

A garden story...

RHINOAG



When our HR Manager asked me if I wanted to join the garden committee I thought, YES! I thought, this is going to be amazing, gardening is fun and healthy and natural and it's why hipsters are digging up their front lawns. Side note: I have never gardened before, in fact, the closest I have ever come to gardening was buying tomatoes on the vine at Whole Foods. However, I was determined to help make this dream a reality.

This dream started several years ago when my boss was at RhinoAg the first time. She and one of our welders, PK Atkins, wanted to make it part of the wellness campaign. Fast forward, my boss leaves RhinoAg. Fast forward again, she comes back. And as legend has it, on her first day back PK asked her when they were going to start a garden.

So finally, it's 2018 and we are going to start a garden. We set a date and time, make and post fliers, it's really happening. I print the CDC's healthy eating initiative recommendations on how to start a garden at work and grab my notebook, like Spongebob I'm ready! People actually showed for the meeting! PK, Gary Kingery and Jason Scribner from welding, Steve Walder and Danny Masco from engineering, Angelena Hampton and myself. This is so exciting – the meeting is starting! Ten minutes later I realize that I have not understood a single word that has been said in the last nine minutes. These guys are the real deal, these guys are not hipster Instagram urban farmers, these guys are Midwestern American Farmers. I suddenly realize I'm just John Snow, I know nothing.



The next thing I know we are heading outside. We are going to map this out today and get started because we are already behind. These guys discuss the dimensions and who is going to test the soil. Someone asked if anyone had some graph paper to map things out. I was thinking, right who carries graph paper? Then Steve Walder pulls a piece of graph paper out of his notebook – who has graph paper at the ready? Engineers who also farm, that's who. Amazing. At the end of the meeting it is all mapped and we decide we are going to do yet another thing I don't understand next week. Cut sod?

It's sod removal day. I get there and they are using this thing that looks like a floor buffer and a lawn mower had a baby to cut the grass. Then, you're never going to believe this but, we roll the grass up like carpet. It is surreal that this patch of lawn has been cut into strips, rolled up, loaded onto trucks and is now the bed for our garden. What was more amazing is that some of the people volunteering their time had been at work since 5:30am. A week later, post soil sample results, Danny Masco, farmer and member of our engineering department, delivers and spreads a truck full of fresh compost from his farm.

The next step was this thing called tilling. Our welding supervisor Justin Barger brought his RhinoAg tiller to work on a Saturday and tilled away. I have no idea if that is the correct terminology. Justin also took home some of the cut sod and was able to fix up the yard of his new home. Eric Gee and others on the garden committee also snagged some of this good Gibson City sod to plant in their own yards. Fun fact: Gibson City has some of the richest, most fertile soil in the world, it's true. So who wouldn't want to take that home?



After the news had spread that our garden was really going to happen John Greenhalgh stopped Angelena in the plant and told her that one of our painters, Chris Smith, had an idea. We could use some of these spare metal containers, otherwise on their way to the scrap pile, in Assembly to plant potatoes. Unfortunately we were past the planting day for potatoes. So we had Chris paint the containers RhinoAg orange and we used them to plant herbs and flowers.



At this point I began to wonder if we would ever get to the actual planting part. But we did and once again it was nothing like I expected. I thought this would be the rather Johnny Appleseed section where we just scatter seeds and they spring up into plants. Easy peasy lemon squeezey, it's actually difficult difficult lemon difficult. You have to plan out your rows, spacing and determine which plants go where so they don't grow over on another. You have to get plants from trusted nurseries – PK got all of ours from Hart's Greenhouse in Paxton, IL. By the time I was able to leave my desk and get out there most of the planting was already done. However, it was amazing to me to see these guys be so gentle and meticulous. To see Jason Scribner, who is this amazing mountain of a welder, measuring out the placement of each seed was pretty awesome.



Finally it was planted and ready to grow. We just let the rain water it and boom, vegetables. Wrong. Apparently the garden has to be weeded and watered with more than natural rain fall. Since our garden is fairly far from the building and we don't have a hose long enough to reach what are we going to do? Enter Engineering, Steve Walder and Danny Masco brought in this huge tank and connected a pump and hose with a switch. Voila, we could water the garden. When it came to watering and weeding there were so many people who pitched in. Terry Rusk from the Fabrication and Machining Department even brought his grandkids by to help.

We watched and waited. Then finally this garden took off. It literally exploded with vegetables, we could not pick it fast enough. In the first few weeks we had more cucumbers and zucchini than you could shake a stick at. Kim Burdette in Tech Services pickled cucumbers and Amanda Zwilling in Engineering made dozens of zucchini mini-muffins to share with everyone.

