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Grower2Grower Project



Shilpi Bhattacharjee & Shah Mohiuddin
Prairie Drive Community Garden, Scarborough *by Rhonda Teitel-Payne*



Shilpi Bhattacharjee

Shilpi grows purple beans, bottle gourds, tomatoes, keraili, mint and amaranth. She keeps her garden productive by adding sheep manure and compost delivered by the city. By constantly harvesting the beans, Shilpi's bean plants are still producing well at the end of the season. She grows the smooth variety of keraili (shown at left) because it's less bitter than the spiny variety.



Shilpi is also an avid balcony gardener, growing container vegetables and vermicomposting. She acknowledges that plants do grow better in the garden, because of the healthy bacteria in the soil, rain water and sunlight.

Shah Mohiuddin

If you're in a garden in Toronto, don't be surprised if Shah pops up. He has shared his passion for long gourds in Dufferin Grove, collected food and water stories with the Rivers Rising program and trained as an Enviro Leader with Access Alliance. He is currently coordinating the Prairie Drive Community Garden.



Soil fertility: Shah prefers to use poultry manure, but cautions against applying too much manure. You need a balance of nitrogen and carbon, and adding too much manure adds too much nitrogen. Also uses compost from FoodShare.



Nematodes on roots

Picture: http://www.fbs.leeds.ac.uk/staff/context_images/PCN%20on%20roots.jpg

Pest control: Shah spreads chili powder to keep out raccoons and squirrels, but only around the edges of the garden to avoid discouraging beneficial insects. He says “it worked to keep out animals at first, but when it washed away, the animals came back and ate even more! I think they were angry with me.”

Shah tried to figure out why his squash, eggplants and chilies weren't thriving. At first he thought there wasn't enough water or nutrients. When he dug up the plants, he found nematodes on the roots that were causing them to shrivel up.



Challenges: Groundhogs

As it sits right beside the Taylor Creek ravine, the Prairie Drive garden had problems with groundhogs this year. Gardeners put up mesh and blocked off holes in the fence, but the thin type of mesh didn't work and the groundhogs just dug around barriers, leaving huge piles of displaced dirt (see left).

Thicker plastic and wire mesh (such as construction fencing) did work. Since orange construction fencing can be unattractive, we talked about using green or black fencing, or use a low fence and cover it with plants.

They've also had some damage due to rabbits and birds, and items stolen from the garden.



Bottle gourds

I ask Shilpi why she likes to grow bottle gourds, she said that they're good for stomach ailments and they're very expensive in stores - \$4.99 per pound!

Shah adds that, by growing them yourself, you can get them fresh – both the fruit and the leaves. They're good for freezing.

Shilpi didn't pollinate the gourds by hand this season, so she didn't have a lot of gourds. She had heard you need to pollinate by hand, but didn't believe it until she saw it in the garden.

Shah does hand-pollinate his gourds. He says you can do this in the morning or late afternoon, but late afternoon is best because the flowers close up with pollen inside. "Doing it by hand means it's done properly. Insects do pick up pollen and pollinate, but they are doing this for their own purpose. The insect picks up the pollen and then takes it home (instead of pollinating the plant)!"





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