

SE. 1 EP 1 Fall Gardening with Melanie Bromberek

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SPEAKERS

Jessica Prugh, Melanie Bromberek

J Jessica Prugh 00:07

Welcome to the very first episode of CLC Connects. The podcast where we connect College of Lake County faculty and staff experts with you to give opinion advice or tips on anything that interests like County. On our first episode, I'll be chatting with Melanie Bromberek, the Horticulture Lab Coordinator and farm manager at CLC. She's going to tell us how to get started with a garden now. Yes, now! August 2, it's not too late. She's also going to give us some valuable tips and tell us a pretty cool story about one of our horticulture students. So please stick around. Hi, Melanie, welcome to CLC connects. Thank you. We're here today to talk about the summer harvest and what's coming out of the greenhouses over at CLC. So, Melanie, can you tell me about why you are uniquely qualified to talk about horticulture and gardening at CLC?

M Melanie Bromberek 00:58

Sure. So I'm the horticulture lab coordinator. And basically, I'm the farm manager over there. So I worked for about seven years with Windy City Harvest there, the Urban Agriculture Department of the Chicago Botanic Garden. During my time there, I had my own farm business for about three years, just growing various vegetables ran a CSA program, did some wholesale sales. I also grew on the Hilton rooftop downtown for the chef there. And before I came here to CLC, I was the sales manager for Windy City Harvest. So I've been doing it for you know, a while growing vegetables day in and day out. And I love it and love talking about it.

J Jessica Prugh 01:36

What's your typical day like in the greenhouse?

M Melanie Bromberek 01:39

M Melanie Bromberek 01:59

Right now, this time a year, I'm not really in the greenhouse very much. I'm mostly outside. Most of the greenhouse work is during like the winter in the spring, prepping for the plant sale and prepping the vegetables to go outside. But my typical day is I just come in the morning, start weeding for, you know, until I can't anymore. And then now, you know, just doing a lot of tomato pruning right now, doing a lot of sowing of the fall crops right now, believe it or not, it's already time to get all the fall things in the ground in order to get a good later season harvest. And then, you know, depending on the day, I'm doing a lot of harvesting for our market on Thursdays.

J Jessica Prugh 02:17

It seems way too early to be thinking about fall already.

M Melanie Bromberek 02:20

I know. I know, but not for the plants. So.

J Jessica Prugh 02:24

So why do you think gardening is important?

M Melanie Bromberek 02:27

To me, it's one of those things that it always has been important since you know, humans figured out how to do it. And I think that it's just kind of in the last few decades people have kind of that's been the abnormal thing is people not doing it as much. And I think now you're seeing a lot more people get back into gardening and growing their own food and wanting to be self sufficient. I think that just people are concerned about the food system right now. And a lot of the things that you can grow yourself you can grow cheaper and better quality than you can find in the store. So I think we're seeing a lot of people getting back into it, which is great.

J Jessica Prugh 03:03

Yeah, that is great. I love I love gardening I have not a great garden. My husband's a horticulturist and you would think that we would have a better garden because of it. He works all day at work and then like I'm in charge of the garden and it doesn't like our perennial garden is beautiful. Our vegetable garden is like

M Melanie Bromberek 03:21

Mine is the same way. I'm here all day. And then I come home. My tomatoes here are eight feet tall and my tomatoes at home are two feet tall. Like definitely nobody's house looks worse than horticulture sometimes.

J Jessica Prugh 03:35
What's your favorite thing to grow in the garden?

M Melanie Bromberek 03:37
Definitely tomatoes. Like I said, they're about eight feet tall right now. I've got, I think 25 Different varieties this year. So I did every color, shape, size, hybrid, heirloom, you know, saucers, cherry tomatoes. Slicers. We've got everything in there. So having a lot of fun with the tomatoes this year.

J Jessica Prugh 03:57
Are those going to show up at the farm market?

M Melanie Bromberek 03:59
Yes, yes, they're here. Come and get on because I have a lot.

J Jessica Prugh 04:04
What can you tell us about what's coming up right now and Lake County.

M Melanie Bromberek 04:08
So right now we're really kind of at the peak of the harvest season. Like I said, the tomatoes are really starting to roll in. I've got a bunch of different peppers. I did probably 20 Different kinds of peppers. Maybe a little less than that. But and then we've got all different kinds of potatoes, a lot of summer squash, root vegetables like beets and carrots. The garlic starting to come in a lot of really nice cut flower bouquets, all different kinds of herbs, okra, cucumbers, eggplant, things like that. So this is definitely the peak of the season right now.

J Jessica Prugh 04:42
Do you know about how many acres the farm is all in all?

M Melanie Bromberek 04:45
If you just count up just the growing area, it's about an acre so we have two high tunnels that we can grow in. You know for season extension. We have like a perennial area that we're doing some fruit in and then just a big you know annual vegetable bed in there as well,

J Jessica Prugh 05:01

That's cool. What about students in the people that work at the farm? Can you tell me anything about them?

M Melanie Bromberek 05:05

Sure. So the students do a lot of work in the spring in the fall. And then over the summer, we're mostly staff and student workers that are running everything right now. So one of our student workers, it's really cool saw he is actually a an international student from Mexico. And him and his family own a pomegranate, garlic and corn farm down there. And he has the record for the largest pomegranate ever grown in Mexico, all grown organically as a special blend of like soil microorganisms that he applies to the pomegranate trees. And so he's been a huge help out there. And it's been really interesting. He's learning a lot about you know, cold weather temperate zone growing and teaching us about, you know, tropical growing and, yeah, that's been a lot of fun. But everybody that works on the farm student workers staff has been really great.

J Jessica Prugh 05:53

And he was in our most recent issue of CLC connects magazine. Yeah, yeah, I remember seeing him in there. Do you know how big is pomegranate was I?

M Melanie Bromberek 06:01

Okay, so he told it to me and kilos. And I'm trying to convert it. I want to say it was like two or three pounds. Okay. It was it was gigantic. It was very impressive. So

J Jessica Prugh 06:14

That's awesome. Let's talk about fall gardening, since that's where people can start right now if they have not planted their garden yet. So what can you tell us about if I want to go home from this podcast? And I'm like, inspired to start a brand new garden? What can I plant today? And what do I need to start?

M Melanie Bromberek 06:41

So yeah, now is the perfect time to start a fall garden. Actually, a lot of people think oh, it's summer is ending, it's way too late to start a garden. But that's actually not true. There's a lot of crops that they really won't do well in the summer heat. So now is the time to get them germinating and they'll be really happy with the cooler fall temperatures, all you would need to do I would say is just find a good spot that gets full sun. If you're growing in ground, make sure maybe you can apply some compost to your soil. Just make sure it's nice and light and fluffy

and rich dark color. Or you can do larger containers as well just make sure they have drainage. And some good things that you can see right now are any sort of salad greens, spinach, parsley does Okay, turnips, some smaller onions, like scallions and things radishes, arugula, bok choy, some Swiss chard, kale, things like that. There's a really good book called The winter harvest handbook. That's if you're interested in foul growing, I recommend that by Eliot Coleman. He's got the whole list in there.

J Jessica Prugh 07:39

Do you know what our zone is?

M Melanie Bromberek 07:41

We are zone five up here. Okay. Sometimes you can get away with some zone six stuff just because the weather is, you know, obviously, the climate is changing. And where I live in Chicago, we're actually kind of zone six because of the heat island effect. So a warm zone five, I would say.

J Jessica Prugh 07:59

So what is that, like? What is the difference between zone five and zone six like and in terms of what you can grow, well sometimes grow.

M Melanie Bromberek 08:06

It's not so much what you can grow, it's maybe when you can put it in the ground in the spring and how late you can do it in the fall. Because the USDA zones are the average minimum temperature of an area for the winter. But how it affects us in practice is that you have a date for your last frost in the spring and a date for your first frost in the fall. So it just is kind of like the averages of those dates.

J Jessica Prugh 08:33

Okay, what does a person need to get started as far as material or tools go if they want to start today?

M Melanie Bromberek 08:41

Um, I mean, a shovels nice, some dirt and some seeds. You don't need much, you know, I think it's it's mostly just having like a good location to do it. So if you want to grow vegetables and you have zero sunlight in your yard that you know, I've got some bad news for you. But I think you know, don't, don't go out and think that you need a million things to start, just like I said, a couple basic hand tools that you can get at the hardware store and some seeds and good soil and watering can and you're good to go.

J Jessica Prugh 09:15

So speaking of seeds, I had this really great tomato from Mariano's. Can I plant the seeds from that?

M Melanie Bromberek 09:22

It all depends on the actual tomato so some tomatoes are heirloom tomatoes. If the one you got there was an heirloom tomato then you can plant those seeds in the ground and they will grow. Say it was a San Marzano tomato. You can plant seeds from an heirloom Sermo and then it'll make another San Marzano plant. If it's a hybrid seed, which a lot of grocery store tomatoes are hybrids. That just means that it's a cross between, you know two different tomatoes that are you know, they pollinate each other and they're kind of making a genetically mixed tomato. Those are not going to grow true to seed when you plant it in the ground. On so it'll have maybe the characteristics of one of the parent plants. And a lot of times with hybrids, you can get some really weird tomatoes, especially, because some of them their bread from one variety has strong roots, and the other one has the good fruit. But you might get the one that has the strong roots, but weird fruit on it. But you know, it's always fun to try. So you may discover a really great variety. So I'd say go for it.

J Jessica Prugh 10:25

And then I'll bring it over to the greenhouse and maybe get famous. Okay. Do you have any piece of advice for the audience in growing, the tomatoes are growing anything right now,

M Melanie Bromberek 10:39

My piece of advice would be airflow is key. So keep them pruned and spread them further apart than you think you need. And use tomato tone. It's a really good fertilizer for them. It's an organic fertilizer, but general gardening advice, I would just say especially if you're first starting off, just you know, don't overthink it too much. Get a little basic book about gardening, read it. But there's all this advice. And it's really easy to get overwhelmed. And the truth of it is just you kind of have to kill a lot of plants to become a good gardener. So don't be afraid to just go for it. And you learn something every year. And before you know it you'll be you know, a pro so.

J Jessica Prugh 11:18

So Melanie, I have a lot of people on social media that somehow ended up with my phone number or my email address. And they they're always sending in questions about about their own gardens. And I usually send those like right over to you guys. Yeah. Where else can people get some help around their gardens?

M Melanie Bromberek 11:36

Melanie Bromberek 11:50

Yeah. So you can always ask our horticulture department We love answering questions. But sometimes if it's a more in depth question, a better place to go would be the Illinois master gardeners. They have the extension office in Lake County that's actually right down the street from our Gray's Lake Campus here. And they have a hotline that you can call. And you'll get in touch with a master gardener and they can help you research their problem. And it's a really good resource, because they have advice that's really specific to Lake County. So I would highly recommend going to them with any of those.

J

Jessica Prugh 12:07

Okay, and I have that phone number. It is 847-223-8627 and that is for the Master Gardeners extension hotline. I am Melanie thanks for coming in today. Thanks for taking time away from the farm and the gardens outside and your tomatoes and for coming in here to talk to us today.

M

Melanie Bromberek 12:26

Thank you so much for having me. And if everybody could please come visit me and the other horticulture staff out on Thursdays from three to 5:30pm. We've got our farmstand happening right outside the H building. It's right outside the greenhouses. You can't miss it on the Grayslake campus. Thank you,

J

Jessica Prugh 12:43

you can't miss it and you don't want to miss it. It's a really, really great farmstand. Find all the resources we talked about in our show notes at www.CLCillinois.edu/podcast. Have a question? CLC has an expert for that. Pitch us your show ideas by emailing PR.podcast@clcillinois.edu. CLC connects is a production of the PR and marketing department with music by faculty member Dave Asma. You can find more of Dave's music at spunkshine.com