

## **PDX GARDEN STORIES**

### **Interview with Madree from Growing Gardens Home Gardens Program Portland, Oregon**

Conducted by Paul Proto

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Faculty Instructor: Nathan McClintock, PhD

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0:16 **Paul:** Question one would be: What motivated you to become part of the Growing Gardens and learn to grow your own food?

0:23 **Madree:** It was mostly because I was sick at the time, and I used all my paid time off...Financially things were difficult and I have a little boy at home that I have to worry about and so I was looking around online for what kind of resources were available that I didn't already know of like food banks, things like that.

0:56 **Madree:** And I came across Growing Gardens and I called.

1:06 **Paul:** Yeah, so would you say that the search for healthier foods was one of your motivations for growing your own?

1:10 **Madree:** No [Laughs]

1:13 **Paul:** No, no...

1:13 **Madree:** I think for a lot of people it is, but for me it was about food security. That's what I was worried about. At that point, you know when you don't have a lot of money, eating healthy is important but It's not number one when you have children. You're worried about food period.

1:35 **Paul:** Right, right. Cost effectiveness...

1:36 **Madree:** You know, you don't really... you're not gonna turn down a burger because it's unhealthy, you know, over a salad. Food is food when you don't want your children to go without.

1:52 **Paul:** Right, and a cheeseburger is a tenth of the price of a salad these days. Perfect, well, how have you, your family, your neighbors benefited from your garden and the program itself?

2:05 **Madree:** Well, I benefited in a lot of ways. It helped me because I was recovering from brain surgery when I first started gardening, and it got me out of the bed every day, you know I had to go outside every day and grow.

2:20 **Madree:** I didn't know what I was doing, so I went out to the community because I needed to go to classes and I didn't turn anything down. You know, every class Growing Gardens offered, I went to. And took my son with... And then it has helped because we eat from our garden every day, usually summer time. You know...not very good at gardening year round [both laugh]

2:48 **Madree:** I try, but it's helped in the community because my neighbors-I garden in my front yard- and my neighbors stop by, you know, and they ask,"Oh, what is that?" Like last year I decided over winter last year with fava beans and I've never done fava beans before so one of my neighbors came by with his kid just walking by and was like 'oh what is that you're growing right there?'

3:26 **Madree:** 'And what do you use that for?' And I'm like "I'm not gonna harvest it... I'm gonna turn it under in the soil and then it just brings conversations, you know. My zucchinis every year are huge HUGE and I'm always passing those out when people stop by.

3:51 **Paul:** You can make a lot with that and a lot can you can produce a lot from that. So would

you say that the garden itself was sort of a medicine when you were healing, and the healing process did getting close to the earth kinda help you kinda feel better?

4:07 **Madree:** For sure, for sure. And then I read a study last year that said that digging around in the dirt releases some hormones that help with depression and I truly believe that you know, because I love growing, you know and it's crazy because you know I was a medical social worker for a long time and I thought that that was my life path and then through growing I found out that I have a whole different path you know and I'll be 40 this year and I guess I'm just now finding out what I want to do.

4:54 **Paul:** It's interesting because social working and you know community garden sorta seems like a way to help people on a more personal level. Social working and kinda being a gardener. So it's almost like you just kinda redefined your path.

5:13 **Madree:** Yeah, it's definitely not what I want to do it's definitely not very far from what I was doing. Just with a different population.

5:22 **Paul:** For sure

5:23 **Madree:** Before I was working with developmentally disabled adults, and now that's not what I want to do, I work with children now

5:34 **Madree:** With growing, I went through the school garden coordinator training last year at Growing Gardens and I'm taking this year off from Garden club but I was there last year and then I found my Grape[?] program at OSU that offers Bachelors' in public health and I thought before you only had to have a Masters' in public health and I don't want to have to go back to school for that long, ever [laughs]

6:06 **Madree:** So, it's really great and I saw that's only one in the country as far as I know for Bachelors' program and I've decided I'm trying to convince the government that and the WIC offices that it's important that instead of giving out farmers market vouchers every year to the participants of WIC like they do, why can't we build them a garden?

6:31 **Madree:** As part of the WIC program, they already give out vouchers every month for fresh fruits and vegetables and things like that well why can't we use the same money and build them a garden and do just like Growing Gardens does.. you know I didn't know how to grow...

6:53 **Madree:** And they gave me seeds and starts and somebody out there to hold my hand whenever I needed it, you know.

7:02 **Paul:** Now, getting into the health aspect of it, what was the most difficult or challenging aspect of gardening for you? What did you need the most assistance with, what was the most complex or foreign thing to you?

7:20 **Madree:** Um, I think it's crazy um,

7:25 **Paul:** Cuz we all basically know the basics of gardening- you stick a seed in the ground, and something happens, right? But that's not really gardening

7:33 **Madree:** Yeah, and well I have a really green thumb and my garden has been hugely successful all the time... even things that people said wouldn't grow I've forgotten to water it and it grew I don't know how. My problem is thinning plants. When I see things that are growing, I can't pull it out of the ground

7:54 **Paul:** Yeah, it's hard to stop something that's growing, you've created it.

8:02 **Madree:** Yes, and I've had people come out and they tell me that's what I always need help with. Help me thin, and teach me what I have to pull out because I can't kill it.

8:17 **Paul:** So the difficult part to you wasn't the actual growing it's the trimming down, it's the selecting. [Small talk]

8:34 **Madree:** Well I grew up in a house where we had house plants everywhere, and my mom

had flowers and stuff like that so I've always had plants that I propagated myself . My mom has a plant that I like; I pull a leaf off of it and get it started. Gardening wasn't too far away from that.

8:56 **Madree:** I just was kinda lucky.

9:16 **Madree:** And there were a few things I didn't understand like how to make a hill farm.

They say you have to hill your seeds for certain things like potatoes, or cucumbers, I didn't get it and I threw 'em in there... they grew.

9:31 **Paul:** yeah, life will find a way. How has the garden impacted your diet...your food choices that you make... how do you cook your favorite vegetable?

9:51 **Madree:** Well, not a lot of vegetables make it into my house. My son and his dog are outside eating from the garden. He likes raw vegetables apparently, not cooked ones. Spinach was big for a long time, you know. Why won't you eat spinach? I was cooking it from the garden, he didn't like it. He says, "no mom, I like the spinach that comes in the salad with the big leaves.

10:18 **Madree:** and I'm like, "Oh, so, you like raw spinach." And he says, "yeah I don't like it when it's soggy. Same with carrots. He likes them crunchy.

10:34 **Madree:** I cook or I grow mostly like cherry tomatoes rather than the big slicing tomatoes because my son loves cherry tomatoes. So we buy a lot in the grocery store, he'll ask for a little tub of cherry tomatoes and then he'll eat them all in the car before we get home. And I'm like, "well, that was a waste". You know? So I grow them and he's outside picking them and eating them.

11:05 **Paul:** Do you think the garden has motivated his diet, has kinda inspired him to want to eat tomatoes because he sees them growing and he can taste them and associate them with something he's done?

11:18 **Madree:** I'd like to say yes but no. Ever since he was small, I have always taken him to farmers markets every week. He's allowed -- I believe that kids eat what they're taught what they're supposed to. I don't believe in kids' food versus adult food. A lot of people seem to think that children can only eat orange slices with a burger or chicken nuggets or fries. My son gets that stuff but he also gets fresh fruits and vegetables

12:06 **Madree:** And I think when they're allowed to grow it OR when they're allowed to pick what they're going to eat, they're more likely to try it.

12:19 **Paul:** [small talk about kids]

12:19-17:20 Talk about food and school irrelevant to gardening

17:23 **Paul:** What do you like most about gardening and growing food? Is there a certain thing that shines out to you, what would be the most liked aspect of gardening?

17:37 **Madree:** Not in my garden as much as I like seeing other people's kids eating well, eating healthy, trying things that they never liked before and because that's kinda what my garden has evolved into.

18:03 **Madree:** My friend's kids come over and they dig up my garden and they mess up my seeds and my plants and I say you know, they're free to touch anything they want to on there because they're not gonna want to grow if they never get dirty or play in the dirt.

18:23 **Madree:** I feel like a lot of my life was wasted and wondering where food was gonna come from or being hungry... or whatever. It's true for a lot of kids, they don't have a lot but why doesn't everybody just grow what they need outside? Nobody would be hungry if they knew that you can grow what you need in your yard. It might not be the best of everything, it might not be the foods that you always want but it's food and it's pretty much free and always available.

19:46 **Paul:** Would you say that you contribute to a healthy nutrition for your neighbors, your

family, from your garden?

19:54 **Madree:** Oh yeah, except my best friend. I gave her a ton of zucchini last year and really big ones, and she was making like, chocolate zucchini bread. And I didn't get any.

20:42 **Madree:** Normally in the summer though, my dinner comes from the garden most nights. I'm not a heavy eater in the evenings, especially when it's hot so I go out and make salad. Every year I plant not the things I would really like to try and grow. I plant with a vision in mind as to what my garden is this year. So I want to make sure that I can eat from it rather than just growing things just to be growing things. Knowing that I'm not necessarily going to consume it kinda like growing peas or beans for me I don't have enough space as what I would need to be able to put up or can or whatever. And shelling it and harvesting it is way more work than what I'm willing to put in.

21:47 **Paul:** And that's another thing about the Urban agriculture movement is the difference between hobby farming and then actually farming to produce food for yourself and your family.

22:43 **Madree:** I really do want to learn how to can more than what I do and preserve and you know, one day I dream of having a little trailer or manufacture home on an acre so I can live off of my land or whatever. I don't want to waste all my money giving it to someone else the things I can do myself but I'm pretty lazy too. I don't want all of the work that goes into all of it sometimes so for me growing the cherry tomatoes are better than the larger tomatoes because then I won't have to say 'well what am I going to do with all these before they spoil because we aren't gonna eat all of them before they spoil.