

GROW-ZONE

A Quarterly Journal Review of our Seasons

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The Fall Harvest

"Let food be thy
medicine and medicine
be thy food."
-Hippocrates



Though we are known by some for our botanical gardens and exotic plant collections, our crop farming is one of our largest annual projects! We currently have five raised bed gardens that we fill with a variety of crops, not to mention the supplementary berry patches and fruit orchards. A lot of pride is taken in our farming practices; it is no small thing to grow your own food! All of the hard work that our garden staff puts into growing healthy, nutritious fruits and vegetables pays off for us all in the fall.



The outstanding crops from this year's harvest were squashes, beets, carrots, parsnips, sweet potatoes, leeks & eggplants. We traditionally preserve a percentage of our produce for use throughout the winter months. (Read more about our canning process on Page 3.) Our staff also benefits from our farming practices by taking home some of the yield as well. Beyond that, the remainder of our season's reaping is donated to the local Meals on Wheels organization. They will use our crops in their recipes that get delivered to their clients throughout Sheboygan County. This year, we donated about 800 pounds of produce to be used in their delivery meals. We hope the community enjoys the fresh food as much as we do!



Scarecrow Festival 2024



Scarecrow Festival Recap



On October 5th & 6th, we hosted the 5th annual Scarecrow Festival for the Sheboygan County YMCA's Camp Y-Koda, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing youth and families with valuable outdoor experiences. It was a record year for attendance, with 1300 visitors going through the gardens over the 2-day event. Widely known as a family event, guests can vote on their favorite scarecrows by category, go fishing in the Farm House pond, have their face painted, enjoy roasting s'mores at the Cornucopia firepit, and more! Sponsors showed up to support the Camp Y-Koda organization in a multitude of ways, from making large donations, funding supplies, buying in for their company's scarecrow, and volunteering their time. It's great to see so much community involvement for this event!

There were a record 50 scarecrow entries in 2024! Let's see if we can beat that in 2025!



Fishing for bluegills.



All aboard the Dairyland Express.



Story time on the hay bales.



The Horse and Cow Canning Kitchen



The months of August to October is peak canning season! George Quiriconi is the head chef in the 'Horse and Cow Canning Kitchen' that we have onsite. He preserves many of our garden's fruits by the way of making jellies, salsas, pie fillings, etc. Much of our vegetable crops are also canned and are then usable for months afterwards. This fall, George gave a pressure canning demonstration on carrots, and he explains his process below.

It should be noted that starchy vegetables with low acidity, like carrots, must be preserved by pressure canning. The first step is taking the skin off the carrot and chopping them into smaller pieces, about one inch in diameter. George elects to do a "cold packing" process with our carrots, which means he cans the vegetable uncooked, and adds boiling water into the jar before sealing. For pressure canning, the water in the pot must be heated to a temperature higher than 212°F in order to kill bacteria for any low acidity vegetable. For a pressure canner, adjusting the pressure to set the temperature depends on the elevation in your area. For us, we need 10 pounds of pressure to maintain a temperature of 240°F. For carrots to preserve correctly, this pressure and temperature must be kept for 25 minutes, but this amount of time may vary for other vegetables.



(Right) George shows the "difference" between a red carrot and an orange carrot. Though they are different colors on the outside, they are still the same "carrot orange" on the inside.



With a pressure canner, venting the pot is necessary to accurately set the temperature. Per the FDA guidelines, the pressure canner needs to vent for 10 minutes, and then you are able to replace the counterweight onto the vent. Once the counterweight skips on the vent in a rolling motion for 10 seconds, then your temperature and pressure are set.

George has his techniques down to a science! Here, we'll share a few more of his pointers. Sanitizing lids and jars in boiling water at 212 F for at least five minutes is essential. Leaving 1/4 inch at the top of each jar allows for pressure alterations. Using salt without iodine (canning salt) prevents the water from clouding and adds a great taste! Last but not least, wipe the rim of each jar before covering and adding it into the pot! This prevents jars (and hearts) from breaking.

Bear Woods - New Pathways



The Bear Woods trail is a forest habitat situated above a natural ravine that runs into Lake Michigan. This fall, the existing main pathway was lined with cobbled stones, along with a brand-new foot path that meanders through the trees. We look forward to walking among the ephemeral woodland flowers in springtime using both the new and the old path!



Tiffany Brunner & her Castor Bean baby

Castor Beans : Our Annual Trees

Castor beans (*Ricinus communis*) are one of the most unique plants grown in our gardens. In frost-free climates, castor beans are grown as perennial evergreens and are considered semi-woody, large shrubs or small trees. In our climate, it is grown as a warm-season annual tree and can exceed 10 feet in height due to its rapid growth in summer. Our greenhouse manager, Tiffany Brunner, has successfully started these plants from seed over the last few years and has shared a few tips that she found to help them excel! She explained that castor beans love to be in full sun and require lots of water to thrive. Since they grow so tall, so quickly, she recommends propping them up with a tree stake, along with putting rocks around their base to keep them stabilized.



(Above) An adult castor bean soaks up the sun.



(Left) Castor Bean seedlings sprout in the greenhouse.



(Right) Castor bean seeds are kept overwinter to sow new seedlings next spring.

One thing to keep in mind about castor beans is that their seeds are incredibly toxic, so they should be kept out of the reach of children and pets. The seeds contain a compound called ricin, one of the deadliest natural poisons, estimated as 6,000 times more poisonous than cyanide and 12,000 times more poisonous than rattlesnake venom. Nonetheless, castor beans have had many uses throughout human history. More than 4,000 years ago, Egyptians used castor oil made from the seeds to keep their lamps lit. In the U.S., the military used the oil in aircraft lubricants as well as in the production of explosives.

Americans also have used castor oil in the making of soaps, linoleum, nylon, paints and electrical insulations.

Daffodils & Tulips

It may seem odd to sow new plantings into the ground in Fall, but it is actually more natural for some plants, and they have adapted to this growth timeline. In our gardens, both daffodils and tulips are planted in mid-end of October. This gives them a few weeks to establish root growth before the ground freezes.

Our tulips are planted in beds near main gathering areas or focal points around the farm. In the past, we have found squirrels and other critters on occasion raiding the beds planted with bulbs before they have a chance to sprout. Our garden staff is clever and has started burying large pattern wire mesh in the ground above the tulip bulbs. The tulip greens can still grow up through the holes in the mesh in the spring, and the squirrels can't get to them – brilliant!

We also use special drill bits designed for bulb planting, to make the process faster and easier on our staff!



A "bulb" of garlic

A "clove" of garlic



Straw mulch insulates our planted garlic.

Hardneck Garlic

During the last week of October, we planted four varieties of hardneck garlic, which are more adapted to growing in colder climates than their softneck counterparts. Hardneck garlic needs cool temperatures for the first eight weeks of growing, which is why we plant them in late October. We leave a thin papery coating on each clove, and plant them 2-3" in the ground, and at least 6" apart. We mulch with straw after planting to further insulate them in our raised garden beds.

After about 270 days, near the end of July, we will see 2-3 sets of leaves die on the above ground portion of the plant; this means that it is time to harvest! We will then hang and dry them for three weeks, and once cured they will be usable in our farm recipes for 6-8 months!

Using fresh garlic in your recipes can have a host of health benefits, including lowered blood pressure, improved cholesterol levels and detoxification!



Welcome Home "Otto"!

Shelley Hildebrandt attended a tour of the gardens over the summer and found a great new home for her Peruvian Apple Cactus (*Cereus peruvianus*) in our Show Greenhouse's desert fauna display. She had taken care of it for nearly 50 years after receiving it from her great uncle, Otto Hildebrandt, who had first collected it from the desert in Arizona during the 1920's. When Shelley realized that the cactus was getting too large for its corner in her home, she graciously decided to donate it to Jay and his collection. We are very grateful, and promise to take good care of this now 100+ year old cactus, which we have nicknamed "Otto" in honor of her late uncle, who loved and cared for it first!



Shelley Hildebrandt & "Otto" the Cactus

A Journey To Japan



In September, hundreds of guests visited the gardens to celebrate Sheboygan's Japanese sister city, Tsubame! The Sheboygan Mayor's International Committee organized Japanese demonstrations like origami, kendo & a traditional fisherman's dance was performed by Lakeland's Japanese Association.



School Field Trips

Local school groups and homeschool families enjoyed harvesting and fall-themed educational activities on their visits to the gardens. Along with a train ride, of course!



Phenology - “the study of cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena, especially in relation to climate and plant and animal life.”

Date: August 23, 2024

High Temp: 78; Sunny

Notes: Swallowtail butterfly caterpillars are seen coating the fennel plants in the Heritage Garden



Date: September 6, 2024

High Temp: 62; Sunny

Notes: Puff ball mushrooms were spotted along the path between the guest houses, the Katsura trees' leaves are turning colors and smell like cotton candy

Date: September 20, 2024

High Temp: 78; Overcast

Notes: Lilacs are blooming again in the gardens; potatoes have been harvested



Date: October 28, 2024

High Temp: 65; Sunny

Notes: Garlic was planted in the Pumpkin Patch today; dozens of Robins seen eating crabapples N of the Perch Pond; the witch hazel is blooming E of the Farm House Pond