

# Redefining Mezzacello

Mezzacello is more than an urban farm. It is more than a group of enclosed sustainable ecosystems. It is also a learning lab dedicated to advancing and innovating agricultural and technology solutions for urban food deserts. That takes improvements in infrastructure and resources. Over the past two weeks I have been pulling down buildings and coops, grading the land, and building forms for new concrete pads for new outbuildings.



[/media-credit] Building up the concrete forms where the shed used to be.

I have a grant for the improved infrastructure but I did not



fully grasp the scope of the under structures. In Mezzacello 1.0 I made the foundations as I went and using stones. This enabled pests and rodents to nest and was not always level. Mezzacello 2.0 will have better infrastructure; water, power, lab space and a media lab. I am learning that construction is tough work (spoiler alert: I built all of Mezzacello myself). I am learning that construction schedules are erratic and annoying. But I am on my way. The next post will be about the specific changes I need to make.



[/media-credit] A split screen of where we are now.

---

# Don't Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth

## *Diversity*

Diversity in an ecosystem is always a good thing. I produce high quality compost and fertilizers from various sources. But the poultry and rabbit manure have limits. And it takes time

and energy to synthesize them to where the garden beds actually need those minerals and soluble nitrogen. What I need is manure from a larger herbivore with a more selective diet. Cows are OK but their manure is hit or miss and cows eat anything. Seeds can remain intact. No, what I need is horse manure. And I found some! Thanks to Facebook, Columbus Area Homesteaders group, and Abigail Santorine and her lovely little pony, Ginger. My niece and I ran over to Abigail's house and collected manure on a Monday night after work.

## Community

I rarely mention this side of being an urban farmer. It takes a village to become a knowledgeable urban farmer and it takes a village to get all the resources one will need to get an enclosed ecosystem sustainable. It takes work and community.

I am from Los Angeles. I started "farming" in 2014. I have gotten A LOT of help. And it's from a community that spans the globe and is right in my back yard. The Facebook group "Columbus Area Homesteaders" is a terrific group! Everyone on there is so empathetic and helpful (even me). If you are interested in Urban Farming, definitely check them out! Also, remember, a community is a garden as well. It needs tended, it requires care and attention, and you have to be willing to replace what you take out. Abigail, I want to support your passionate mission at Tiny Horse. I'll post details in the comments on this post! Thank you!

---

## Changes, Evolution, and

# Chicken Coops

***I love the play house chicken coop.  
It represents my innocent and playful  
heart. I meant well; Now I know better.***

I was at a party last year (just before the #COVID19 pandemic changed the world) and I was discussing farming with a colleague. Their position was that it was impossible to be a farmer (based on my experiences) they couldn't manage the shame of failure. Straight face when they said this, by the way. There was a version of me that existed at one time that would have been horrified at this sentiment. That version of me craved convenience over confidence. I am a product of failure; I feel zero shame at my failure. What I feel instead is a desire to keep evolving, learning, and sharing. I am a product of the very culture I want to transform. The person who looks at a grocery store as the ENTIRE story of food. Thanks to modernism, technology, and capitalism this is true of many people these days. But an idea is not truth. It is a story that you create and use to describe what you can see. The trick is to always be willing to ask better questions. Yes, those questions will most likely lead to failure. But the truth is that wisdom nurses at the teet of failure. We grow very little from success; but we grow most at the hands of failure. This is a hard but necessary lesson. There was a time when seeing someone else succeed at something I was trying would make me feel shame. I burnt that nuisance weed down to the ground – with a flamethrower. My success is DEPENDENT on seeing what others do and learning from THAT. Case in point; my chicken coop.

Precious, naive me believed this was a good idea at the time. In fact you can see the very evolution of this idea in this photo. You gave the “winter coop” and just behind it the

larger coop. When I engineered these coops I believe I was engineering g from the perspective of the chickens. Small and scaled for one purpose; housing for small animals. I had not yet factored myself into their ecosystem. There did not need to be room for me to coexist in what I thought of as their “space”. But that was a failure of imagination. The enclosed ecosystems of Mezzacello I now realize need to be gracious enough for all components of that ecosystem to interact. That includes the humans.

i feel zero shame that it took me five years of continuous failure, evolution, and modification to discover this truth. I documented it all. I can point to specific moments like this and help others avoid these mistakes. There is a calculus to life that has variables of ease of use, integration, cost, and wisdom. You must be ready to factor for all of these when you make plans. My plans are changing – yet again. But they will make it easier for me to coexist in the worlds of these animals, these systems, these plants, microorganisms and fungi. As we should. I love the play house chicken coop. It represents my innocent and playful heart. I meant well; now I know better.

---

## **Spring      2021      and      the Brunerform**

An update on the gardens this spring and a candid little confessional and observation on Spring, Beauty, Life, and Fashion.

---

# The Vision for the Formal Gardens

Six years ago around this time we started mapping out the “rooms” of the formal gardens. We cut out the sod and recycled as much of the dirt as we could and turned the rest into sod rolls for our neighbors. We had 60 rolls of sod. Then I aerated the beds well, and in a few select spots dug the swales which I filled with old wood and dead branches. Then I covered everything over with dirt, compost, weed fabric and mulch. We had nothing to put in the beds. By sheer luck, a neighbor posted on social media they had some boxwoods they wanted to re-home. But we knew we needed something more. So Rick went about making cuttings of the Annabelle hydrangeas we found in the neighborhood. He stuck them right in the ground and let me use my systems to nourish them. This was our first hedgerow.

It's fun to think about those tiny boxwoods – all 36 of them! Rick put them to use to frame the formal garden rooms. They were all donated from a neighbor who had inherited them from the previous owners of their house – who happen to now live down the street from us. So we made three truckload deliveries and Rick planted every last one of them. It was hard work. They are so much bigger and more vigorous now. The systems for developing compost, the manure, the additives, and the water swales really make a big difference!

*It's funny to see Mezzacello this way. Today the flowers and hedgerows frame everything so well. And the 36 Hornbeams are all almost 4 meters tall now and a solid wall of green.*

I did almost all of the labor here. Rick helps, but it is my job to fertilize and plan systems. This one I cannot take credit for. Rick is the genius behind this plan. I thought he

was being over generous in his proportions and scale. I was wrong. This garden has matured beautifully. I can only imagine what our neighbors must have thought of the “racetracks in the grass” that was our yard in 2015. Rick had a vision. And it is today one of my favorite places in the world.

## **Update**

---

# **The Paths To The Ecosystems**

The roads most traveled on an urban farm and what these paths to the ecosystems tell us. How the ecosystems of Mezzacello connect.

---

# **Giving Back to Sustainability for Lint**

Four years ago we decided we were to dedicate our efforts across all domains to sustainability. We refer to it as an enclosed Sustainable ecosystem network. There are many pathways that enable and insure those networks remain viable and renewable. This requires that we reframe waste. Not as an inconvenience or troubling afterthought; but as a valuable resource. This is one of the most valuable waste streams at Mezzacello. Humble lint.

We pull it off our clothes, linens and rugs. We used to throw



it away. But then I saw the multiple functional pathways lint could be useful for:

1. birds nests
2. holding moisture in potting soil
3. carbon in compost
4. catching and housing algae and microbes in the biofilter
5. bedding for baby chicks
6. bedding for baby rabbits
- holding water safely for crickets
7. great padding on hangers
8. holding peanut butter and lard for sueT
9. helping seeds thrive as it holds water and fertilizer close to the seed
10. creating sachets to keep moths away in closets, especially when you add cedar oil and lavender

There is more I am sure. I haven't encountered it yet. What would you use lint for? Share it with me. Make me better!

---

## The Foodist: Rabbit Pot-Au-Feu

Pot-au-Feu is usually made with two cuts of beef and lots of fresh herbs and vegetables. We have lots of the latter but no beef; we raise rabbits. So rabbit it is! I love this in the fall and winter, we love it with fresh herbs and vegetables so it needed to be a summer meal – But I can use the root cellar vegetables and herbs that I dehydrate and store. So we are adapting as we go along.

## INGREDIENTS

- 5 sprigs of parsley
  - 2 sprigs of thyme
  - 1 large bay leaf
  - 4 large leeks
  - 4lbs of rabbit (a whole rabbit)
  - 2 cups beef broth
  - Rabbit Kidneys, liver and chicken liver, quartered
  - 1 small head of cabbage cut into 8 wedges
  - 4 large carrots cut into quarters
  - 2 medium purple turnips peeled and quartered
  - 2 large cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
  - 1 large yellow onion
  - 4 medium Yukon gold potatoes peeled and halved
  - 8 toasted pieces of crusty bread
  - 1/4 cup Dijon mustard
  - Salt and cracked pepper
1. Tie the parsley thyme and bay leaf together in a 10" square of cheesecloth with string. This is your bouquet garni.
  2. Place rabbit but not organs in a 10-12 quart dutch oven and cover with 1" of cool water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat.
  3. Fill an additional 6-8 quart pot with salted water to a boil. Add the cabbage in and boil for 3 minutes. Drain and set aside.
  4. Skim the fat from your boiled rabbit. Add the bouquet garni, leeks, cabbage, carrots, turnips, onions, garlic and 2tbs salt. Add beef broth and enough water back to the pot to cover the vegetables. Return to a boil.
  5. Skim the water again after the boil. Turn the heat down to low and partially covered. Cook at a simmer. Continue to remove fat occasionally.
  6. The rabbit will take a few hours to cook. Remove the vegetables as they cook. Set the vegetables aside after

they cook.

7. Boil the potatoes for 20 minutes. Drain and set aside.
8. Remove the rabbit from the broth and set aside. Cover with foil.
9. Feed the the bouquet garni to the chickens. Add the organs, vegetables and potatoes to the broth over medium heat. Heat them through.
10. Serve up mugs of broth. Add the Dijon mustard to 1 cup of broth. Use this to spread on your bread. Spread half on the platter you will be serving the Pot-au-Feu on.
11. Transfer the vegetables to a platter. Plate the rabbit. Pour enough broth over the dish to add a shallow pool of broth. Add Salt and Pepper over the dish.
12. Serve.

---

## The Aquatic Ecosystem in 2021

It's winter, 2021. This is the fourth winter in the aquatic ecosystem for the fish at Mezzacello. If you're not familiar, [start with this nightmare](#) or [this](#), or [this](#). I have busted my gluteal muscles trying to learn what Mother Nature needs to create a #Sustainable aquatic ecosystem and make it manageable for a 21st Century life style. It has been a rewarding journey. So much #Physics #Biology #Chemistry #Ecology #Hydrodynamics #Stats #Mathematics #Topology #Geometry and #Legal issues. All of this. From having the police called on me for digging a six foot grave, to mastering hydrology and pump technology and #Backup Systems to the magic of getting handwritten poems in the fence written by neighborhood kids. This particular ecosystem at Mezzacello has been a wonderful journey. Recently I went out and looked into the clear 1.7m

abyss at the perfectly content fish I was reminded of the Haiku that one of my summer camp kids wrote to me on 2018:

*Sky of clear water  
Dug deep down into the ground  
Warm in winter, sound*

That's the aquatic ecosystem in a nutshell.

---

## Winter Soldiers in a Garden

Food is complex. The types of food I grow at Mezzacello are optimized mostly for three things:

1. Caloric Benefit
2. Rate of Growth and Yield
3. Seasonal Duration

Today's blog post is about 2 and 3. The vast majority of crops that I grow are root crops or squashes. They grow well in my #ProjectMartian beds and they can last three seasons with proper precautions. Then there are the "super crops" or "winter soldiers" like chard, kale, leeks, and green onions. Root crops sweeten, but don't continue photosynthesis like green onions, leeks chard and kale do. They may not be strong on the first optimization strategy, but they are great for flavor and reliability.

The other intriguing component of leeks and green onions: they are essentially immortal. The leeks and green onions you see in this garden in 2020 I planted from either seed or cutting in spring of 2017. If you mound dirt (or compost around leeks and green onions, they will root well. Then when you harvest them, leave the cut root in the ground and a new plant will

replace it. Three generations of green onions in 2020 alone. And the leeks were bought at a NC garden stand on highway 12. I kept the bottoms moist in paper towels and brought them home. They lived in a five gallon bucket of water all winter of 2019 (I wanted to move them and replant them and forgot) and yet they persist. These are my winter soldiers!