Two keep busy with Your Backyard Farmer

You expect rain in June, but you don’t expect hailstones the size of marbles to destroy your tomato plants. But that is exactly what happened to Donna Smith and Robyn Streeter when a freak storm trounced their tomatoes and other leafy veggies on June 16.

The two women, who own Your Backyard Farmer in the Ardenwald area of Milwaukie, could only watch as one minute the sun was shining, and the next minute their nearly half-acre farm was inundated with hail.

“We lost all our lettuce, and our zucchini plants were down to one leaf,” Smith said, while Streeter added that the leaves of their squash and pepper plants were shredded.

This happened just days before they were slated to put boxes of vegetables together for their Community Supported Agriculture subscribers.

This is their CSA’s third season, and they currently have eight individual subscribers, but would love to have 15 more. They also supply a variety of vegetables to Milwaukie’s Cha Cha Cha and Oregon City-based Pepper & Salt, along with peppers to Stone Cottage Herbs.

Because they also have 32 chickens and two ducks, the two women can include eggs in a CSA order as well.

Smith and Streeter harvest their CSA farm Friday mornings, and their subscribers come to pick up food boxes between 4 and 6 p.m. that same day, through October.

“It is fun to watch people gather and get their produce,” Streeter said. She added that she and Streeter also donate leftover, good-quality produce to a women’s shelter in Southeast Portland, where women are given job skills by being taught how to cook. As for the rest, the chickens eat anything that does not go into the compost pile.

Your Backyard Farmer

Smith and Streeter both have associate’s degrees in horticulture from Clackamas Community College.
They are organic farmers, which means they use no synthetic pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers.

The two women started Your Backyard Farmer in 2006, and now have 30 farms that they build and tend in other people’s yards. “Each week we visit every farm for harvesting. We don’t get any of the produce; that goes to the residents who come home to fresh bounty,” Streeter said. She noted that they charge a fee based on square footage, and how many people the farm feeds.

“We also have a farm at Rock Creek Corner, a restaurant in Southwest Portland,” and the produce is used in the restaurant’s kitchen, Streeter said.

The two women run a consulting program from February through September where they go to people’s homes and teach them how to grow food in their own spaces.

“That fills up quickly, so we try to get people signed up for that in the fall,” Streeter said.

“We also do one-time consulting for people who already know how to grow vegetables, but might not know where to put their garden. We talk them through that and advise them about what they can and can’t plant,” she said.

Classes

As if they weren’t busy enough, the two women also teach classes at Portland Nursery’s Southeast Division store.

“We offer a free class the first Saturday of the month for an hour and a half. It is a basic, all-you-need-to-know class about growing vegetables. People are supposed to pre-register as the classes fill up fast,” Smith said.

She noted that each class is “month specific,” as to what needs to happen in the vegetable garden that month. The next class will be held on Saturday, July 5.

There are no classes in August, but the schedule picks up again in September.

Information is available at portlandnursery.com.

As for the future, Smith said, “We have grown our business slowly and smartly, but are always open for expansion.”

Contact Your Backyard Farmer at 503-422-9056 or 971-506-6508.

For more information about services offered, visit yourbackyardfarmer.com.
Two keep busy with Your Backyard Farmer

http://portlandtribune.com/sl/225648-88162-two-keep-busy-with-your-ba...