



GIDEON'S GARDEN

a project of
GRACE Church & Taft Farms

Supplemental Report 2019
The Rev. Jen Bloesch,
Gideon's Garden Program Director

Gideon's Garden: A Year of Change and Growth

The Rev. Jen Bloesch's report to the Annual Meeting of Grace Church, January 26, 2020

This year saw the biggest change in Gideon's Garden since its inception eleven years ago, when Danny Tawczynski offered land to Grace Church to begin a garden that could supply free vegetables to those in need of nutritious food at the local food pantries. With Kyle Gangell, Youth Supervisor in 2018, moving on from Gideon's Garden towards his next steps in life, he passed the baton to Jen



Bloesch, who became the first ever Gideon's Garden Program Director. Fisher Riiska filled Kyle's shoes by becoming the new Youth Supervisor. Together, Jen and Fisher oversaw the garden from start to finish and enjoyed a fun and successful year overall.

Jen's arrival this year has meant the expansion of Gideon's Garden's scope and goals. In addition to the continuation of deliveries, growing produce, offering youth a safe place to be, and welcoming visiting groups to the garden, through Jen's efforts we also hope to increase the number of young people who come to the garden, to develop new community partnerships, and to increase Gideon's Garden's public presence in the community. This will be achieved in part by an internship program that is planned for 2020, in which a cohort of teens will come together once a week throughout the summer to learn and work together at the garden. Jen has focused this year on building relationships at the schools, with the pantries that receive our produce, and with the organizations that bring youth and adults to the garden.

This year it was our community partners that brought so much vibrancy to the garden. In June, the YES! Program from Monument Valley Middle School, led by Jake Pinkston, brought twelve engaged and energetic 7th and 8th graders for a three-day volunteer visit. We set an ambitious agenda, including making a raised table bed, crafting a native plant garden, building movable chickens pens, and getting the butterfly house ready for the season. The young people had a great time, and their efforts were invaluable in being ready for the beginning of the growing season.



Perhaps the most exciting addition to the Garden was the chickens. Jen incubated the eggs in her apartment, and once the chicks hatched, they were housed in the greenhouse at Taft Farms for all the youth to see and play with. Our regular youth volunteers loved helping raise the chicks. We hatched 38 chicks, but had to find a permanent home for the many roosters that hatched. Now, our flock is at 20, and they are laying many eggs each day. They have been a joy and delight for everyone who has worked at the garden, and they continue to be a feature for visitors to the garden.



The events that were held with the members of Grace Church were also a great success this year. Planting Day featured beautiful weather and an eager crowd. Jen led the blessing of the Garden alongside Fisher and our other youth volunteers—Cayenne Riiska, Harley Margraff,

and Harrison Buck. The 35 or so volunteers headed straight to work, and the garden was planted in a startling 45 minutes! It was a beautiful day. Equally beautiful was the Celebration Sunday on September 22. Fisher and Jen shared reflections with the congregation, and Harley sold her own dried teas after service. It was a lively and celebratory occasion. Throughout the year, Jen was also able to regularly attend worship at Grace, preach, and share updates with the congregation about Gideon's Garden, bringing the congregation into closer connection with the Garden.

Overall, Gideon's Garden had a wonderfully bright year, which involved a lot of hard work, laughter, silliness, and connection with others. We are extraordinarily grateful to all the individuals who directly supported the garden—Pennie Curry, Janet Zimmerman, Kathy Clausen, and Dutch Pinkston. We are equally grateful for the support from the entire congregation, whose generosity has outpoured upon this hands-on ministry. We eagerly look forward to another year of caring for youth, tending the Earth, and feeding our beautiful community. Thanks for being on the journey with us.



A Year in Review: 2019 Goals

A sampling of Summer Goals (April-September)

- Identify needs for supplies/tools, purchase supplies
- Successfully grow a variety plants for donation to pantries and meal programs
- Grow an herb garden
- Raise chicks and incorporate chickens into functioning of the farm
- Successfully operate the butterfly house
- Experiment with new spring crops/season extension
- Successfully execute planting day with Grace Church on June 8th
- Maintain delivery schedule and strengthen relationship with pantries
- Compile detailed data regarding seeding schedule, harvest quantities and calendar, and delivery schedule
- Sustain relationships with current community partners and continue pre-existing programs with them

Sharing our Successes: Group Visits

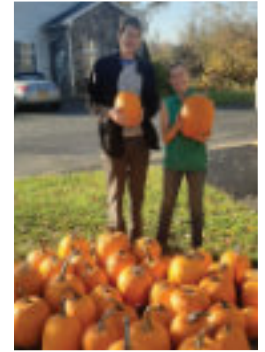
In addition to the YES! Program we had five other groups visit and volunteer at



Gideon's Garden, including Multicultural Bridge, Gould Farm, Berkshire Meadows, ExtraSpecialTeas, and Railroad Street Youth Project. We were able to successfully sustain and/or grow in our relationship with all these groups.

In August Multicultural Bridge participated in two days of volunteering, as in previous years. On two consecutive Fridays, the 35 campers came to the farm to help and have fun. This year the children helped with transplanting

zucchini, stuffing scarecrows, and harvesting. These days included visiting the rescue animals, doing a project on the farm, seeing the butterfly house, and enjoying an ice cream party on the last day of camp. This year, Jen was able to do a cooking workshop with the kids on another day of their camp, and this workshop was well-received by the camp and the kids. We look forward to working with Multicultural Bridge again next year!



Similarly, Gould Farm sent a committed volunteer from their organization. Our volunteer, David, came weekly from July until the beginning of November, and he helped with the much needed projects of weeding, harvesting, and take down of the farm in the fall. We are very grateful for his work this season and we look forward to the return of another Gould Farm volunteer.



ExtraSpecialTeas also brought young adults with special needs to help out around the farm during August and September. The volunteers loved seeing the butterfly house and helping with harvesting. They even took on the laborious task of moving our compost pile! They returned for volunteer days on five different occasions. They will definitely be invited back next summer for regular volunteering.

Berkshire Meadows made one visit to the butterfly house this summer. The kids were able to enjoy the butterflies, and they also had the opportunity to see the chickens, which was an enjoyable experience. We hope we can offer a similar program for Berkshire Meadows again.



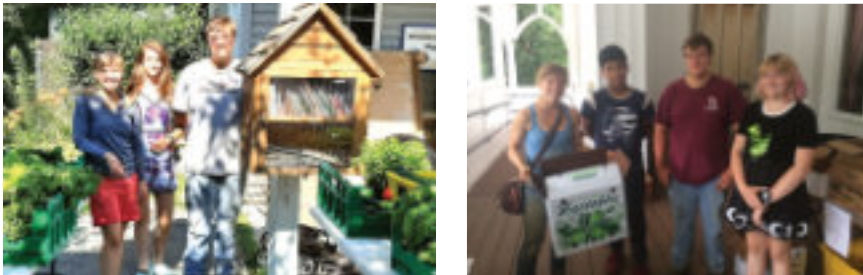
Railroad Street Youth Project visited twice this summer, once in the spring and once in the fall. The fall group in particular had a good time taking down our cucumber plants and catching sparrows in the butterfly house. We hope our relationship with RSYP will only grow from here!

Sharing our Successes: Deliveries

This year we served five different organizations in town, including three food pantries, one community-meal program, and one homeless shelter.

Recipient	Total # of Deliveries	First Delivery	Last Delivery
The Guthrie Center	23	May 30	October 30
CHP	21	June 18	October 30
People's Pantry	20	May 23	October 31
Construct	14	July 18	October 31
Lee Food Pantry	14	July 5	November 1

Each organization received a variety of all the produce that we grew, from lettuce in the spring, to zucchini in the summer, to butternut squash in the fall. The youth accompanied Jen on many of the deliveries, the highlight being the free lunch at the Guthrie Center that all the regular youth volunteers could enjoy together. We received many compliments for providing the freshest looking produce from week to week.



Harvest Records

Plant	Total Amount Harvested	First Harvest Date	Last Harvest Date
Arugula	7.08 LBS	May 22	May 27
Radish	7.14 LBS	May 28	June 11
Spinach	1.14 LBS	June 11	June 11
Lettuce	236 Heads	June 12	July 25
Peas	13.67 LBS	June 14	June 26
Kale	53.5 Bushels	June 18	October 29
Zucchini	566 LBS	July 2	October 4
Summer Squash	378 LBS	July 2	October 4
Cucumbers	397 LBS	July 4	August 12
Swiss Chard	26.5 Bushels	July 11	October 16
Green Beans	70.5 LBS	July 19	August 30
Hot peppers	93 LBS	July 19	October 9
Tomatillos	125 LBS	July 29	September 25
Tomatoes	887 LBS	July 31	September 27
Cabbage	38 Heads	August 2	August 5
Cantaloupe	3.5 Bushels	August 2	August 12
Okra	32.5 LBS	August 6	September 24
Watermelon	341 LBS	August 8	August 26
Eggplant	86 LBS	August 12	October 2
Beets	26 LBS	August 12	October 29
Acorn Squash	181 LBS	September 9	October 9
Butternut Squash	641 LBS	September 13	October 1
Brussel Sprouts	15 LBS	September 20	September 20



Looking ahead: 2020 Goals

A Sampling of New Goals for 2020

- Increase collaborations with partner organizations
- Increase number of camps that come for a visit day
- Increase visitation to the butterfly house
- Successfully execute internship program
- Experiment with sustainable growing practices
- Increase yield so as to offer second delivery to CHP and provide produce for the farm stand

Thank you to Taft Farms

Gideon's Garden is a cooperative project of Grace Church and Taft Farms. Without the generosity of the Taft Farms owners and staff, the Garden would have just remained 'a good idea'. Thank you to Danny, Martha, and Paul Tawczynski, Sue Hayden and the many members of the production team who give the land, expertise, and time to ensure the success of Gideon's Garden.

Gideon's Garden is located on Division Street, just across from Taft Farms, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Planting day is the first Saturday in June. For more information visit the Grace Church website: graceberkshires.org/gideons-garden/