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Reflections of an Urban Gardener: Inspired by the Trybal Revival Garden and Novella Carpenter's,
Farm City

The question: "What's growing in your garden?" is deceptively simple and unexpectedly hard to answer. Yes, I could give you a list of exactly every plant that will be grown in the garden, its readily available on the website, however, this does not even begin to cover what is actually happening. The Trybal Revival gardens role in my life and the life of the neighborhood community cannot be explained through "oh well we grow fruits and vegetables... you know". If I have learned anything this quarter it is that a garden is so much more than just plants thrown together. A garden has life, it has meaning, and it can offer comfort or mystery. Every garden tells a story, so to fully answer the question of what is growing in our garden I will have to start at the beginning.

Section 1: Shoots

Our start at the garden could not have come at a more perfect time. We started after a very long and agonizing winter, right as spring began. I remember it was unusually warm the first time we went to the garden, so warm in fact that we were all wearing shorts for the first time in 3 months. I can't lie; at my first glance of the Trybal Revival garden I was taken aback, disheartened even. It was also so bare due the winter's long frost that no plant could fight its way through survival during cold Michigan months. I can't explain why, but I had expected something spectacular; rolling lawns, lush fruit trees bending under the weight of hundreds of juicy, mouthwatering specimens, flower beds filled with sweet smelling colorful flowers rivaling Meyers Garden, a vegetable garden that could provide enough food to feed the whole community for free. My imagination went on and on, completely ignoring logic and reason and creating Eden on earth. You can understand then why I felt the way I did. However, this view did not last long and it was the first lesson I got from Trybal Revival. What is grown in the garden or how it may appear to an outsider should never define a garden. After my first tour of the garden my irrational thought processes had been thrown out the window for something even greater: reality. Suddenly my rolling lawns and fruit trees seemed so frivolous, and shallow; looks really are not everything. Even though the garden did not have anything growing in it when we started, it was still beautiful. It was beautiful because it had the potential to be something amazing and the pure energy this created in the garden amazes me to this day. Dale and Tomme are essential for this energy, the way they approach the garden is what gives it life. Seeing the garden as more than just a way to provide food

but as a way to develop community has been an invaluable experience for me. Their endless positivity and openness to everyone creates a garden that transcends the norms for a community garden and makes it into a vehicle for creating a healthier more lovely community. Now as I look at the gardens I not only see hard work but I see the love that had gone into developing it and the amazing message this sends; a garden is more than plants lined up in rows, it is a way of life. What is grown in a garden is not as important and the way in which the garden is approached by the workers and the community.

Section 2: Permaculture

Dale and Tomme recently received some land from the land bank with the intention of creating another garden that is open to the community. Our time in the garden marked the beginning stages of planting and shaping the garden to create their vision. The garden will be a combination of permaculture and round community beds (see image on p. 5). Permaculture, when I first heard this was the plan I was stumped. Did that mean we were going to grow everything in giant glass cases, or was it a reference to hairdressing, cultivating the garden to appear like a perfectly coifed perm? Permaculture is in fact a way of growing plants with a mutualistic, symbiotic approach. As I learned from my brief encounter with biology, all plants absorb and release nutrients into their environment. Horticulture studies the input and output of the plants and according to nutrients which plants will grow best with each other in a reciprocated way. For example, if one plant needs a lot of calcium to grow it may be planted next to a plant that has an excess of calcium. In many ways my work in the garden itself was like permaculture. By working in the garden I found much needed stress relief and a sense of accomplishment that comes with working on your hands and knees in a garden. I got to relive my childhood through gardening, an activity made difficult by living in a dorm with hundreds of other students. And in turn I helped in the garden, planting seeds, weeding, digging up beds. The idea of permaculture also represents the garden as a whole; the garden gives the community a way to grow food, a sense of unity and beauty and in turn they may come in and cultivate it.

Section 3: Grapes

The contribution I'm most proud of in the garden is my help in planting the grapes. It also provides me with a way to literally answer the question, "What is growing in your garden?". Grapes, grapes are growing in our garden, white grapes and red grapes. However, once again there is so much more to "grapes" than just a plant growing in the garden. The day was beautiful, the best kind of day to garden, and I had convinced my boyfriend to come with me to the Trybal Revival garden. Dale had recently received some grape stalks from her brother who is a large vineyard owner. She

and Tomme, following the advice of the professional, had buried the grape stalks upside down underneath about 6 inches of dirt so as that no part of the plant was showing. Our job was to dig them up and plant them in the gardens. I remember thinking how odd it was to bury the stalks upside down underground, how could plant possibly grow without sunlight and fresh air. Imagine my surprise when the stalks came up with tiny little white buds growing on them. It struck me how amazing nature is, the fact that these plants were able to grow completely underground is miraculous. Grapes are a great example of a plant in the garden that can work as a metaphor. I once read somewhere that the best wine grapes came from the most desolate environments. The pure sustainability and survival ability illustrates the great powers of evolution. The way a grape plant can grow upside down underground demonstrates the human ability to thrive and adapt to new environments. To me the Trybal Revival garden is like those grapes, Dale and Tomme created a space that is not only aesthetically pleasing but it betters the community that it is a part of. Like the grapes it was able to sprout in adversity, taking the foreclosed lots and turning them into a community space. During my last visit to the garden I found dark green leaves had replaced the small white buds. The success of the grape plants remind me of Dale's and Tomme's goal and how the garden is growing and improving every time I see it.

So when asked to answer the question "What is growing in your garden?" I will probably answer "oh y'know, fruits and vegetables" just to avoid having to talk for three hours, but I will not be content with this answer. It is close to impossible to express what is really growing in our garden but if I had to really sum it up I would have to say: something great and wonderful, new life, old life, flowers, trees, herbs, relationships, love, community, permaculture, bees, spring, ideas, goals, fruits, vegetables and last but not least grapes!