

PDX Garden Stories

Interviews with participants in Growing Gardens, Home Gardens Program Portland, Oregon

Interview with Shanda

Conducted by Calen Robinette and Robert Bomstad

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Faculty Instructor: Nathan McClintock, PhD

0:06 C- What role did gardening play in your life prior to getting involved with growing gardens?

S- Well when I was a kid I used to go out to the berries, and pick berries. my friend had a farm. So not a really big role. None of my family and friends have a garden. Until now, a few people do now because of my suggestions, but before that nothing. I think my main goal was for my kids health and my own, and not spending so much money.

C- Haha, thats a big reason I garden. Thats awesome. You went out berry picking on Sauvies Island?

S- Yep, Sauvies Island when I was younger. So I've always had it kind of in my genes.

C- So you're not new to gardening you've gone out and done all that. That's awesome. So your friend had a farm?

1:05 S- Yeah when I was growing up my friend, her aunt had a farm. And we used to go out there and play with the animals and go in the river. Then we'd climb on the top and jump onto the hay. And then we were picking squash, and that was the first time I realized squash had all kinds of different shapes and bumps and things like that, and different varieties.

C- Thats awesome. So for your garden, you did this through your program and since you had your roommate move in you had to take it out?

1:59 S- Yeah, and then I'm doing some remodeling out there. I just had someone come yesterday, so we're going to build it (the garden beds) up a foot and a half, but it's going to be brick, it's not going to be wood. Just because I found the wood fell apart so quick and easy and I went to a home and garden show and I saw the ones that people were making out of brick and yes it's going to be a little more expensive, but I think it's going to be nicer looking. And if the dog goes back there again it's (excrement) not going to sink into the wood.

C- Yeah. So when you were growing what did you grow when you were using the program. You showed me some pictures, which were really awesome.

2:48 S- Yeah, we had peas, kale, baby cucumbers, garlic, eggplant, tomatoes, lettuce, three different kinds of lettuce. Oh and I had a pepper plant, and I got 20 peppers off of it. And I had cilantro, basil, and green peppers.

C- That's awesome. Were you familiar with all of those before growing, or seeing them before or was that all---

S- Yeah I saw them before. Broccoli too. Cabbage and brussel sprouts. Those ones didn't look very good

C- Yeah those ones are hard.

3:59 S- Yeah it was hard and then it scared me so I didn't want it.

C- Its so funny those ones freaked me out to at first. They look alien almost. it's just that weird stalk and then a bunch of little nubs on it.

R- So you grew all of that back there

S- Yeah. Mhm.

R- That's quite a variety.

S- Yeah I had two beds. So on that one over there I had my--- I did the garlic, and then when I harvested the garlic I put in the cilantro. And then I had my peas and when I harvested my peas I put in my onions and lettuce. And then the big one I had the tomatoes, the cucumbers, and the eggplants, and the lettuce were all at the bottom too.

C- Cool

R- Nice

S- And then my tomatoes grew over on the outside of the house there for some reason. I didn't plant over there. So how did they go through the concrete. How did they do that?

5:01 C- That's crazy. I suspect bird or pests got into your tomatoes and seeded them basically?

S- Yeah because I was like why do I have a whole row. I didn't know but I had a whole row of tomatoes. So I'm expecting they're going to grow back. Shouldn't they have grown back by now? Or is it about time?

C- It depends, if they're wild seeded like if you didn't do starters they probably won't start until june. I direct seeded last year and those ones took a little longer and didn't end up coming to fruit until like late august. This year I did a bunch of starters so they're all going on right now.

S- Okay

C- So how did you decide which vegetables to use, was it based off of Growing Gardens suggestions?

S- Based off of what I ate and what was going bad in my refrigerator. Because I bought it and didn't use it all up right away.

6:02 C- Oh so you'd plant based off of stuff you had in you fridge you'd use to plant?

S- Yeah

C- Nice! That's really awesome, that's really cool. What did you end up cooking with it if you don't mind me asking?

S- We made some pickles, I made some spaghetti sauce, salsa. The garlic I used everyday on whatever I was cooking. Eggplant I didn't know how or what to do with it. And then when I opened it, it didn't look right, it looked like a sponge. And so I think I had it in some thai food before so that's why I got it. And I was like I don't even like what it looks like as I cut it open so I'm not going to do that anymore. So I gave it too my neighbors, and so that's the other thing, I became--- I mean we do have a community garden here--- But once I started making my own compost and stuff everything got bigger. And so I'd give it out to my neighbors. But I could tell last year, before we started remodeling, I was like oh the sun is out earlier. You know the weather was different, but my stuff was smaller than the year before everything. And then my garlic started sprouting there and they already got the little bulb at the top. So I don't think my garden was very happy last year.

7:30 C- Yeah. Last years (weather) threw me off a lot. I wasn't able to grow a lot of the stuff I wanted to because it just got fried.

S- Yeah and it was just too much, the sun came too strong to me I think.

C- Yeah we had that first month of almost no rain and a lot of my stuff got wrecked

S- And aphids came a lot stronger for me then they did last year then the year before.

8:00

C- City Farm has ladybugs that you can grab from them, and I heard through a friend of a friend that if you spray them with Sprite [...] they'll stay.

S- What kind of spray?

R- Oh, like, sugar water?

[...Discussion about ladybugs and sugar water here]

C- Okay, cool, so you did a little pickling; did you do any freezing or canning?

8:33 S- So I bought the cans, but when I was on facebook and google and all that trying to figure out how to boil them before, that part got confusing so no. I just rinsed my can out in extremely hot water... and put the pickles in there. But that was my goal because of all the tomatoes that I had and we use them on a regular basis. I was like how do I preserve these and I couldn't figure that part out. But I did do my greens. I didn't put them in a jar, but I did blanch them and put them in freezer bags. So the greens came out... Oh, that's right I had collard greens too... or mustard greens

9:29 C - So what are you planning on growing the next time around? The same things?

S - The same things because it worked well and it wasn't too much and we used everything. But I think I'm going to have more garlic. Last time I had 18 and gave them to my neighbors, too. It was a nice little batch.

10:00 C - I have to say, out of the space you have, you have the highest production garden I've heard of. That's crazy.

S - Yeah, it was pretty neat. And I was really happy about it, it was really thriving too. And I liked being able to give to my neighbors. That was the main part, was sharing.

C - And you said that now some of your neighbors are getting gardens themselves?

S- Yeah, they have pots, little pots going. And my neighbor down on the end, she's --I don't know if she's still doing it, but she had tomato and some lettuce going. She's a little person so she couldn't do anything big, and I was like just put them in a pot and let it go.

C - So when the garden was installed, how else did Growing Gardens work with you--a little bit more than just the installation? Did you do anything else with them?

S- Yeah, I had a mentor. She...brought me a stand for my cucumbers, some soil, she helped me
11:00 plant, she helped me harvest and told me when to, she brought over the stuff to do a cover crop and talked to me about how to do that. And as I kept going, then it just became once

a week, and I had her connected to my blog, or my feed, or my iCloud, and I would put things up there. She would respond to that too. And that was really good because a lot of people who had iPhones would respond back to me “Oh you should do this or you should do this!” And that was really neat.

C - So did you take other classes?

12:00 S - Yeah, I took... [pause]. I did the compost class and that was how I learned which one I wanted to do. And then the canning class and that's-- Well no, no, I didn't make it to the canning class. I came out and they were talking about seeding, and when to seed and plant. So I have a book from them and some seeds and some soil, when to plant and how much to plant. I listened to them a little bit on the spacing, but I found that my plants were okay in the space that I had them in. Because... I had a lot going in each one. So I followed their directions 13:00 on the cilantro and the garlic and the red onions. And what I found that was nice was that the onions and the garlic started to infuse because I guess they're in the same family. So the garlics that were closer to the red onions had a little bit of a tint to them, and they were so good. My stepmother called me and said what did you do to the garlic? And I was like, I don't know but I'm sorry if those were bad because they were next to the onions. And she said no, she tasted a little bit of the onion in it. So that's my goal again, to kind of go along the same route because it wasn't broke and it worked really good. And I liked the bigger tomatoes that I had that they gave me. They were shaped different and they were just so full of juice and the skin was thick. I wanted to go to the fruit tree giveaway that I think it's this weekend? Because I went to the store 14:00 the other day and I got some plums and some peaches and they were hard. So I let them sit out for a couple of days and they were still hard. Then a week went by and they were still hard. And I was like “Don't eat that fruit, there's something wrong with it! It's not right.” It's got too many chemicals in it.

C - Yeah, fruit trees this early are just, they're not quite there yet. My roommates brought home peaches and they were so tiny, they were just not--

S - There's no flavor.

C - Yeah, exactly.

S - These were pretty good size, this was last month and I was just like waiting. I kept touching them and everything. And about a week and half went by and still nothing. And then the kids bit one. And I said okay, let's bite it and set it out and see what happens. It didn't even rot, it didn't 15:00do anything.

C - That's creepy. That's really creepy!

S - So I was like okay, well, I don't want to get fruit from the store anymore.

C - Yeah, there's a ton of... cherry trees at least, there's a ton around. I have a peach tree in my backyard, I got really lucky moving into my house.

S- Here?

C - Yeah, I have a peach tree.

S - And it grew?

C - Yeah. It's been there for a couple of years.

S - I didn't know it was hot enough to grow peaches. So the thing that I go this week, if it is... I gotta call Ms. Lathan, because she's the North Portland Community Outreach Garden Coordinator, and confirm if that's going to be there. Because I want a peach tree, and I'll put it right in front. There's all that sun--I'll just take out one of those bushes. [...] But at the end of the 16:00 day, I've--When I had my garden, I saved a boat load of money. I was able to harvest what I need as I needed it. Once I saw that it was going over, I gave it to my neighbors. I have food in there now that's going bad because I had to buy it in bulk, I couldn't use it all. I think I'm going to add more squash and fresh basil...

16:38 S - Can we grow mushrooms?

[We talk about mushroom growing for a bit]

17:40 C - What excited you most about the Growing Gardens program? And, what's your favorite aspect of gardening in general?

17:47 S - Oh, they were at my kids' school and they put a garden in there. I had started volunteering there and then someone was telling my about the class they have and said, "oh do you want to garden in your backyard?" "Well... I don't know. How long will it take and, you know, what does it consist of?" So then, after I got it put in, I was like, "oh, this is therapeutic!" So I'd play my music, and have a glass of wine, and go out there in my hat. [Laughter] Yeah, so, that was the encouragement of it. I started volunteering at my kids' school.

18:34 C - And are you thinking about talking with them again as you go forward?

18:37 S - Oh yeah, I'm going to start --- definitely go back. And that's why I'm trying to really figure out to see what the roommate's doing. Because, brick is going to be very expensive.