

# Gardening Produces Living In The Present

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**HARRISONBURG, Va.** — Gardening is an activity that offers profound benefits to Sonya Shaver, a subscriber of Glen Eco Farm Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) 2002.

"Gardening is an opportunity to live in the present moment," Sonya said.

And living in the present, she has discovered, is far better than the stress of continually striving for something more tomorrow.

Before gardening, Sonya rushed on a hurried career path toward occupational therapy,

which she loves still, but inside she felt a longing she describes as an "ache" to make conscientious choices.

"I've found since I've become a mom, it's a daily choice. I just want to be a mom and stay at home and grow tomatoes in my backyard," she said.

Despite loving city life, the 30-year old mother said she not only supports community agriculture for herself but also for others. She considers the organic and health aspect, but also the benefits of providing labor for the farmer, contributing to the local economy, and reducing stress on



**William Shaver enjoys helping.**

the environment by eliminating the packaging and delivery aspects of these same commodities.

Shaver takes great pride in providing for her own household by desiring to work with her own hands.

"It's a wonderful opportunity," Shaver said. "It's a chance to contribute to my family's food and income."

"That's the nice thing about Harrisonburg. You don't have to travel very far to be in the mountains or on a farm," Shaver said.

Besides the above reasons, at a young age her son is seeing firsthand, the source of his food. Take green peas, for example. Shaver said 2-year old William saw the pods being harvested at the farm. At home he saw how they were shelled. Then the little fellow watched his mother cook them and the family ate them with Andrew Shaver, his daddy.

On a recent Tuesday — the appointed weekday — Shaver and William arrived at Glen Eco Farm, situated near the community of Singers Glen. The application of sunscreen to their exposed skin that very hot day was the first order of business.

From town, the jaunt was about 15 minutes over rolling countryside considered by many to resemble Lancaster County. According to her contract with Glen Eco owners, Marlin and Christine Burkholder, Shaver is to work several hours for her share, which is a big box of fresh produce. Some CSA members opt for the cash plan, and others ask for a labor and cash setup.

Upon her arrival, Shaver was given a sheet of paper containing a list of vegetables for the day. A tall, slim woman who had bound her wispy hair with a bandana, Christine Burkholder, reported there were 50 boxes to pack as vegetables were picked and brought in from the field gardens. The cartons people were picking up at the farm were kept separate from those being delivered to folks in town.

Other women began exiting the vehicles they had parked along the gravel driveway. It was obvious they, too, preferred working in the pleasurable great outdoors and earning the reward of food that couldn't be any fresher than straight from the patch.

In the garage area Shaver explained how the vegetables are first weighed in bulk. The containers' weight is deducted and equal shares are distributed. Each box is exactly alike.

On this particular afternoon there is broccoli, kale, spinach, asparagus, onions, rhubarb, cilantro, oregano, lettuce, and perfect heads of cabbage grown by a Mr. Gullman.

As Shaver and her friendly consort, Harriet Burgoyne, a grandmother from Mount Clinton, weighed and divvied the asparagus spears, Burgoyne commented about the friendly atmosphere: "The conversation is like the produce — it's always fresh."

The wholesome talk between themselves more often concerns family and careers or how to prepare the food items that were picked that day.

"William has fun because he knows the people," Shaver said.

Beginning in his mothers womb, in fact, William made trips to Glen Eco all his life. As a baby, he was carried in a sling until his graduation to a backpack. Then he gained a morsel of independence going about on his own sturdy legs.

Community Place is a community garden in the middle of a city street. Local people may consume the produce themselves, but only after they have seen the process of seedlings burgeoning into luscious vegetables.

Each Monday, the Harrisonburg soup kitchen situated in the Little Grill restaurant is one grateful beneficiary of the community gardens produce. A Community Place person coordinates whatever is ready to be picked with the soup kitchens menu planner.

As far as the Glen Eco Farm, Marlin Burkholder says that CSA farmers and consumers benefit mutually from the membership arrangement which permits them to deal directly with one another. Consumers are encouraged to bring along their children just



**Sonya Shaver and her son, William, on Tuesday afternoons enjoy gardening at Glen Eco Farm, owned by Marlin (pictured) and Christine Burkholder. Sonya is a Community Supported Agriculture subscriber who chooses to work 52 hours during the season so her family can enjoy fresh produce in great variety.**



**Pictured with the boxes of produce to be delivered to CSA subscribers are Sonya Shaver with her son William, Harriet Burgoyne, left rear, and Wendy Reardon, opposite.**



**Sonya has been instructed to prepare to wash fresh lettuce that got a bit muddy from the last rainfall. The bulk will be weighed and then divided equally amongst members of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) at Glen Eco Farm.**

This development, however liberating, was also tiring for William and a bit of a drawback for his mom. She unfailingly brings along water and snacks for the inevitable recesses.

"Last year was harder than this year," Shaver says. "But we just stop and take a break."

She compensates for the lost time by working longer.

Shaver says when she first got involved with CSA, she didn't want recipes, she just wanted to know how to fix it. Since then she has learned to make better use of everything and takes care to apportion herbs and so forth to small containers for the home freezer.

"I have greens in my freezer all winter long," she says.

Shaver believes that when you have ownership, something becomes more valuable and certainly the theory applies to ones food. That is one reason she also belongs to a group of community-minded, food-conscious volunteers called "Our Community Place."

Briefly, one project of Our

as Shaver does.

There is no doubt that a positive relationships exists between the farmer/producer and the CSA consumers. In every way, the ingredients for healthy growth are present, be they in the air and soil or between people.

Burkholder says Glen Echo Farm strives to follow sound ecological principles that are based on the concept of sustainability. This year three acres are supporting diversified vegetable and small fruit production. Additionally, 20 acres support mixed hay production, 40 head of beef cattle, and 100-150 egg-laying and broiler-producing chickens.

Crop rotation is practiced in addition to mulching and the application of manures and composts to maintain soil fertility.

The hurried life at times, still tries to crowd Shaver, she acknowledges, but she doesn't permit it to take over.

"I want to be more present," she said.

For her, the answer to that quest is gardening.