

In my early childhood there were many times when my family was dependent on soup kitchens, food banks, and Food Stamps to be able to eat. We survived on donations and allocated government funds, and were lucky to be able to do so. Many in similar situations go hungry every day, dependent on food systems that have failed them. The memories of rationing SNAP money make the idea of food sovereignty, of community control over food supply, very appealing to me. Systematic change for the good of the people is greatly needed, but would be very difficult to implement all at once. Small steps must be taken. A very effective way for people to begin to control their own food supply is community gardening. Growing even a single vegetable gives a person a small freedom from food systems and supply chains and begins to put control back in the community rather than the corporation.

Growing a single plant is what I did in this project. I started green onion roots in a dish of water, and when they were long enough I planted them into soil. They take only about two weeks to grow to the size green onions are sold at, and now I've got a small part of the produce section replaced by what's growing on my windowsill. Implementing tactics on rooftop gardening and indoor growing on a wider scale could allow people in disadvantaged urban communities to control their own access to fresh produce and bring accessibility to healthier eating. I plan to continue my gardening practice and expand beyond my pot of onions to take full advantage of the possibilities to grow food in my Brooklyn apartment.

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GARDEN ZINE!

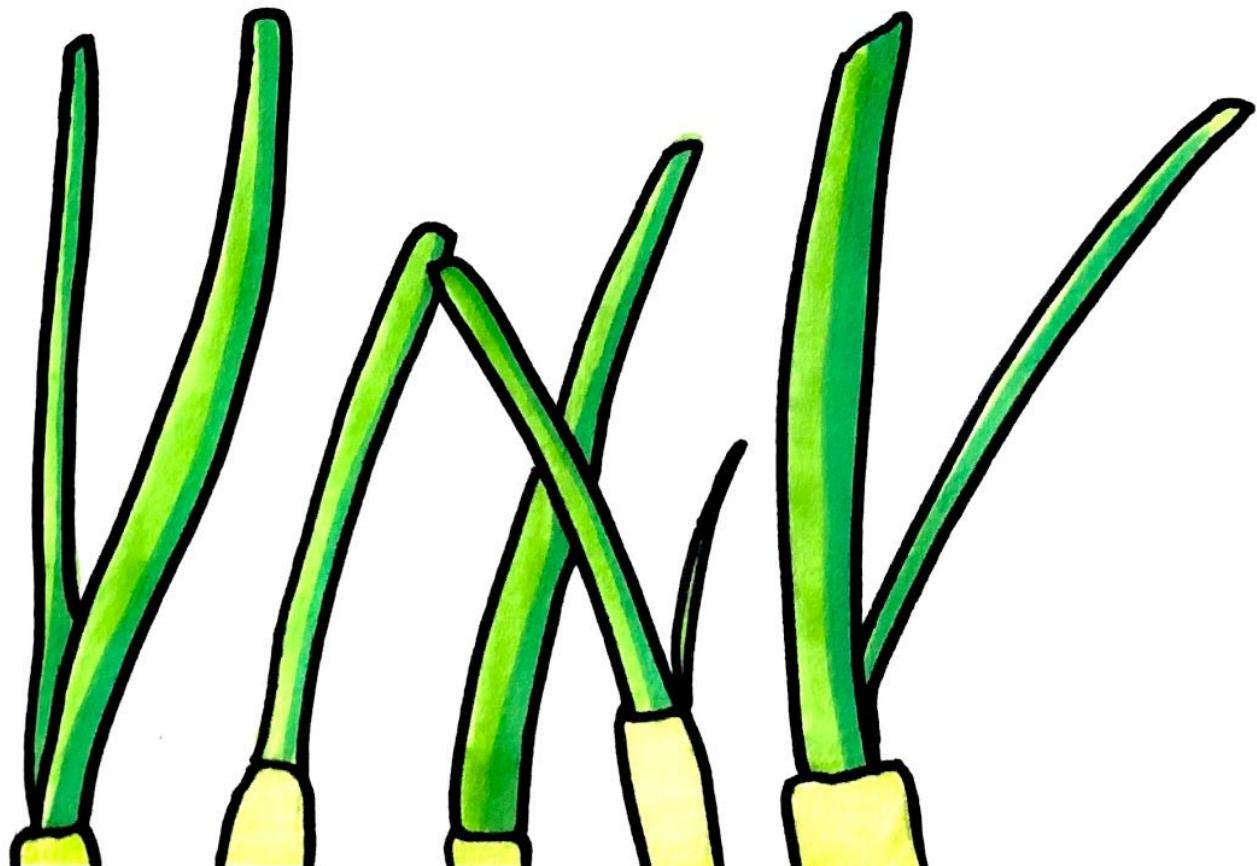
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INSIDE:

TIPS FOR REGROWING PLANT SCRAPS!

INTERVIEW WITH A TEENAGE GARDENER!

ORIGINS OF COOPER UNION'S ROOFTOP GARDEN!



Tips for Regrowing Plants From Scraps



My onion plants, nine days after starting

Not all of us have the space for an outdoor garden, but many herbs, fruits, and vegetables can be started in pots indoors from scraps usually discarded. A dish of water and a space with adequate sunlight is all that's needed to begin regrowing scraps from vegetables like green onion and celery.

My venture into scrap growing was very successful. Less than a day after I placed my green onion roots in water, new growth began to show. Within a week the shoots were about four or five inches long.

These results are very easy to replicate. Fill a flat dish with enough water to cover the roots of the plant, place in an area with sunlight, and wait. Change the water every other day, but beyond that not much maintenance is needed to care for these plants--just time.

A Garden Grows in Brooklyn: Interview with Max Drury

During this quarantine, those with the space to garden in the city are taking advantage of the opportunity to be outdoors. Oberlin student Max Drury is working with his family to realize their backyard's potential.

What inspired you to start a garden?

A lot of different things inspired me to start this garden, the first one would probably be that we have always had a garden. I have been blessed to grow up with a backyard garden, and my family has always grown lots of flowers, grass, and even raspberries and grapes in our backyard! My grandparents also have an extremely beautiful flower garden at their house outside of Seattle, and until her health made gardening impossible, my grandma on the east coast also had many beautiful flower gardens. We also have perennial plants that both grandparents have given us from their gardens! In other words, my interest in gardening partly comes from generational connections and sharing.

This past semester I have taken a class called American Agriculture with Janet Fiskio, and have become completely immersed in the liberatory potential of agriculture. I have learned about the many creative ways in which Black people have used the garden/farm as a space of celebration, and mutual aid, even from the dawn of the trans-atlantic slave trade. This tradition has manifested itself in many different ways over the hundreds of years of Black and Indigenous dispossession, and has informed my own visions of liberation.

This garden is in some ways practice, I'm learning how to grow, and practicing for larger agricultural projects that I hope to work in. It is also an extremely inspiring thing to grow food during a global pandemic and economic crisis. No matter what happens, my veggies will grow. This is both materially relieving, and inspires how we can understand our organizing and mutual aid projects.

Can you describe your garden space? Where are you located?

I live in Flatbush, Brooklyn, and my garden is in a small strip of our backyard. My garden is probably about 15-20 feet long, and two feet wide. It was mostly grass, violets, and other weeds, which I uprooted and tilled the soil beneath to plant my seeds. It is not a raised bed, and is set up with different veggies having 2-4 rows

of plants parallel to each other. We're very lucky to have extremely healthy soil, despite the environmental racism which has left many working class, black, and immigrant neighborhoods (like mine) with shitty, and lead infected soil.

What are you growing?

I'm growing spinach, carrots, cucumber, radishes, fennel, peas, tomatoes, peppers, onions. All of them are doing relatively well except the fennel which haven't sprouted yet. I chose these without doing much research, but next time I'm going to do more research (perhaps in Lenape agriculture) to figure out what will work the best.

What did you do to start?

To start I started seeds inside in little compostable seed starting cups that I bought at my local nursery. To start seeds you need to have potting soil, and put a few seeds in each pot, and water every day, keeping them in a sunny indoors spot. While the seeds were starting I tilled the soil I wanted to plant in. Tilling soil is digging up and turning soil, and pulling weeds, rocks, and anything else out of the soil. A few weeks into gardening I learned that tilling soil actually gets rid of a lot of the nutrients in the soil, and widespread tilling by settlers in the great plains caused the first big wave of carbon to enter the atmosphere. In the future I'll use no till techniques, in which you use mulch, cardboard, soil, and other things to suppress weeds, but don't take them out.

What work do you do daily/weekly to care for the garden?

I water daily (if it didn't rain), and also weed daily. I'm still in the process of transplanting some seeds which I will do in a few days.

What will you do with the food you grow?

Hopefully I'll be able to eat it with my friends!!! If I was growing on a larger scale I would use some to harvest seeds, some to eat, and some to give to people in my community who need food.

Do you see yourself continuing this garden? What do your ideas for future planting look like?

Definitely! I will switch up the crops, and I would love to make it a bit bigger. I am also working on a plan for an anarchist community farm / DIY performance space which may be my life work!!!

Any tips for people starting backyard gardens?

My main tip is just to go for it!! I haven't yet completed a growing cycle on my own, so I don't have much other learned experience to share. Look into no-till gardening.



Max breaking ground in his backyard in preparation for planting

Painting an Art School Green

New York City's skyline is getting greener.

Over the past ten years, green roofs have become more and more common on commercial buildings like the Barclays Center and the Javits Center, and legislation passed in April 2019 mandates every new building have a green roof. Existing structures are also going green, and rooftop gardens are plentiful. One such green roof is at the Cooper Union for Advancement of Science and Art. Cooper's garden project, started by former student Jasper H. Kerbs in 2018, aims to utilize the roof space to produce fresh food and engage the student body and surrounding community in regenerative agriculture gardening practice.

The project started when Jasper, inspired after volunteering on a farm in Greece, decided to make use of the school's abandoned green roof. The roof had the infrastructure for a garden but had been neglected. By distributing flyers and holding meetings for interested volunteers, Jasper gained enough student support to form an official club and garner funding from the school.

Using club funding, the garden project volunteers built a compost bin and began gathering organic waste from around the Cooper campus. Unvarnished wood scraps from the shop, food waste from the cafeteria, and miscellaneous scraps from the freshman dorms provided a base for fertilizing the soil of the future garden.

Wild plants and grasses had sprung up in the disused garden beds. Wild cabbage was growing already, but the garden project would soon add their own cultivations to the roof. Starting from seeds, they planted indoors during the winter using planting trays with heating mats underneath and grow lights overhead. That spring, the outdoor garden project officially commenced with a community seed planting event.

Using compost from Cooper waste, as well as some donated by the NYC Compost Project, the garden volunteers fertilized soil for the garden beds. Over several growing seasons, they worked to rejuvenate the soil by mulching and eliminate heavy grass growth through lasagna gardening--layering organic matter. Last season, the garden produced a crop of tomato, broccoli, cauliflower, string beans, sweet peas, cabbage, squash, watermelon, honey dew melon, mint, sunflowers, oregano, thyme, carrots, kale, lettuce, arugula, spinach, Solomon's seed, ceremonial

tobacco, and cucumbers. The food harvested was picked by students, faculty, and visitors and free to anyone who came. The ceremonial tobacco was given back to indigenous people who hold ceremony and used as offerings, prayers, and gifts. The garden grew to be a community engagement space, the location of events such as the butterfly release ceremony of children from Preschool of the Arts and a way for residents of the community to engage with nature.

Unfortunately, while the garden project achieved success, student interest was low. The workload at Cooper Union prevents most students from being able to take part in an unpaid, no credit extracurricular. Plans are still in the works for securing funding to pay students working in the garden.

As spring begins this year the garden lies dormant due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but it is the hope of Jasper and other garden volunteers that it will be revived when campus opens and that students will be able to get needed compensation for their time working there.



Cooper's garden beds, dormant for now