Growing Food at Home
But Not Alone

Zuleyja Prieto of *Rooting Through Corn, Planting Families*
Jon Zirkle of Bushelcraft Farm

from the Zero Waste Goshen website description of class

Title: Growing Food at Home, But Not Alone: a model for reducing waste, sharing resources and knowledge, and building community

Description: Want to grow food for your household but feel overwhelmed by needing to buy all the supplies and acquire all the knowledge by yourself? Come hear Zuleyja Prieto of Goshen share about a community project called *Rooted Through Corn, Planting Families,* which supports backyard gardeners in raising, honoring, and sharing heritage corn seed as well as tools, supplies, and knowledge. Learn how a community of growers is reducing wasted time, energy, materials, and knowledge by sharing, and how building relationships with other gardeners can be key to success, sustenance, and sustainability. In addition to talking backyard corn, Jon Zirkle of Bushelcraft Farm will cover aspects of growing a variety of foods by starting small--at the backyard and patio scale. Attendees will have plenty of time for questions and sharing ideas as well as opportunities to acquire seeds for growing in 2022!

Presenters: Jon Zirkle and Zuleyja Prieto, members of the Rooting Through Corn, Planting Families project, a regional collaboration supported through a USDA-SARE Farmer Rancher grant.

https://goshenindiana.org/webinars---zero-waste-goshen

Rooting Through Corn, Planting Families

2018 - Michiana Heritage Corn Project = Seed bearer John Sherck, informal, 5 growers, every gardener in their own garden with common struggles/concerns

2020 - SARE Grant proposal “Heritage Corn: Planting, Challenges and Educating from the Family Plot Perspective”

2021 - Rooting Through Corn, Planting Families / Maíz y Raíz, Sembrando en Familia

Challenges

Underlying challenges that are being addressed in this project

-Need for shared resources

-Need for more knowledge about corn for human consumption/corn culture

-Environmental/geographic challenges to grow heritage corn (GMO corn all around us); climate change, adapting late maturing corn to short season

-Need for community building through planting (“*rooting*”)

Responding to these challenges:

Sharing Seeds

20 families = 100 people impacted

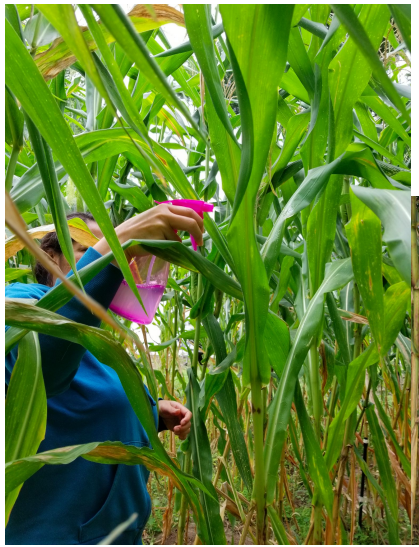
Sharing Tools

- Soil tests
- Sod Cutter
- Chain Saw
- Weed ripper
- Hand grinder

Freezer, metate, comal

Sharing Supplies

Compost
Organic fertilizer
Lime
Hand pollination materials
Mesh bags
Bird netting
BT
Arm work
Leg work
Ideas
Carpool
Books



Sharing Knowledge

Rooting Through Corn, Planting Families / Maíz y Raíz, Sembrando en familia

Published by Zuleyja Prieto · April 25, 2021 ·

https://fb.me/e/Yz92vqKn

Training #2 / Clase 2
See you Friday via Facebook Live!
¡Nos vemos el viernes por Facebook Live!... See more

FRI, APR 30, 2021

Get To Know Your Garden Soil: Texture, Fertilizers, and Preparing to Grow

7 Went · 14 Interested

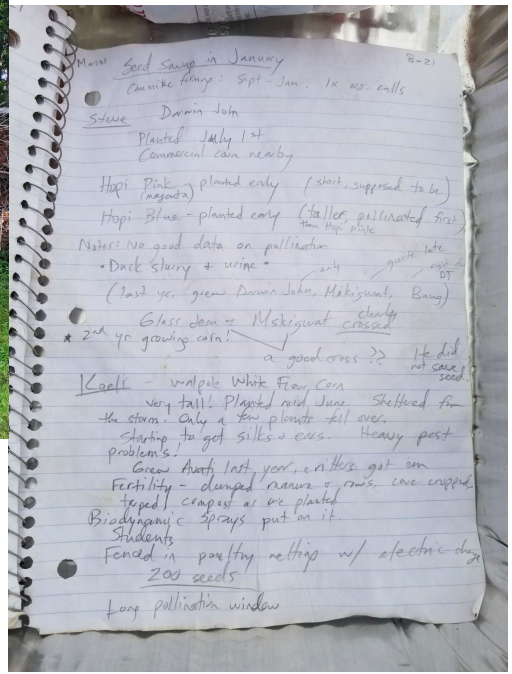
57	4	Boost unavailable
People reached	Engagements	

Like Comment Share

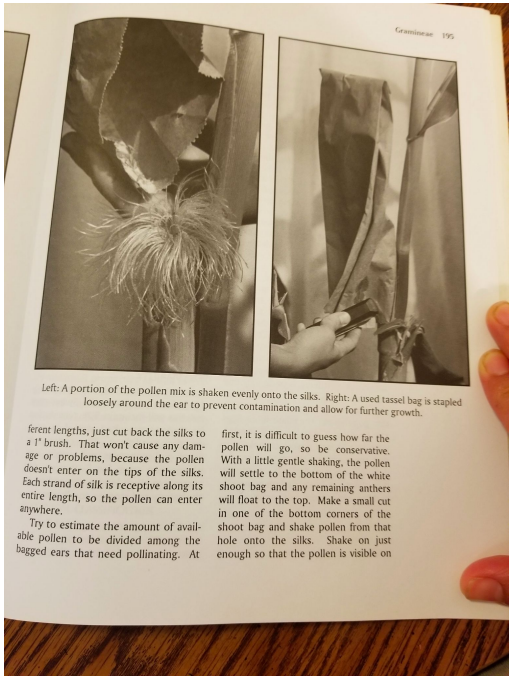
Stories of reducing wasted time, energy, materials

Making corn husk dolls - Reducing waste and sharing knowledge

Family Friendly Field Session at Steven Shantz's



Hand pollinating at Bushelcraft Farm



Left: A portion of the pollen mix is shaken evenly onto the silks. Right: A used tassel bag is stapled loosely around the ear to prevent contamination and allow for further growth.

ferent lengths, just cut back the silks to a 1" brush. That won't cause any damage or problems, because the pollen doesn't enter on the tips of the silks. Each strand of silk is receptive along its entire length, so the pollen can enter anywhere.

Try to estimate the amount of available pollen to be divided among the bagged ears that need pollinating. At first, it is difficult to guess how far the pollen will go, so be conservative. With a little gentle shaking, the pollen will settle to the bottom of the white shoot bag and any remaining anthers will float to the top. Make a small cut in one of the bottom corners of the shoot bag and shake pollen from that hole onto the silks. Shake on just enough so that the pollen is visible on

Harvest celebration and group husking

https://www.facebook.com/rootingthroughcorn/videos/459677375186640

Read about this project's description on the North Central SARE website:

https://projects.sare.org/project-reports/fnc21-1295/

(First time backyard corn grower in Elkhart, Indiana) "I learned more in this training session with you guys, than years and years of reading and trials."

The first year I grew Bofo corn, a native variety from Mexico, in my backyard I got 8 ears from a 20 x 20 foot plot. The second year I got 16 ears and cornworm damage was extense. On this third year, by amending my soil, early planting (as this is a very late maturing variety), applying biological pesticides, and increasing my plot size (20 x 25), I got 11 pounds of seed for eating and plenty of seeds for saving and sharing.

"Knowing that the native seed we began with and the seed we produced is free of GMOs is wonderful. All this hard work has its rewards!" - experienced farmer in Bristol, Indiana

"I come to these workshops to learn from everybody, then I go back to my plot and use it." - Backyard heritage corn grower in Fort Wayne, Indiana

What Can We Learn from the Corn Project That Might Also Apply to Other Kinds of Gardening?

Will gardening alone lead to more waste?

Could a network of supportive people and resources—a community—help sustain gardening efforts?

Gardening At Home: important considerations

Starting small is key

Consider growing on your patio, porch, or deck

If you have space to grow in the soil, consider creating a raised bed (or beds)

And consider a goals of reducing plastic waste as one way to decide what to grow

Gathering Your Thoughts, Making Intentions to Reduce Waste

First, do a self inventory:

1) What space to you have to work with? What are the dimensions? What are the perks and the limitations of that space?
2) How much time (hours per week) are you willing to commit? Will you be gone for big travel vacations, especially in hot/dry months of summer?
3) What skills and tasks are you good at? What tasks do you dislike or avoid?
4) What tools and supplies do you need? Can you think of others to partner with?
5) How fulfilling do you suspect growing food to be for you? Which aspects speak most to your values?
6) Do you have particular goals? Make at least two solid, tangible goals.

Gardening: Small Scale

Crops that might grow on a patio, deck, or sunny porch in containers:

Easier	**Medium**	**Somewhat advanced**
Tomatoes	‘Cooking greens’ like kale, collards, chard, mustard, bok choy/pak choy	Sweet potatoes and potatoes
Peppers & Eggplant	Kohlrabi	Cabbage/Broccoli/Brussels sprouts
Herbs	Zucchini	Cucumber
Green Onion or Perennial Onion	Beets, small radishes/small turnips	Pole beans
Heat-tolerant lettuces	Fennel	Figs
Edible flowers	Ginger & turmeric	Strawberries*

If on a patio or deck, are you growing pots that rest on soil, rock, or wood?

Photos from the Internet, not Jon's

Herbs: a great place to start

Many herbs can live for more than one year.

Think of all the plastic saved by not buying herbs in plastic shells!

Photos taken by Jon Zirkle

Bag of cilantro example:

How many of these might I generate in a year from buying them in the store?

How much plastic might I save by growing my own cilantro?

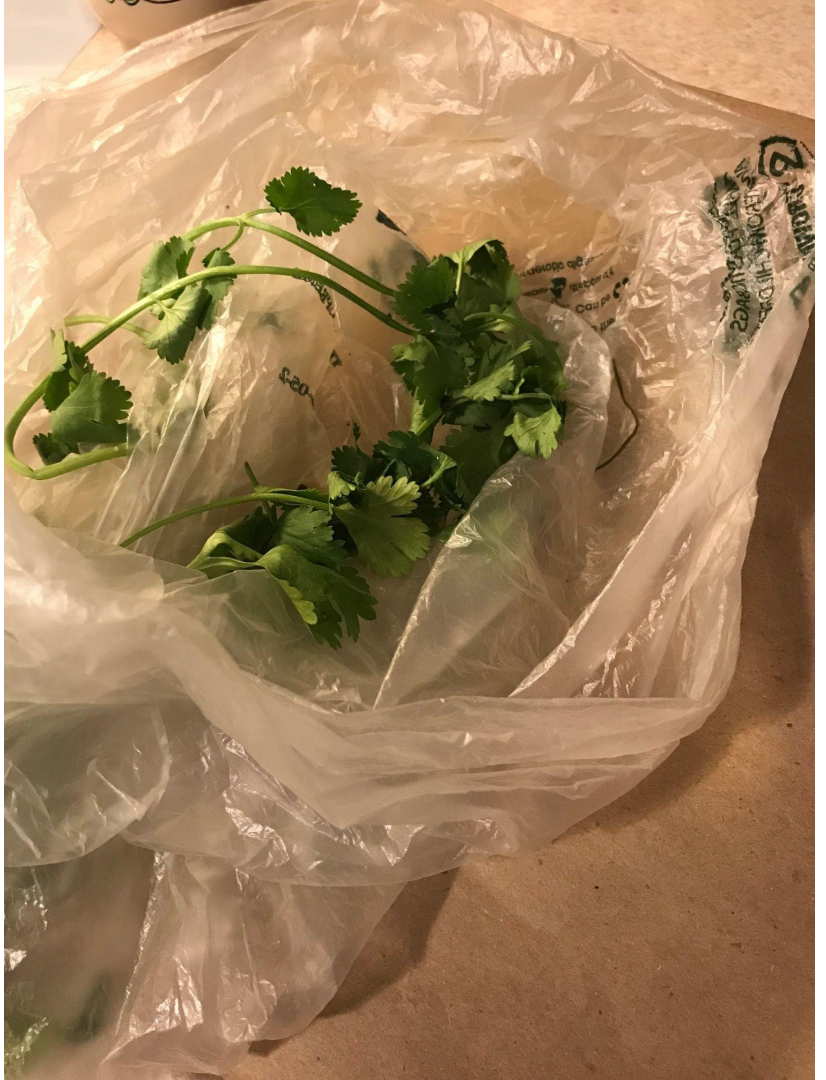


Photo taken by Jon Zirkle

Nasturtium

This edible flower is sweet and spicy in taste. The flowers grow on creeping vines which flow over pots and look attractive on a patio or porch.

The greens are edible, too!

Lettuces, mustard greens, cilantro

Many are mature within 30-40 days

Tomato, eggplant, okra

Tomato

You will need trellising support!

I would recommend at least 1 cubic foot of soil material per plant. You'll need larger pots. Otherwise, you'll be fertilizing frequently.

Look for specialized natural fertilizer blends.

Will require plenty of sun, good drainage, and general care (trimming, pinching out flowers at times, etc)

Photos not taken by Jon Zirkle

Kale

Kale is one of the hardiest options

Can basically be grown year round

Might bring in the pots during December-Feb

Require a fair amount of nitrogen source and

Compost additions

Plus frequent watering

Photo taken by Jon Zirkle

Turmeric

Anti-inflammatory

Tropical - start indoors first!

Use a strong heat source to germinate

May-Sept

Can be eaten fresh or dried (ground)

Photos from Internet, not from Jon Zirkle

Sweet potato

Make sure your plants will stay hot and watered regularly. I'd plan on at least partial sun.

Set out your sweet potato starts in

~late May. Monitor nighttime temps!

Jon once grew a 60' row of sweet potatoes from 1 tuber I bought at Maple City Market!

Photo taken by Jon Zirkle

Potatoes in pots

You'll need a large pot or flexible bags with drainage holes, plenty of compost, partial to full sun, and nitrogen and potassium fertilizer sources.

Pots will need to be watered regularly.

Photos not taken by Jon Zirkle

Strawberries

I’d much rather grow my own strawberries if I could, rather than generate lots of plastic containers of berries

Photos L and R taken by Jon Zirkle

Jerusalem artichoke

Quite tall (use large pots)
Gorgeous flowers (Sept)
Tubers harvested in winter

Tubers photo from Internet

And why not some milkweed?

Photos taken by Jon Zirkle

Question:

What fresh foods do you buy weekly that come in plastic?

Are there foods you could grow that might significantly reduce plastic waste?

Jon's list:

Salad greens

Spinach

Herbs (basil, cilantro, etc)

Root crops that come in a bag (ex. carrots, potatoes, etc)

Celery

Berries

So many bags

Can growing food in the backyard cut down on single-use plastic bags?

Can we also learn to buy produce without bags when at the store or market?

(example: bunch of carrots vs. bag of carrots)

Gardening in Partnership with Others

What does your space at home lend itself to most easily?

Do you have a particular environment (deep shade, full sun, etc) or a particular gift (ex. carpentry, irrigation system design, etc) that partners well with someone else with a different environment or gift?

Partner with this person!

Consider a work trade.

Or arrange to grow 3-5 foods that work well in your environment while a partner grows other foods better suited to their space; then swap! This can be less overwhelming.

Growing food

with others

can be

FUN!

Can Everyday People Garden Sustainably? At Home?

It's tempting to throw our hands in the air when we realize how overwhelming it is to tackle the environmental problems related to food production and eating in ways that respect the earth. Living and eating sustainability is hard work.

However, **environmental aspects of sustainability are only part of sustainability.**

If we are going to become gardeners and encourage others to garden, we must also consider the social and economic aspects. Maybe we are on board with the environmental reasons to grow food, but what are some social and economic reasons for growing food at home? The social and economic costs of not growing at home?

Sustainability

The Triple Bottom Line:

If we want to garden with a goal of reducing waste, we could think holistically about the environmental, social, and economic aspects of reducing waste.

Image from
https://www.rnpinfo.com/single-post/2019/11/25/what-is-our-triple-bottom-line

Environmental sustainability, applied to gardening

Thinking critically about the kinds of materials used in growing backyard food:

Instead of peat-based potting mix, can we use leaf compost from Goshen Environmental Center? Or generate our own compost from composted food scraps at home? Worm castings from local sources?

Instead of buying more plastic pots, cheap tools, or buckets, ask around! Ask a local restaurant, coffee shop, or bakery for buckets. Or ask a neighbor or relative about plant pots and tools they have in their garage that they aren't using this year.

- The sustainability of the materials: potting mix, seeds, containers, etc.
- Transportation (aka **fossil fuels** needed) to purchase supplies
- The other inputs used in gardening: chemicals, products in plastic bottles, etc
- What kinds of companies do we support when we buy supplies? (seeds, products, etc). What are *those* companies' practices?

Social

- Education
- Reinforcing family structure
- Community Building
- Empowerment
- Responsibility
- Stewardship
- Creativity
- Mind-body-soul-environment
- Sacredness
- Meaningful connections

Economic

Homegrown

- Less waste
- More affordable
- Less dependent on failing food systems
- Less use of non-renewable resources
- Food security
- Tailored to one’s needs
- More use of people power!

Financial Considerations

How affordable does growing food at home need to be?

Can we truly afford to rely on cheap food, food covered in plastic, food shipped from far away?

How much food can a pack of seeds that costs $2.50 produce? Is it worth it?

Would you like to grow corn with us in 2022?

rootingthroughcorn

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Contact Jon Zirkle at bushelcraftfarm@gmail.com, or 574-612-5063