still but the most important thing for me is oh my god I got to get out of the house I got to do something I got a baby strapped to my back, I'm pregnant you know that kind of thing I can't really go out with all three of them without causing some sort of a fuss so having the freedom to go in my backyard and make change and see the physical change and my boys have been able to understand that food doesn't come from the grocery store has been priceless for them to understand that and whether they don't like the egg plants I grow they always there is always something in the backyard they like versus the store.

K-they like to get their hands dirty?

N-they do, this one likes to eat worms they love roly pollies capturing things slugs things that are bad and the roly pollies I don't know what they do I just tell them to just leave them alone.

K-So sort of similar in what ways if any (gardening) has it affected your diet? you say you don't really shop at the store anymore?

N- oh no there is a lot of that how has it affected my diet.....it's hard to say um.. changing my diet here has been really simple and great having a garden I think more than anything it reminds me that I need to eat more green (laughing) more things that are green (Emily-all the green stuff). All the green stuff but yeah I think it's also been to watch the boys go out and enjoy because I have three blueberry plants and a raspberry plant and bush and just getting them to understand what sugar within a fruit is versus sugar added to a cookie has been really amazing and so its affected my sons diet quite a bit where they are like I want something sweet, can I have an apple mom? And I say Yes! yes you can!

K-how long have you been growing with Growing Gardens, how long have you had your bed here?

N-this is my third summer

K-and have you participated at any of the build they do at other people's homes?

N-no no I have not

K-can you describe you best experience with Growing Gardens? One that stands out?

N- I really enjoyed the class we had I think they would come in the fall made the garden and this I think was in the winter time when they a class and they brought all the first year gardeners and I think it was all the gardens from past years and they taught us to lay out our crop in the two plots we had where things

would go, taught about crop rotation and how much space we would need and I loved that I love organizing and the way my father would garden would be oh heres some dirt and a shovel put it in if it doesn't grow throw more good dirt more good

K-so what do you like to produce out there, what do you like to grow?

N-Cherry tomatoes are great the boys like to pick them and they go right in their mouths, the big slicer tomatoes are getting a little bit easier at understanding to cut it and to use it for things, guys just would tell me slicing big slices of tomato and using a little bit of salt was his favorite and I was like wow ok so we grow that I love my mixed salad greens a lot I have a blender that I will put them in with an apple and some orange juice and do a weird green smoothie greenie that the boys will generally drink so that's awesome I do variety of chilies like jalapeno and anchos and just I use those for making salsa the calabasas the pumpkins are a big favorite around here so I try and give lots and lots of space for the vines to take over. Last year [speaking to child] how many pumpkins do you think we had baby?

Child-we had thousands and thousands of little pumpkins

N-thousands and thousands of little pumpkins I mean we had at least 50 of the small tiny ones and they got to line the deck with them and the kids drew smiley faces on them and it's just a really great thing to watch the season change with plants you plant and harvest things and it especially with the pumpkins takes you into the school year and into fall which is great so butternut squash cucumber are huge we love them the boys love them with salt and I think that's about it. (14:30-16:00)

K-So how has growing your own food made you aware of larger food systems, industrial agriculture produce food systems?

N-I try not to (Laughing) yes its definitely terrifying because I know I can't grow enough food for my myself and my family but what do I like about this doing this is my kids understand what it takes to grow food right so they are more more respectful of food at the dinner and they see that a someone planted this and water this and grew this and the whole process they begin to understand and they haven't seen.(18:10-19:25)

K-how do you feel when you're gardening?

N- I love it I am a single mom of three young sons and I don't get a lot of quote unquote down time. I mean I don't even know how you would describe it it is way for me to check out but really to check back in it's an amazing process I don't have to go on my phone I don't get to watch netflix, you know do all these things that are distractions to take away from my life because my life is so bad but instead I get to go in and make a difference in my yard be outside with my kids they can see me doing something productive and yet it's also my own time and when they see me and when they see me gardening they see oh mom is in her zone like I have to go do something else so it is something that has allowed me to gain a lot of peace in this time in my life. (19:38-20:30)