

Spring Crop Harvest

by Monticello - October 11, 2012

On June 8, 2012, Smithsonian Gardens staff harvested beets, cabbage and turnips to be displayed as part of The Jefferson Table and Gillette Family Garden public program presented by the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) at the USDA Farmer's Market. The program featured culinary historian Leni Sorensen, Ph.D., who captivated audiences with a cooking demonstration. The harvest was replaced with summer plants started in the Smithsonian Gardens greenhouse and seeds from Monticello.

Planting Summer Crops

In the summer planting of the Gillette Family Garden, the okra itself served as the initial support for the beans; after which a tripod support made with cut branches was added. Hops twined around the wattle fence under the exhibit banner. The resulting summer growth has created an exuberant garden featuring the following varieties:

Plants

Okra — Cow's Horn Okra (<http://search.store.yahoo.net/monticellosestore/cgi-bin/nsearch?catalog=monticellosestore&vwcatalog=monticellosestore&query=okra&x=0&y=0>), *Hibiscus esculentus*

Sesame — Bene. (<http://search.store.yahoo.net/monticellosestore/cgi-bin/nsearch?catalog=monticellosestore&vwcatalog=monticellosestore&query=sesame&x=0&y=0>), *Sesamum indicum*

Strawberry — Alpine strawberry (<http://search.store.yahoo.net/monticellosestore/cgi-bin/nsearch?catalog=monticellosestore&vwcatalog=monticellosestore&query=strawberry&x=0&y=0>), *Fragaria vesca*

Chile pepper — Fish Pepper (<http://search.store.yahoo.net/monticellosestore/cgi-bin/nsearch?catalog=monticellosestore&vwcatalog=monticellosestore&query=capiscum&x=0&y=0>), *Capsicum annuum* 'Fish'

Tomato — Lycopersicon (<http://search.store.yahoo.net/monticellosestore/cgi-bin/nsearch?catalog=monticellosestore&vwcatalog=monticellosestore&query=tomato&x=0&y=0>). var. Lycopersicon

Hops — Humulus lupulus ‘Cascade’

Seeds

Squash — Cymling or Pattypan squash, Cucurbita pepo variety

Gherkin — West Indian Gherkin (<http://search.store.yahoo.net/monticellosestore/cgi-bin/nsearch?catalog=monticellosestore&vwcatalog=monticellosestore&query=gherkin&x=0&y=0>). Cucumis anguria

Legumes — Whippoorwill Cowpea (<http://search.store.yahoo.net/monticellosestore/cgi-bin/nsearch?catalog=monticellosestore&vwcatalog=monticellosestore&query=cowpea&x=0&y=0>) or Crowder Pea, Vigna unguiculata ‘Whippoorwill’

Potato Pumpkin — Tennessee Sweet Potato Pumpkin, Cucurbita moschata

Discovering, Growing and Tasting History

The histories (<http://www.monticello.org/site/house-and-gardens/african-american-gardens-monticello>) behind the various summer crops are significant. In the account book (<http://classroom.monticello.org/teachers/gallery/image/285/Anne-Cary-Randolph-Account-Book>) of Thomas Jefferson’s granddaughter, young Anne Cary Randolph, cymlings, or “simelines” were recorded as one of the top vegetable purchases from the enslaved community along with cabbages, cucumbers and melons.

Sweet potato pumpkins were popular among African American families and were adopted in local cuisine. A cookbook of the era, Mary Randolph’s The Virginia Housewife, suggests pureeing them or baking them whole with meat stuffing. Okra and sesame crops came from African traditions, while the gherkin used for pickling originated in West India. The tomatoes, peppers and hops are varieties developed more recently, but approximate what may have been available when the Gillette family planted their garden.

Smithsonian Gardens provided a display of summer produce, including peppers, crowder peas, okra and sesame for the second iteration of NMAAHC's The Jefferson Table and Gillette Family Garden cooking program with Leni Sorenson at the USDA Farmer's Market on September 21. The sesame was especially impressive, producing dozens of pods of tightly arranged seeds per stem. The audience could also see the crowder peas used in the stew, which were harvested as dry beans and can easily be saved for future plantings.

We encourage visitors to come and see the Gillette Family Garden at the southwest corner of the Heirloom Garden terrace at the National Museum of American History through October 14, 2012. While you're there, be sure to view the ongoing progress on the National Museum of African American History and Culture. We have enjoyed a bountiful season and invite visitors to grow these heirloom plants and share the stories behind them.

Joe Brunetti and Erin Clark

Horticulturists

Smithsonian Gardens

<http://www.gardens.si.edu> (<http://www.gardens.si.edu>).

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