



It's a lot quieter in the garden these days without students. The students are the most exciting part of caring for a garden space. The things that they notice that I would've glanced over without even a thought amazes me. Their excitement of finding a bean on a vine or a pepper on a stalk when I said I didn't think there were any growing quite yet is unparalleled.



Harvesting the Mexican sour gherkins (small circle shaped cucumbers that look like mini watermelons) that are abundant right now, makes me wish for a summer that wasn't. A summer of Charlottesville elementary-aged youth exploring the garden and tasting the fruits of their hard work. When I pluck the gherkins off the vine, I think of how much they would've loved everything about this plant.

As for the rest of 2020, all of the goodness that comes from students in the gardens is not lost. While the elementary garden coordinator team is working to develop a plan to engage with students and families in the fall, we've also been working to ensure that the produce grown at the elementary schools finds its way to places where it is needed.



This is happening through the collaboration with our Food Justice Network, as they coordinate providing wrap-around services to community members who test positive for Covid-19 and request assistance to support them during their recovery. They receive items such as PPE, boxed food, prepared meals, medication, and any other necessities that will support them while they recover. A part of these services is a bag of fresh produce for each family.



While at times it feels odd being in the garden, weeding a bed, and harvesting gherkins without students there to share in the magic of the summer garden, it has been wonderful to utilize the public schools garden spaces as a place where food is grown and distributed to community members who can benefit from it. Each time I harvest and bag up produce for a family from the elementary gardens, I am deeply thankful for and grounded by the ability to share fresh food with members of the community. In this way we are seeing again what we already know to be true: public, urban gardens are vital to increasing access to fresh, nutritious food for local communities and food systems.

