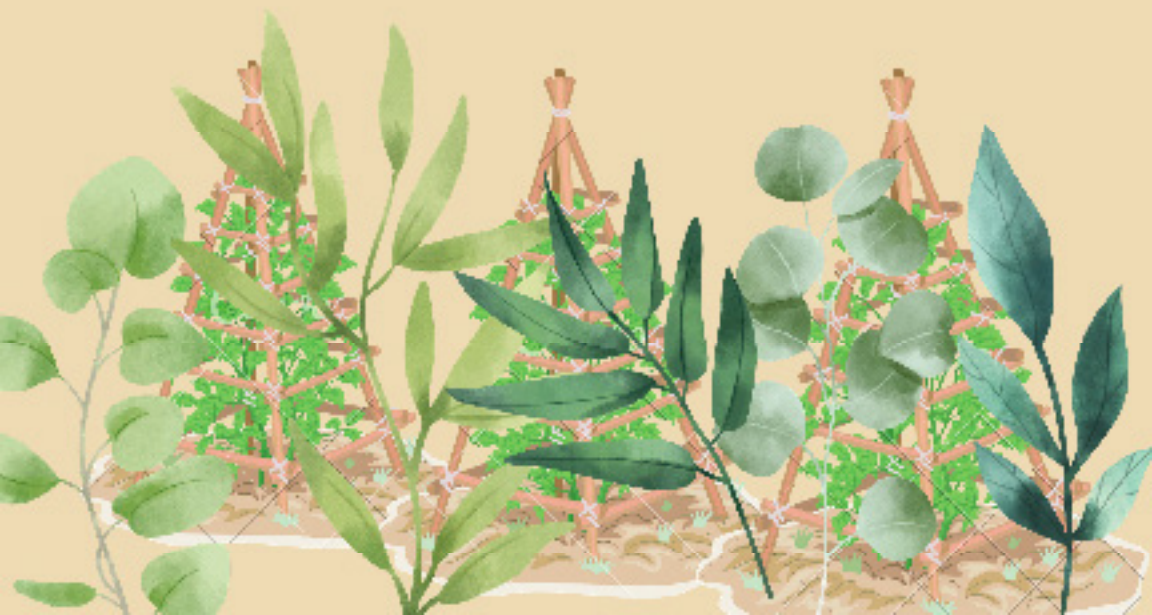


# Grandparents' Garden

A project by Stella Xu,  
YFSI '20





# Background

I first learned about the Grandparents' Garden through fellow Yale Sustainable Food Program student and friend, Addee Kim. We were at our friend Lauren Kim's Knead 2 Know talk on urban food forests in Taiwan, when Addee mentioned the Garden during the Q & A session. At the time, I had just formally accepted my summer internship with the Yale Farm, the beginning of a (hopefully!) lifelong engagement with food systems, food justice, and sustainable agriculture. I knew I wanted to do my independent project on the Garden, even though I had never been there, let alone walked past it.

When Covid-19 got much worse in the United States, I struggled with finding ways to connect with the gardeners. People were already on edge, so a stranger walking over and striking up a conversation would likely cause alarm or at the very least, discomfort. Given that many of the gardeners were elderly, I hesitated to conduct ethnographic research face-to-face in the first few weeks of my internship. What follows is a mental and visual roadmap of the many, many conversations with people—from my housemates Emily Sigman and Steve Winter to our next door neighbor Caroline Posner (one of the few younger, non-immigrant gardeners)—that eventually led me to meeting several gardeners, who have their own sections below. This project would not be possible without them, their patience, generosity, and openness to a complete stranger. Aside from those who have a direct connection to the Garden, I am incredibly grateful to Jacquie Munno, Sarah Mele, Erwin Li, Abby Lee, and Mark Bomford for giving me insightful guidance throughout this project period.

This project is ultimately the culmination of my journey among a web of interrelated people and communities. My time in New Haven this summer has also given me time to experiment with gardening and growing. I like to think that by doing gardening every day across the street from the Grandparents' Garden, I was engaging in an indirect form of "participant observation." By learning and experiencing the challenges of growing vegetables from seed with limited knowledge and resources, I could also manage to understand some of the challenges and delights that my neighbor gardeners were experiencing.



Map of the Garden and surrounding areas;  
Garden areas are shaded with diagonal lines.

# Introduction

Nobody is really clear on when exactly the Grandparents' Garden started. From all the people I talked to, I received myriad answers such as "since I was a kid" and "I think 2011." The first published article on the Garden, in the *New Haven Independent*, describes a dozen Chinese gardeners tending to the plots on Prospect, Division, and Mansfield streets as early as summer of 2010.<sup>1</sup> So why was the history of the garden so hard to pin down?

In contrast to the vast majority of other community gardens in New Haven that are managed by a non-profit organization, the Grandparents' Garden has no formal ownership or management system in place. Whereas other community gardens have a staff member or volunteer dealing with who tends to what plot, these gardeners informally pass their pieces of land onto a different family—usually among the same ethnic or linguistic ties—when it is time to leave New Haven. This unwritten process makes for a unique, and often tenuous, system of land tenure that is wholly different from the existing landscape of community gardening in New Haven. The Garden sits in clear contrast to "white-led and professionalized organizations" in the urban gardening sphere with funding support and policy support.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, due to linguistic barriers and a lack of institutional legitimacy, scholarship and knowledge on the Grandparents' Garden is greatly limited.

As Horst, McClintock, and Hoey write, "Working-class and immigrant households have for centuries engaged in growing kitchen gardens and raising animals in urban settings as well as using open space for food production."<sup>3</sup> Established Black, Brown, and Indigenous community gardens and the scholarship that has arisen from them have been instrumental in informing my own research questions. Devon G. Peña's documentation of the plants grown in LA's South Central Farm inspired my brief page on the different Chinese vegetables in the Garden.<sup>4</sup> Kristin Reynolds and Nevin Cohen's *Beyond the Kale* challenged me to look critically at urban agriculture and imagine alternate possibilities.<sup>5</sup>

I was initially interested in examining mutual aid relationships and solidarity economies, especially in a time of Covid-19, that were present in the Garden. This search proved to be not as fruitful as some of the other unexpected information I later learned, about the Garden's (and gardeners') relationship to New Haven and Yale. Mutual aid and exchange still existed among the gardeners, though not in the large-scale ways I had imagined. Paired with the readings we did for the Internship, I realized that community gardens do not always equal food justice. But the complex ways in which the Gardeners related to each other brought up many other interesting questions.

This zine roughly splits my ethnography into three layered facets: (1) the Garden and Gardeners themselves, (2) the Garden + New Haven + Yale, and (3) the Garden's future. I attempt to give a thorough overview of these three facets by including interview transcripts, while incorporating my own analysis and thoughts. Interviews with Chinese-speaking gardeners are translated into English, but there are limitations even with translation. I quote my interlocutors directly, but I can never do justice to the original dialogue in Mandarin and regional dialects.

Lastly, the "Grandparents' Garden" is an informal name, one that I choose to use throughout this zine for ease of reference. I borrow this name from Addee, and from local news articles that highlight the elderly demographic of the Gardeners.<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that not all of the gardeners are necessarily grandparents, and even more so, that the Garden is living and transforming even as I conduct my research. Even my usage of the term "Grandparents' Garden" (rather than "the garden" or "my plot") denotes my status as an outside observer looking in, since each gardener has their own ways of naming and thinking about the Garden.



## Muhammad Kaimul Ahsan

*So, in the past and the beginning, Chinese people started gardening. But now, we are also evolving. Chinese, Bangladeshi, there are some Indian families also. I'm from Bangladesh originally. I'm doing research at Yale University. And I'm also starting gardening.*

(What did you plant here?)

*I planted strawberries, eggplant, and some peanuts. I also have strawberries, some tomatoes over there and green chili and spinach also. Lots of things. Those seeds, I bought from the garden and the rare ones, I brought from my country.*

(How did you get started gardening?)

*I live in Ivy Manor. At the beginning, we didn't notice that this is Yale property or that some Yale graduates and their parents were cultivating this place. And then we got an email from Yale Housing people. They emailed us that whoever wants to do gardening, there is some space that you can do gardening. At the beginning, I also didn't know that I could garden here. I've been gardening here for four years now.*

*I have kids, but they are not interested in doing this. They are a little afraid of mosquitos, so they don't like to come here. I'm doing it because I need to do some exercise. I start at 5:30 and do it until 8:30. Today, my wife is harvesting some mini spinach."*





## Gardening Practices

The most noticeable feature of the Garden are the numerous trellises crafted from fallen tree branches, which make the plot of land look like an “enchanted forest.”<sup>7</sup> The branches are propped up in the shape of a cone, tied together by twine or shoelaces or whatever string-like material gardeners can find, and arranged in rows to support tomatoes or pole beans.

Since there is no running water at the Garden, gardeners find different ways to transport and conserve water. Almost every gardener I met used baby strollers to push recycled milk jugs and laundry detergent containers filled with water from a hose across the street. Many of the elders make two or three trips to water all of their vegetables, while those with smaller plots could manage with just one trip. Instead of store-bought mulch, some gardeners use newspaper cuttings, dead leaves, and other recycled materials to retain moisture in the soil. As gardener Yang Shengming explains, “It’s to keep it from drying. It shields the light, so the inside is still wet. Today is too hot.”

Yang also shows me his orange pill bottle filled with a white powder. “This is baking soda. This soil originally had lots of pine needles. Last year, things wouldn’t grow. Recently, I found out from the internet that baking soda can dissolve things, so I wanted to try and add some to fix the soil.”



Kristyn Leach of Namu Farm asserts that East Asian farming techniques are “more about being place-based and not having a lot of rules.”<sup>8</sup> Generalizing “East Asian farming techniques” may be essentializing, but it is undeniable that the grandparent gardeners’ practices do reflect a kind of place-based improvisation, reminding me of the YSFP’s “principles over recipes” mantra. From using the materials at their disposal to working through challenges and without institutional support, the gardeners embody improvisation through their practices. A tree trunk that has fallen across the Garden is used as a bench by elderly gardeners.

Even the Garden’s system of land tenure is improvised—when one family moves away from New Haven, they are usually responsible for finding someone else to take over their plot. Sometimes, when a new gardener decides to quit gardening or a plot unexpectedly lies vacant, someone else will swoop in and plant something there. It’s a messy system, not without some conflicts that I describe in later sections, but it works.

Every gardener I spoke to said that they ate their harvest all by themselves, denying any “mutual aid” connection that I was initially looking for. However, there were ways in which they practiced forms of gifting and exchanging, subconsciously embedded in their everyday lives. Many of the gardeners described getting seeds and seedlings from their neighbors and other gardeners, showing that this is a common practice in the community. Yang Shengming and Liu Mei, who I had seen at the Garden a couple times but didn’t speak to until recently, energetically insisted on giving me a bag full of jiucai once we realized I taught them English two years ago. I gave them a hot wax pepper and some basil in return, which they begrudgingly accepted.

garlic chives: a "mix" between garlic and chives, these are often used in East Asian cooking the same way scallions are, in dumplings, pancakes, etc.

韭菜

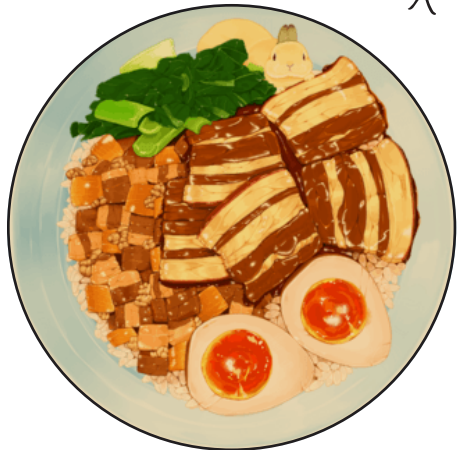


朝天椒

"facing heaven" peppers: commonly dried and used in Sichuan cuisine, this chili grows facing upwards

Chinese mustard is often dried and pickled with a variety of other Chinese greens, and cooked with pork

梅菜





## 丝瓜

Chinese okra: more like a ridged zucchini than an okra. When dried, it can be used as a loofah

## 油菜



rapeseed greens, which look similar to Chinese broccoli, are the leafy part of the plants, from which canola oil is also produced!

## 豆芽

mung bean sprouts are commonly used in Asian cuisine, in stir-frys and soups (not to be confused with the soybean sprout~)



## Chen Gui Song

*My name is Chen Guisong. Chen, with a big ear radical plus east. Song, as in squirrel. Feel free to look and walk around! If you have any questions, you can ask.*

*This is jiucai (garlic chives). This is meicai (dry pickled chinese mustard). This is, in China it's called yundou (kidney beans). It's also called sijidou (string beans/green beans).*

*(Where did you get these seeds?)*

*Uh, I brought them from my country. This is nangua (pumpkin/squash).*

*I started gardening last year. I've been here three years. I came here late — My child has been here for 7 or 8. I came to watch my grandson. They live right over there (Prospect Gardens).*

*This is lajiao (hot peppers). This big one is caijiao (bell peppers). This one is chaotianjiao ("facing heaven" peppers). In China it is called chaotianjiao. This is douya (mung bean sprouts). This is huanggua (cucumber).*

*That's more jiucai. This is youcai (rape flower shoots). I push these water jugs from home, for watering. It's so hot, you can't afford to not water your plants. Someday, when these are harvested, it'll be worth it.*

The vegetables in America are too expensive. In China, they're cheap. You're from Shanghai, a big city. We are the countryside. I was born in the countryside, in Shandong province. After high school, I didn't want to apply for college. So I started farming. I didn't apply for college, just stayed home and farmed. I am a peasant. After high school, there was a period of revolution. You know? The Cultural Revolution. So I became a farmer. Do you understand? I just stayed at home, on my land. I am also part of the Communist Party. I have already been for 50 years.

(What's your favorite vegetable?)

My favorite to eat? Douya, it's expensive in America. Even more than yundou and sijidou. These vegetables are all delicious. And jiucai! This jiucai can be sauteed or even wrapped into dumplings (siujiao). It's very fragrant.

I miss China. I want to return, but now you can't even get plane tickets. Can't go back. China still is better. I can plant all these things in China. Here, there is han (drought 旱). In China, it's no big deal and there is rain. This soil isn't good. It isn't suitable for growing. It's just for fun, to exercise the body.

I try to tell Chen that I'm an intern for Yale Farm, but he thinks I mean the Farnam Memorial Gardens. "Ahh, I know. That San Ke Shu. That piece of land. That park, that willow tree, that's where Chinese people hold group activities."

Chen's wife, Wang Xiuyu, and their friend Zhou Yuru walk towards us with Zhou's toddler-aged grandson, Lucas. Lucas tries to pick up a jug of water before he is scolded by his grandma— "Hey hey that's someone else's water!"

When I ask them who started the Garden, Chen laughs and responds, "That, we don't know."

"This place, people just come and people go," Zhou explains, "It constantly changes. My plot is over there. It belongs to whoever plants there, and when they move away, it changes again."







## Liu Mei and Yang Shengming

Liu Mei and Yang Shengming were my two former students when I worked as a teacher for Bridges ESL. Funnily enough, I had seen Yang at the Garden a few times but didn't recognize him, with masks and all. In late July, Yang finally told me his full name and I realized who he was!

*Liu Mei: We don't live in Prospect Gardens anymore. My daughter and her husband moved down, towards Whitney. They drove me up here. I already haven't been here for two days, so I wanted to come today to water my vegetables. It's dry and hot these days.*

*Yang: There's no running water here. It might be too difficult for them to install a water system, so they put two water tanks here instead. It was around 2018. After they installed them, after about an hour, the water was all used up— so they no longer came (laughs).*

*Liu Mei: You can't do anything about it. The bugs eat everything. And what can you do? If you want to catch the bugs, you have to stand by the crops all day.*



Liu Mei: *I planted this here — what do Americans call it again?*

*(Kale?)*

*Ah, right! Kale, kale. This nangua (pumpkin) is also mine. This over here, with the small leaves, is qiukui (okra). It's a really good vegetable. In China, it costs five, six, seven dollars per kilogram. It's pretty expensive. My neighbor gave me some of the seedlings. But the pumpkin plant is growing fast and stealing all of its nutrition. This year, I don't know why, but the pumpkins are especially thriving. This is xiacong (small onion), that is jiucai (garlic chives).*

*The weather is too hot and dry, it's just that way sometimes. When we come and push water over, we can't bring that much. We just water what we can and make do. We made these frames ourselves, with sticks we picked up around here.*

*(What are these bottles tied around the sticks?)*

*The liquid inside is for bugs to eat. I searched it up on the internet, and it said sugar water would attract bugs and trap them. But they don't seem to work!*



(above) Yang Shengming's scrap paper mulch;  
(right) Liu Mei's bottle fly trap



## Liu Mei's jiucai boxes/pockets recipe

*Cut the jiucai into small pieces, mix it with some salt, you know?*

*Whatever seasonings you want to add, just mix it in.*

*Then, mince the noodles into tiny pieces. You need to cook them a little earlier and let them sit so they hold their shape.*

*After you mince them, mix it with the jiucai.*

*Add one or two eggs on top and whisk it all together.*

*Put the filling into a spring roll wrapper, and fold the sides evenly.*

*Pinch the sides to hold them in place.*

*Then, fry it in a pan. You'll have to see if you can even get it into the pan— they're so soft!*

## Kim Edwards

*I've lived in this neighborhood since I was a toddler. So I live on Sheffield Avenue— I'm only a couple blocks from you, I'm two and a half, three blocks from the Garden. I used to live a block from the Garden when I was little, until a few years ago actually, so I've always been in this neighborhood.*

*I don't even remember when it really became a garden. But it was many years ago when I still lived on Division St across from Science Park, close to the corner of Mansfield and Division. If you noticed, the Garden's not just on the corner of Prospect and Division. It started moving down a little — did you notice? It wasn't two parts back in the day. It wasn't a Garden at first. But as a community member, it's not our Garden. It's never been our Garden. I've never seen members of our community, other than that section of the hill, go to the Garden.*

*And, I love it though, because you see a lot of older Asian people babysitting their grandkids, and they would stroll over there and — it's a Garden! You would definitely notice, like back in the day when I wouldn't drive a car, and you get on the old bus on Winchester Avenue to go downtown or wherever, the bus goes up Division and takes the right on Prospect and you would look. And you would see people playing and doing taichi, and it just evolved into a "Garden" over time. As far as just being around and seeing it as a neighborhood person. And I'm 46, I've lived in this neighborhood since I was a toddler.*

*As far as my alder stuff, I only got involved with getting Yale to put the water there and different things like that. That came, because one day I noticed, I roll by the Garden, it didn't look too Garden-y to me. Then I roll by another day, a couple weeks later, still didn't "Garden-y" to me. Then, I roll by there with someone in the car with me, and they said, it don't look too Garden-y either.*

(What do you mean by Garden-y?)

*The upkeep was not there. As you see it now, it's a little more organized. You'd would see containers left there. And I know you would see different buckets, you would see different milk containers. I had to speak with someone at Yale, and I let them know—you guys have to clean this up. I understand it's a space you're letting people use or garden, but I need you to ride by here. I said, it looks like a shantytown. It was clutter. But that is*

*a highly visible corner, and that's a nice space, and you can see through the whole space. So that's when we decided, we need to have a meeting.*



*I talked to Alder Steve because it is his ward now. I let him know, because I had noticed it, someone with me noticed it, and a few neighborhood people noticed it too and had complained to me. I said, it's not just me. And we had a community meeting.*

Steve was very helpful. We started getting stories from people. We were just talking about the upkeep of it. And from there he started asking questions. Well, is there any way you guys could put barrels or just things out here so people can get water. That's how some of the conversation came out of it. We were looking at each other, there were some language barriers, but it was pretty cool because you don't see your constituents and neighbors all the time. You might get an email from them, or you might talk to them on the phone, but you don't see them all the time. Especially some of the older people, their kids, you know, I'm like oh! I know you, you know from like being around and stuff. They were able to help with some of the translation.

There were arguments because this group of people planted this, but I don't know if their crops died or if they were left for some years, and then another group, the Indian group planted this, the Asian group planted this. I'm saying this because I don't know the family names. And they were arguing, "You can't plant there." You know, this is what we learned was happening. That there was some discourse of who could plant where and who owns what. From that community meeting, my intent was not to have them stop gardening, at all. My intent was just, hold up, I know y'all not letting this look like this. But I think, stemming from that, of course it's still Yale's property but they set a few guidelines for people who are using it. And it was just totally cool, you know. And from that, more communication amongst neighbors became better. That's my history with it.



*From my knowledge it just started one day. Even as a kid, you know, being younger. You know I'm not ancient, Stella. I love it. It's cool. Early in the morning, you see somebody in there. Not necessarily gardening, just chillin'. You see people do their little exercises, couples, I used to love it. Like, oh they're doing tai chi out there. Somebody's getting it on.*

*(The only big question I have is, when did it start? Because nobody I asked knew. Nobody knew the history because it's so old and not written down.)*

*Exactly, look, cause it's illegal (laughs). It's not illegal, you know what I mean when I say that! It was just a thing that happened.*

*(It's organic!)*

*That's my word! Cause I couldn't think of— It just "sprouted," is what I wanna say. And it is organic. And that's what I think is kinda cool about it to tell you the truth. And it was so funny, let me tell you about it, because when we had the meeting, to find out that it was not officially sanctioned ever, it was totally funny. It was one of the coolest aspects of it."*

## Steve Winter

*I don't know when it started. It well predates us moving back to New Haven.*

*When I became alder in the spring of 2018, Alder Edwards' mom (who was Alder before Edwards) reached out to me and was like, 'You gotta do something about that Garden across the street.' I believe she said it looked like a shantytown. In particular, they didn't like the proliferation of watering cans. So I went over there to try to talk to some of the gardeners about trying to clean the garden up some, and that's when I found out the Garden doesn't have a water source. They tried to run a hose across the street but it didn't work, so you have people with baby strollers and milk jugs full of water and rolling them across the street.*

*Yale owns the property, so I reached out to them and tried to see if there was anything they could do. And they said, "We can bring some water over there, and we can also have a meeting with folks telling them to clean the space up." So did both of those things and they dropped off these big water containers, which lasted like a couple of months and never got refilled. So now there are these huge water tanks that just sit there. After another year or so, all the water jugs were back. The place still looks a little bit better than it did two years ago.*

*We did have a meeting, which was kind of amazing. I went over there and talked to a couple of gardeners, and I think Yale did a bunch of flyering in the properties. Then we had a meeting with a bunch of gardeners, myself, and I think like six people from the university — a guy from the legal team, multiple people from Grounds, I think a landscape architect, a community relations person. They really showed up. And we talked about garden hygiene and how to clean the place up.*

*The other thing that came up during this process was this conflict about who could plant where, which is not at all unusual in a community garden. But I think it was heightened because there's no one who administers this, there's no organization. People have plots and they tend to them. There's no central body, like the University is not the authority and there's no meetings or governance of the garden.*

*There were plots of land that were being handed down as people left, like graduate students and their families left, and new people came in. And there were people who wanted land, who weren't able to get it, but there wasn't any system for it. And the people who were passing their land to other people felt a strong claim to it. As one woman kept saying, "We created it. This was unkempt forest space, we took all that out, we made the soil what it is. We created it," she kept saying. And, it was an ethnic thing. There were Chinese people giving land to Chinese people and there were people from the greater Indian subcontinent who were waiting for years to get land over there. They were kind of told, you can have this not-so-great parcel off in the corner. It got pretty heated. But in the end, we were able to broker a compromise, and that was the last I heard of it.*

*I helped them communicate that it wasn't really fair for people who are part of the same community to be waiting for years, and not have access to a real plot. And I think that message got through, and they agreed there was some plot that they were okay giving up.*

(I also reached out to Yale Elm Campus properties— I know it's Yale-owned land, and they could technically bulldoze it anytime they wanted and build something there. So did you get a sense that there's any desire among the gardeners to secure a permanent land tenure or at least some sort of permanent status for the garden, because it's currently just temporary.)

*I'm not aware of that and I don't think they would have a really good chance at it, unless they were very well organized. And it's tough because the people and their families are only there for so long. It's a rotating thing. On the other hand, so are Yale undergrads, but there are things there that outlast a particular set of undergrads. So I don't know. It seems unlikely though, just because it's a very valuable location and I can see the university wanting to build something there at some point, in the long term.*

(Kim also mentioned something about their possibly being lead in the soil, but she didn't know much about it.)

*I think what Alder Edwards is pointing out is that there was a house somewhere on the property—you can probably find out by going to the city of the library or the New Haven Museum—and look at old maps to see where the house was. But if there was a structure there, anywhere near where the Garden is, and I don't know where the house was, but it was most likely painted with lead. If it was a stone house, then maybe it's not much of a concern, but most structures were wood and the wood was painted with lead paint til the 1970s. The lead paint would flake off and contaminate the soil. Chances are, what Alder Edwards is saying, is there's some soil contamination there. The other thing you could do is, take a soil sample and go to the Connecticut Agricultural Experimentation Station and get it tested.*

## Emily Sigman

*Be really careful with that though. Like Yale Programs, as a rule, do not do soil testing and they actively discourage soil testing. Because if they have any evidence that their properties are contaminated, then they'll assume the liability and shut the Garden down.*

(Yeah, I won't do that. But if there was potentially lead in the soil, how would that affect the crops and also the health of the gardeners?)

*Lead is a neurotoxin, and it's easily bio-accumulated by plants. Pretty much any piece of land that had a building on it, like Steve said, in New England and a large part of the whole country, is gonna have heavy metal contamination because lead was unregulated for so long. And in addition to there being typically high concentrations of lead over old roof lines, over time that lead can get moved around. It can get moved around by mycelium, so fungus transports it around the site. It can get moved around by people, so if you're digging up soil. There's a lot of really fast-growing plants over there too, like the Japanese knotweed and other kinds of big, invasive things, so those are gonna bio-accumulate really quickly, so if those also get moved around, that's gonna move the lead around. So there's a good chance, like Steve said, if there was a painted house there and there is lead on the site, I would think that because of all those fast growing species, that are also getting cut down and moved around and used as trellises, which would mean that in the areas where people are planting, if there is lead in the soil, the crops that are growing there are going to bio-accumulate the lead, and that can make it into the food that people are eating. If that enters peoples bodies and reaches high-enough concentrations, it can cause a lot of problems for people.*

*This is not my area of expertise, but it's definitely something to look out for with any kind of urban farming or foraging situation. The New Haven Land Trust, for example, starts community gardens. They'll typically do things in raised beds, they'll build new soil, sometimes they'll even cap the soil underneath."*

*And you know, I mean it's a really rich field to dig into and something that I personally am really interested in learning more about. These things sound really scary and they are really scary, and I think it definitely points to the need to restore city ecosystems on a pretty massive scale, down to the soil and down to the watersheds, cause water will also move these things around. And who knows, there might also be really innovative things that people on the site are doing to mitigate that, that isn't apparent to the naked eye, or a person who isn't initiated into that system. I don't know. The only way to really confirm is to look at those maps, and to take soil samples around the site, and that comes with a decent amount of baggage. If you do find lead in the soil, then the question is, what do you even do? Lead remediation is a serious task, and I know you were talking about securing land tenure— I imagine that if Yale knows that there's lead there, it becomes a big liability.*



## Future possibilities

In my preliminary research for this project, I read some interviews with Julia Ho and Mai Nguyen, who are both second-generation Asian young people with a connection to sustainable agriculture. Their experiences and insight gave me a bit of inspiration for thinking about the Grandparents' Garden's possible futures.

Julia Ho, a community organizer with Solidarity Economy St. Louis, credits her mother for influencing her mutual aid work. Their family's Tree Grace Farms in Lubbock, Texas is "a hub for organic agriculture, supporting edible school gardens, donating produce to a local food bank, and offering shares in community-supported agriculture." However, Ho's family connection to solidarity economies goes back further than that. Her grandfather founded a farmers' cooperative in rural Taiwan, where they would pool their money to buy seeds for a collective harvest.<sup>9</sup>

Mai Nguyen, a grain and heirloom crop farmer in Sonoma County, observed the high demand for "culturally relevant crops" during their time in San Diego. The Vietnamese community there was buying out the supply of Southeast Asian vegetables at the farmer's market every weekend. People were able to get the produce they wanted, and the farmers were benefitting, but according to Nguyen, the crops weren't always grown in sustainable ways.<sup>10</sup>

Ho and Nguyen's testimonies allowed me to imagine optimistic, but quite far off, possibilities for the future of the Garden. For instance, in the time of Covid-19, many farms and gardens have been redirecting their efforts towards hunger and food insecurity relief—transitioning from the market towards mutual aid food packages. What would it look like if most of the crops in the Garden, taken from the gardeners' surpluses, were picked up and brought to Semilla Collective's Food Garage? What would it look like if the gardeners had a collective stand at farmers' markets in New Haven, selling their crops to consumers who are looking for locally grown Chinese produce? What if they then pooled the extra profit to purchase resources and equipment for the garden? These were the questions that I was grappling with when writing my project proposal. However, none of these questions even begin to take into account the possibility of lead in the soil, as Kim and Steve mentioned.



So, where do we go from here? Before I spoke to any gardeners, I had a romantic notion of the Garden as a space that could be a center for mutual aid, diverse crops, and cultural organizing, inspired by the legacy of South Central Farm. But the reality is that the gardeners on Prospect Hill come from a very different background and material circumstance. Almost all of them are the parents and family of Yale-affiliated postdocs and researchers, with plenty of disposable time and income— a very different demographic from those that urban agriculture initiatives purport to help.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, because most Gardeners are just in New Haven for a few years, there is less at stake in organizing for permanent land tenure. All the Gardeners I spoke to regarded their gardening activities as a past-time, rather than a means of sustenance.

I'm definitely not in a position to impose a direction for the Garden, but I thought it fitting to end this project with additional questions. Before even considering the Garden as a center for mutual aid, there's still lots more to think about. Whose Garden is it? Who feels welcome at the Garden, and who is left out? Besides the intra-community tension between Chinese gardeners and South Asian gardeners, we must also consider the relationship and boundaries between the Garden and the surrounding, non-Yale neighborhood.

When I interviewed Ward 19 Alder Kim Edwards, she said: "it's not our Garden. It's never been our Garden. I've never seen members of our community, other than that section of the hill, go to the Garden." It is clear that the Grandparents' Garden exists in a racialized geography that the gardeners as well as New Haven community members are implicated in. Although it's technically a "community garden," the space still has its own unmarked boundaries that dictate who belongs, and who doesn't.

One of the YFSI weekly seminar discussions was on the topic of "Gardens." We deconstructed the idea that urban farming always equals food justice, and spent some time envisioning what an ideal, justice-centered garden would look like. Most of all, we thought that gardens should be a place where neighborhood kids can go to learn and explore. The Grandparents' Garden can be a place for cultural learning, sharing, intergenerational connections, and even health, but how can those benefits be expanded and spread beyond the immediate Prospect Gardens residents?

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