



Baltimore Green Space Stories

...the stories behind neighborhoods' treasured open spaces

July 2011

A Family's Summer at the Duncan Street Garden

With so many distractions these days – jobs, computers, soccer games and music lessons – there seem to be few chances for quality family time. But at the Duncan Street Miracle Garden, one family has been spending summers gardening, and growing, together.

Anita was the first one to get involved. Because of her community work, she happened to visit the Miracle Garden, and was immediately hooked. Although none of the family had much gardening experience, they dug in anyway. Four years later, Anita, her husband Peter, their two children, and even some relatives all have plots here, and visit twice a week to check on their progress.

"They've really grown since last week," Anita said, lifting a leaf to inspect the cucumbers, on a humid June evening. "It's all that rain." The weeds had grown too, and nearby her daughter Jade, age 11, expertly scraped them down with a hoe.

Mother and daughter were clearly comfortable here, knowing what work needed to be done, and how to do it, but Anita attributed most of their gardening know-how to the guidance of the garden manager, Lewis Sharpe. Thanks to his mentoring, Anita's rows are picture-perfect, resembling an advertisement for the ideal community garden – thriving



(photo credit Kelsey Miller)

Jade, age 11, works in her family's plot at the Duncan Street Garden.

zucchini, tomatoes, and string beans, all the result of shared expertise.

Their produce has done so well, in fact, that the kids have been able to enter their crops in an annual gardening competition, hosted by the University of Maryland Extension. Anita explained that it gave the kids a goal, and a reason to stay patient until the end of the growing season. They have each taken home multiple ribbons every year. Last year's success was a blue ribbon for a giant pumpkin, which according to Noah, age 8, was nearly three feet wide. "It was a big pumpkin," his mother confirmed.

While glad that her family enjoyed the garden, Anita was also enthusiastic about how the garden gives back to the community. Although garden members come from a variety of Baltimore neighborhoods, the spirit of generosity seems common to all. Anita explained that the surplus of crops goes to churches and soup kitchens, including Moveable Feast. Some of the gardeners bring in groups of school kids for nature education programs. Peter made sure to brag for his wife, saying that she helped write the grants that funded many of the garden tools and materials. Anita talked about the year that Mr. Sharpe planted string beans around the

outer fence, so that neighbors could come pick them as they pleased.

The kids were enthusiastic in their own way. Noah, who prefers not to eat vegetables himself, nevertheless named every vegetable plant he saw. Few kids, let alone city kids, can enter a garden with the confidence and knowledge that these two seemed to have. Noah is even maintaining a small plot of his own this year,

which is full of colorful flowers.

However, both siblings said that most of their school friends did not know about the garden. Noah said that when he brought it up in class, “they didn’t really believe me.”

Sometimes the Duncan Street Miracle Garden does seem unbelievable – it is not just unbelievably beautiful, but a productive and valuable community asset. However, for

Anita, Peter, Jade and Noah, it is simply a real part of their lives. For four years, it has been a place to work, learn, and enjoy time together as a family. And because the site is forever owned by Baltimore Green Space, they will be able to enjoy the garden, free of distractions, for many years to come.

– Kelsey Miller



(photo credit Kelsey Miller)

Noah, 8, shows off his flower garden and its bright, colorful decorations.

Baltimore Green Space

Baltimore Green Space works to protect community gardens, pocket parks, and other open spaces created and cared for by city residents. At the request of community groups, Baltimore Green Space acquires community managed open spaces and provides support to those who care for them. This allows communities to ensure that their urban oases endure without taking on the responsibilities of acquisition, ownership, and liability.

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