Farming on 300 Square Feet

What do farming and a New York City apartment have in common? Both can be done in a mere 300 square feet! At First Light Farm, this year 22(?) families took on their own “Mini Farm,” or a 300 square foot patch of land upon which they grew their own organic vegetables. Much like a community garden, the Mini Farm program allows gardeners to participate in a collective growing experience; Mini Farmers share tips for trellising rogue peas and sunflowers or lend one another extra starts over evening run-ins at the farm or at frequent farm potlucks.

The goal? To provide a space for families and individuals to not only earn how to grow their own organic veggies, but also experience the innate connection that comes with getting to know a piece of land. Terroir - or the sense of place that say, a carrot, embodies simply by being grown in a particular geography and climate - inevitably transfers to the families here.

For Josh and Linda, first time Mini Farmers, this year at First Light Farm proved fruitful. Josh’s careful list of everything his family grew reads like a true farmer’s journal with careful annotations about what worked, what didn’t, and the culinary treatment that each vegetable received.

* Acorn squash – 14
* Brussel sprouts – 6 plants, still growing but looks like a lot
* Carrots – only several made it, didn't thin properly
* Cauliflower, white and yellow (the yellow was better) – 10 heads, Made picalilli
* Celeriac – 4, made soup
* Cherry tomatoes (red and orange) – a lot, too many. Ate some, dehydrated lots into crunchy chips
* Cilantro – flowered early, didn't get much
* Corn – 8 ears
* Cucumbers – 12, made pickles
* Delicata squash – 24
* Fava beans – 2 cups cooked
* Leeks – 8 or 10. Some bolted early, others didn't
* Lettuce – 2 varieties, about six heads, starts were gifted by fellow gardeners
* Love Lies Bleeding and Bells of Ireland flowers -  just because
* Peas - ~2 lbs
* Peppers (three varieties) – dozens, still producing. Made pepper jelly, salsa, and chili relleno ad nauseam.
* Pole beans - ~3 lbs
* Red cabbage – 4 heads
* Strawberries – just two plants. Grew some berries but we didn't harvest them
* Sugar pumpkins – 14, made pumpkin puree for pies and breads
* Sunflowers (2 varieties)
* Tomatillos – enough for 4 batches of green salsa
* Tomatoes (4 varieties) – many, many pounds. Made tomato sauce, tomato jam, ketchup

Families paid $150 plus a maintenance and membership fee to lease their respective plots for the season which runs from late April until November or as long as they can prolong the harvest. This family spent about another $75 “on starts and seeds and things like twine and wood for the tee pee [trellises],” though they said it could have been cheaper if they were able to plant directly from seeds rather than having to use starts during the very wet Spring. The retail value of their tomatoes alone probably come close to matching the upfront costs of leasing a mini farm.