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Front Yard Farming

By Ann Katzenbach

There are no lawn ornaments in Summer Lewton's front yard. Most of it has been converted to fertile garden plots from which she grows and sells tomatoes, squash, melon, cucumbers, garlic, onions, eggplant, and peppers. In the back she cares for 40 Rhode Island Red chickens, and there are bee hives as well, maintained by Summer's husband, Sasha.

Sasha works long hours in the produce industry in Nogales, but he's also a partner in the business of farming. Summer does a lot of the labor, but together they plan and figure out what fruits and vegetables to grow, what seeds to buy, when to plant, how much of each crop to plant, and how to save on labor and water. Sasha grew up on an organic farm in Missouri. Summer has always loved to grow things—a trait that includes four children. From her front yard garden, Summer sells wholesale quantities to local stores and restaurants and has customers in Nogales (Villa's Market and Mercado Farmer's Market) as well as Aqua Vita in Tucson. Probably all of us have eaten something grown at Dirty Girl Farmette, the registered name of this establishment on North Avenue.

The big garden began just two years ago when Sasha ordered onion starts. He says he did all the calculations for the size of their family, but when two huge boxes of onion starts arrived, he realized he had over

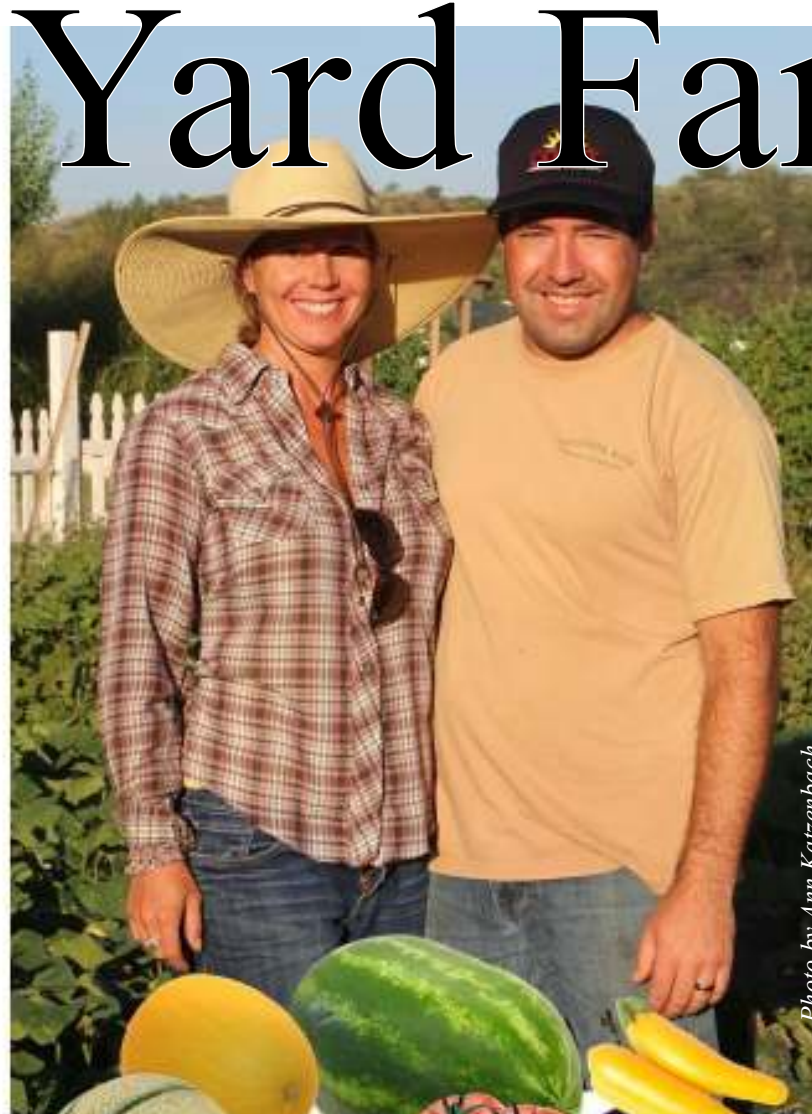


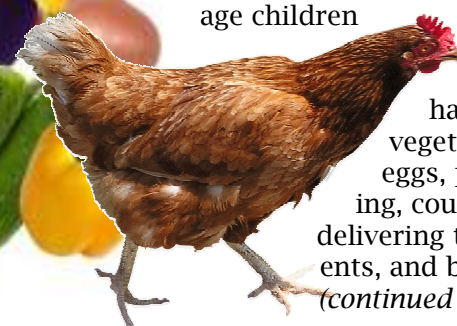
Photo by Ann Katzenbach

ordered—by a lot. When the crop came in, it overwhelmed them. They gave onions away and still there were hundreds more, so they decided to sell them. Once Summer got the hang of it, she says it was easy. The onions quickly disappeared and there was some money in the bank.

Since then the garden has grown and evolved into what it is today. Dirty Girl Farmette has two wells that are doing fine with all the rain we've had. The Lewtons have invested in a biodegradable manufactured mulch that helps keep the weeds down and they have an irrigation system and a rototiller. In between harvests, they plant cover crops to put nitrogen back into the soil. With weeding, watering, tilling and fertilizing all made easier, it's possible to just keep ahead of the growth, but no one has yet invented a machine to harvest tomatoes or squash, melons or onions.

Harvesting is the hardest part of the business of farming. At the height of the season, Summer is up most mornings by 5 a.m. and out in the garden until it's time to take her three school-age children

to school. The rest of the day disappears with harvesting more vegetables, collecting eggs, packaging, weighing, counting, billing, and delivering to her various clients, and being a mom for
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Front Yard Farming, continued

three-year-old Madi. By then school is over and the family comes back in focus.

“Sometimes I can get the kids to come out and help me,” she says, “and they do a lot of work around here, but they have lots of other things that they think are more important. So did I once.”

One of the other things that Summer does think is important at this point in her life, is having some knowledge and say about what goes on in school. She is the newest member of the Patagonia Elementary School Board of Governors, an

unsung volunteer position that requires meetings, reading policy documents, and attending workshops.

Are there enough hours in the day for Summer to be a farmer, mother, wife, and school board member? Obviously the answer is “yes.” She and Sasha are enlarging the garden and there’s talk about leasing some land for Dirty Girl Farmette to expand and keep on growing.

In Patagonia, you can find their produce at Red Mountain Foods, and they now have a website: www.dirtygirlfarmette.com.

NEWS BRIEFS

A video camera has been installed at Paton Center for Hummingbirds. You can watch the hummers and other birds at tucsonaudubon.org/hummingbirdcam.

Patagonia’s Municipal Court will hold a jury trial in Nogales on October 6, 2015. It’s the first time in recent memory that the local court has summoned a jury. The trial was first scheduled for August 21, but summons were sent to post office box holders, some of whom don’t live within town borders. New notifications have already been sent out.

Ike Isakson, Patrick Hatfield, and Ivan Mingura, Patagonia Volunteer Firefighters, and a truck, have gone to help fight the wild fires on the West Coast. They started in California and when last heard from, were near the Canadian border in Washington.

Annette Koweek, Elgin’s eighth grade science teacher, has been named Santa Cruz County Teacher of the Year by the Arizona Rural Schools Association.

Two new members are being sought by The Sonoita Elementary School District Governing Board to replace Gary Brown and Alan Neal, who have resigned. Potential candidates should submit a letter of interest to the county superintendent’s office: 2150 N. Congress Drive, Nogales, AZ 85621

Volunteers are needed for all sorts of jobs at the Fall Festival, to be held the second weekend in October. If you can help, contact Bonnie Macclean at Ovens of Patagonia or call her at 520-308-0963.

Ten gardening seminars will be held through a grant received by Patagonia Library, five in English at the library and five in Spanish to be held in Nogales at Mariposa Health Center. A schedule will be posted in October.

Fireflies have recently been seen at night by several people in town. According to entomologist Liz Bernays, this is very unusual, as they are usually found in other parts of the country where there is high humidity...which we have been experiencing lately.

Borderlands will expand its Earth Care Institute (BECY) into a year-long youth business skills program, thanks to a rural development grant it received from the Dept. of Agriculture. They will partner with the PUHS agricultural program.

New Mining Bill Introduced

By PRT Staff

Raúl M. Grijalva (D-Ariz.), together with 16 co-sponsors, recently introduced the Hardrock Mining Reform and Reclamation Act of 2015, in an effort to address the nation’s backlog of abandoned mine cleanups and to ensure that taxpayers get a fair share from public lands mining. The number of hardrock abandoned mine lands (AMLs) that will require cleanup is 7,700 – 31,000. Federal estimates of the cost to clean up abandoned mines are as high as \$54 billion. In addition, mining companies currently pay no royalties for hardrock minerals they take from publicly owned federal land.

The bill would:

- End the antiquated patenting system that allows companies to purchase mineral-containing public land for as little as \$2.50 per acre
- Establish strong reclamation standards and bonding requirements to make sure taxpayers don’t pay for cleanups if a company skips town or goes bankrupt
- Establish an 8 percent royalty on new mines and a 4 percent royalty on existing mines to bring a fair return to American taxpayers
- Use those royalties and money raised by newly established pollution fees to clean up abandoned hardrock mine lands across the country
- Provide clear authority to federal land managers to reject a proposed mine if it would unduly degrade public lands or resources
- Protect wilderness study areas, roadless areas, and wild and scenic rivers from mining
- Empower state, local, and tribal governments to petition federal authorities to withdraw certain areas from mining in order to protect drinking water, wildlife habitat, cultural and historic resources, or other important values