

Leek Whitening Strategy

I grow Leeks here regularly. But the whites of the leeks carry the most flavor, so I am speeding up the white growth. Wrap in paper.

The Manure That Infected Mars

#ProjectMartian really worked well. Especially during the COVID19 isolation. Last year every bit of manure and green and brown for compost went through the #Bioreactor. I was mocked for using it. I was chastised for calling it that. But it did work. This year I used compost from the bioreactor in all of my 24 garden beds. But in eight of them I got cocky and amended the beds with horse manure. That was a good idea in theory except for one important fact; there was life in the manure. Bugs and weeds to be exact. I placed a layer of diatomaceous earth on every bed as a last step. In the outside manure beds, the life came from below the layer of diatomaceous earth. The system worked perfectly when I used "Eden's Ghost" and just compost from the bioreactor. I was stunned to find all these weeds beneath the burlap today.

This is the design cycle in action. This is a failure that is going to drastically curtail my productivity. Along with the weeds came a whole class of pill bug and centipede that LOVE rich, wet, dark, organic environments. And now I have to sterilize the top 6cm of the infected beds. But I learned a valuable lesson; on Mars you have to use what you have. Had I stayed true to that mission I would not have discovered this flaw in my system. Lesson learned. Cook all manure before you add it to a #ProjectMartian bed. I am glad I learned this here and not on Mars.

The Rule of Sustainability – 3 and 5 Strategy

Sustainability is an important topic right now. We need more of it, and better metrics to define what “it” is.

Spring 2021 at Mezzacello

Well it's nearly Easter in this year after COVID19. My enclosed sustainable ecosystem is readying itself to come back to life. I decided this cold sunny day was the perfect day to record Mezzacello.

This is right before it goes through it's next big expansion. So here is a little slideshow from April 1, 2021. Let me know if you have any questions. There is some bit of trivia or an active experiment going on in everyone of these photos.

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.

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!

Love and Hope and Yin and Yang

It is January 21st, 2021. I am grateful, not because of yesterdays events, but because of the reaction from all of my friends, family, interns, mentees and that 22 year old poet, Amanda Gordon. I think this embodies best what I am feeling. At first you might mock this image or think, "get rid of the brick.". After all if the idea of the balloon is to fly, well why would you tie it down with a brick? I chose this specific configuration very carefully. Yes, ONE balloon accomplishes nothing, but hundreds of balloons working together can accomplish a lot and WILL lift that brick. One hundred bricks can make a wall.

Bigger tables, less walls

I also chose it because it better reflects our actual universe: **Yin and Yang**. There are scared and hurting people amongst us. They were not wrong, just unfinished. We need to help not hurt, empower not dominate. Unity comes when both of these elements work together to achieve good for all, not just the one or the other.

Besides, the balloons and their power over the brick is the ENTIRE premise of the movie "UP" which is hands down, one of my favorite movies ever. Do NOT be fooled; it takes a lot of courage to love and stay hopeful. Fear just makes you complacent and cruel and does not encourage growth or change. We are better than that and we still have some work to do.

I leave you with the opening and closing lines from Amanda Gordon's BREATH TAKING poem:

The Hill We Climb

"When day comes we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade?"

"When day comes, we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid. The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."

Amanda Gordon