

A River Ran Through It; Alum Creek, Kerr Mill, and a Farmhouse

This house will be 155 years old this year. A quick history of the house and the land around it.

Mezzacello: Home Is Where The Lab Is

My home and my non-profit Mezzacello are the same place. This is the future of food security, creating networked gardens.

Energy Gardens For The Future of Food

After years of providing power to the garden this was the year that the garden began providing power back as a “crop”.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.