

# Harvesting Melon Stories



*White Gate Farm, Dracut, October 2010*

*Photo: Peter Kiang*

## in Asian American Studies

**Reflections, Recipes, and other Green Possibilities**

**from AsAmSt 423L Boston's Asian American Communities**

**UMass Boston — Fall 2010**

© 2010 UMass Boston Asian American Studies Program



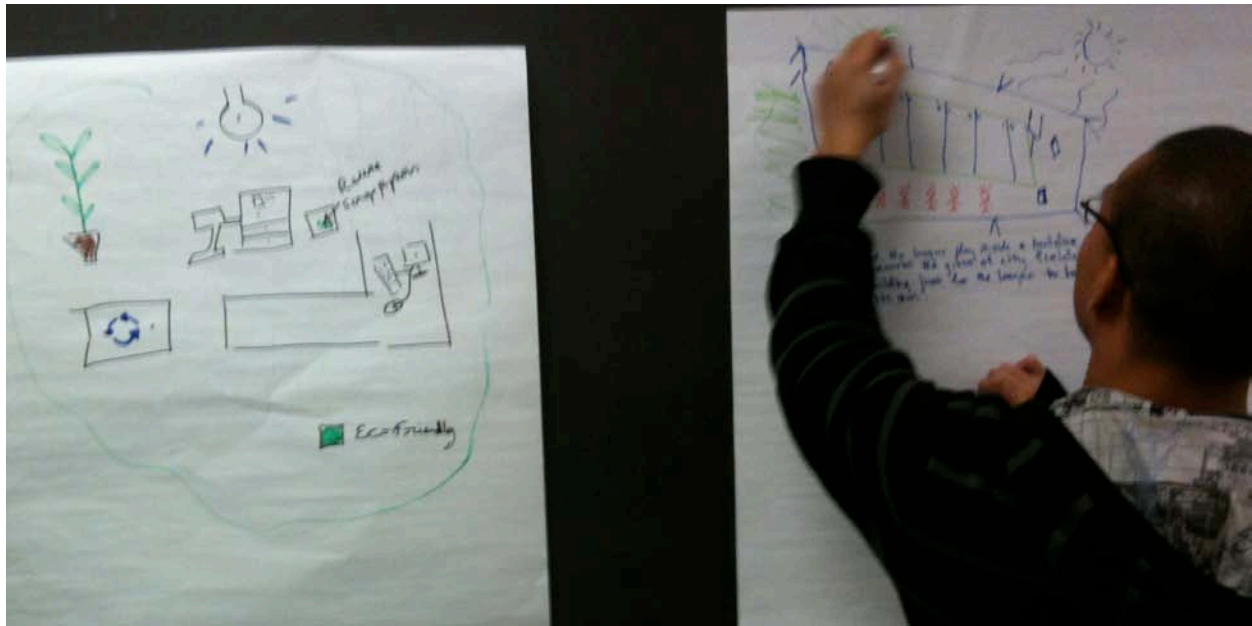
*AsAmSt 423 field trip to the Lowell Farmers Market, October 2010*

*photo: Peter Kiang*

UMass Boston students in the Fall 2010 Boston's Asian American Communities course (AsAmSt 423L) participated in multiple activities that connected themes of voice, space, and rights with local contexts of community empowerment, sustainability, and food. Through critical historical readings, policy case studies, grant-making and win-lose negotiation role-plays, digital archival research, and engaged leadership in several campus/community outreach/documentation/advocacy efforts during the semester, students experienced a range of ways to explore, analyze, represent, and influence local Asian American community settings. In addition, by drawing on their own diverse identities, home environments, and aesthetic visions, each student produced an original photo documentary essay to express how a specific location with historical significance for local Asian American communities also can convey powerful personal meaning.

Most importantly, specific campus/classroom visits by community development practitioners, researchers, and documentary filmmakers, together with monthly community-focused field trips enabled the class to directly experience examples of “real life real stories” from local sites that included Fields Corner-Dorchester and Boston Chinatown as well as Quincy, Lowell, and even post-Katrina, post-BP oil spill New Orleans East. We considered complex, real challenges such as how to sustain immigrant community gardens; how Chinatown restaurants and Vietnamese nail salons can become greener and healthier; how to mutually enhance relations between UMB's campus food services and local Asian community resources; and how to design our own AsAmSt food truck.





AsAmSt 423L Photo Essay Green Transformation Activity, November 2010

Photo: Peter Kiang

A brief but meaningful curricular opportunity to focus on melons emerged in early October, inspired initially by AsAmSt student staff Frances Chow whose email to Prof. Peter Kiang asked, “Well, I was in the garden yesterday and today, and I’ve picked over 10 fuzzy melons. Yup! And all of them are 15-18 inches long. How are you thinking of using them in your class?? They are quite heavy...”

The writings and images harvested in this document — one in a continuing series of publications and digital products by the Asian American Studies Program — presents some of the fresh, hand-picked, melon-inspired work that followed in AsAmSt 423L. We also know that much more is possible.



AsAmSt 423L Lowell Field Trip conclusion at Pailin City, October 2010

Photo: Maryanne Chow

## **Squash Thief**

by Maryanne Chow with Chris Quigley and Thomas Nguyen

My aunt, Mwee, lived in a small village. Her mother and father owned and worked on a small farm. There, they grew many vegetables such as potatoes, corn, and carrots. What they grew most abundantly, however, was their squash. All of the families in the village were amazed by how delicious the squash was, especially their famous squash spring rolls. And so, the family made sure to grow lots of squash each and every year. They would sell half of what they grew and half for themselves. However, as a girl with materialistic needs such as make up, jewelries, clothes, and shoes, Mwee needed money. Her parents would only give her little allowance since their income was not very much. So she thought up a plan of selling their squashes secretly so she could fulfill her needs.

Mwee soon realized that once you succeed in doing something, then you'll want to keep doing it again. But the more money she earned, the less squash was in the farm. This made her mother furious! Where has all her squash gone? The daughter, trying to cover herself, blamed it on a nameless thief. "A thief stole them, Mom!"

To stop this stealing nonsense, Mwee's mom decided to borrow their neighbor's dog to be alert when the thief comes again. Her mom didn't tell Mwee about the dog because she was afraid of them and she didn't want to scare her. So one night as she continued to succeed in her plan, Mwee snuck into the vegetable field and began to pick several squashes in her tote bag. All of a sudden, she heard a loud barking noise. Unable to finish picking, she hurried out of the field trying to escape. As she kept running as fast as she could, lugging about 20 pounds of squash, the dog caught up to her. Scared that she might get bit, she threw her squashes at the German Sheppard. But Mwee's eyesight, in addition to her poor aim, didn't help in stopping the dog. Eventually the dog won, and bit her buttocks.

When Mwee's mother found out her own daughter was responsible, she was infuriated. "How could you steal all of our squashes? You are a horrible daughter, and you bring shame to us!" As a punishment, Mwee was forced to slave over the farm by herself with no help to plant more squashes for the family, even when her buttocks were in pain. Until this day, Mwee is tainted by the experience she had. Every time she sees a squash, she will always think about the incident; how she got punished working on the farm day and night, and how her buttocks were sacrificed. Besides being scared of dogs, she is now also scared of squashes.

*This story received the audience award for best presentation at the AsAmSt 423L 2010 Melon Recipe Tasting Competition.*

## My Lola's Garden

Juan Carlo Gaspar

Back in the Philippines, my *Lola* — which means *grandmother* — had a garden in her backyard where she had onions, squash, bittermelon, tomatoes and gourd. As a child, my mother used to tell me how my Lola would tell her to grab vegetables in the garden for dinner. Each day, a different child was assigned that task. Whether she was in a good mood or bad, my Lola always took time to spend time in the garden.



*Backyard Family Garden, October 2010*

*photo: Frances Chow*

When her children moved into the city, Manila, to attend college, my Lola kept her garden and continued growing vegetables. She also had pigs which she took care of and sometimes sold. Once a month, she would travel to Manila to visit her children. With her, she brings basket of vegetables for her children. Melons — whatever type, bitter melon, squash melon — had a special meaning for her. My grandfather — *Lolo* — had diabetes and it is believed that bitter melon helped diabetes. My Lola would always make bitter melon dishes for my Lolo. My mom recalled that she used to skip dinner to go to her Aunt's house because she was so sick of bitter melon. However, my mom emphasized how her garden and bitter melon were significant to her and her childhood. The garden was a tool that helped my mom and her siblings bond.



## **My Mother Really Means it When She Says Organic**

by Thuan Hien

Spring is all about nature coming back into blossom, plants coming back from the winter hiatus. But for me it also means the revival of my mother's garden in our backyard. Don't get me wrong, I am not hating on the garden; it saves us money and provides yummy, pesticide-free, and hormone-free veggies like: cucumbers, Thai basil, Thai chili peppers, and of course, winter melons.



*White Gate Farm, Dracut, October 2010*

*photo: Maryanne Chow*

It's all organically grown. My mother really means it when she says organic. She saves water from washing rice, vegetables, all perishable refuse and use it as fertilizer. Because one of my windows faces the garden, I have the unfortunate pleasure of smelling all the "fertilizer" decomposing. And on top of that I always joke with my mother about how the area resembles a refugee camp because of the material she uses: torn car tent tarp, broken wooden and metal pole scraps, pieces of fencing, kiddie pools to collect rain water... My mother's creativity and resourcefulness never cease to amaze me. Anything and everything can be used to garden.

As the end summer approaches, my mother's commitment and effort comes to fruition, literally. And as much as I joke and complain about how eclectic and what an eyesore the garden is, I am grateful that mother has an opportunity to engage in an activity that she loves. Who cares if our garden never ends up on the cover of garden magazine.



## **Chicken Pox Remedy**

by Dao M. Duong

So, when I was younger and I had the chicken pox, my mother didn't really know what to do. She went to the doctor and they gave her suggestions but it didn't keep me from itching. Being from a Chinese-influenced village in Vietnam, my aunt saw my mother was having trouble keeping me from scratching myself so she told her of a Chinese remedy she had learned and worked on her kids. She took the fuzzy peel which people usually just discard. Then she threw it in boiled water and told my mother to use that fuzzy peel water to wash my face and body. This helped reduce the itching a whole lot and my skin was back to normal in less than a week.



*Backyard Family Garden, October 2010*

*photo: Frances Chow*

## **Melons and Connecting**

by Jim Burke and Joe Yee

On a windy night in October, two classmates, Joe and Jim, got together to make a traditional Chinese melon dish. They were students at UMass Boston. Their assignment from their Boston's Asian American Communities class was to take a melon and somehow, somehow make a traditional Chinese dish out of it. The melon was gigantic and it had hairs on it. It was only recently that the students had seen the way melons grow (from an overhead vine) at a farm in Dracut, Massachusetts; that was on a field-trip with their class.



*Lowell Farmers Market with Jennifer Hashley, October 2010*

*photo: Maryanne Chow*

Joe's Mom was instrumental in the process. Joe and his mom are Chinese. Joe's mom, Amy, created a dish called melon scallop. The ingredients that were used included the scallops dipped in water and refrigerated overnight. Dried shrimp; cleaned was also part of the dish. We used 2 different soy sauces, sesame oil, salt & pepper, brown sugar, and chicken powder. The melon was cut up and ready to cook immediately. The seeds from the melon needed to be cut out and thrown away. The dish only took 15 minutes to cook, even though Amy originally estimated it to be a roughly 30 minute cook-time.

The project (and the melon) helped Joe, his mom, and Jim to connect and share a little bit about each other's lives. A possible new roommate situation for Jim even came up in the discussion; Amy offered Jim a room to rent if he wanted. This subject came about when Jim said that he had two roommates and that he pays x amount of money for his apartment. Amy offered to rent Jim a room for x amount of money cheaper. It was a simple offer and no final decisions were made that night. But, it's funny how one simple traditional Chinese dish with melon brought people together and now we all have a story to talk about. Every time we see a big green melon in someone's garden or at a market, we can definitely relate it to our Asian dish.



## White Gate Farm Field Trip — Dracut, MA

Thomas Nguyen

Being given the opportunity to come to this farm established by the late John Ogonowski and his family was very rewarding. The experience gave me a different insight on farming. Our groups left UMB at different times so we arrived in Dracut, MA separately. Our car was second to arrive. The farm was part of a bigger land trust that the owners lease to immigrant/refugee farmers, keeping alive the commitment of John Ogonowski, one of the American Airlines pilots killed on 9/11. Upon our arrival at White Gate Farm, we met Mr. Rechhat Proum who seemed small, yet very strong. He reminded me of my cousins in Vietnam. They were small and skinny, but could carry 100 kg bags of rice on their backs with ease; 100kg is equivalent to over 200 lbs.



*Mr. Rechhat Proum sharing his harvest at White Gate Farm, Dracut, October 2010*      *Photo: Peter Kiang*

Mr. Proum was very happy to see us. He kept asking each of us, “Are you Khmer? Are you Khmer?” He received word that some of our students were of Khmer descent [They didn’t arrive until later though]. He walked us around his rented land and showed us many different varieties of plants and vegetables that he grew. Mr. Proum mentioned that the crops did very well this year, unlike last year when there was not enough water at another area of farmland he used. He also walked us to a pond where he has many catfish. They’re like his “sons.” He tells nearby kids that they can fish there but just make sure to throw the fish back. When there’s not enough rain, Mr. Proum uses the water from that pond to water his plants.



*Jennifer Hashley on immigrant farming practices at White Gate Farm, Dracut, October 2010 photo: Peter Kiang*

Our main contact at the farm, Jennifer Hashley, the woman who runs the New Entry Sustainable Farming project from Tufts University, suggested that we also see Mr. Proum's greenhouse. In his greenhouse, he had freshly wrapped greens that were prepared to be sold to the local markets. It was in this greenhouse where he emotionally emphasized to all of us about the importance of school from his perspective. He says, "sometimes I do all this work, and if the markets don't like it, they won't buy it. It's not easy. You must go to school and do good. If not, then you can do this work. Be a farmer." Mr. Proum came as a refugee from Cambodia. Everything he does is for his children.

Seeing this perspective and this experience was very touching. Mr. Proum's growing organic fruits and vegetables and being Cambodian and my working at Whole Foods which promotes buying from local farms helped me to better understand the issues he was telling us about. Hearing him talk in person was very different from just reading about immigrant farmers in articles or on-line.

I first became interested in food last fall when I took a UMB freshman seminar called "Food and Society." It showed us how food production and consumption have changed over the last 200 years. It sparked my interest and made me think twice now about going to McDonalds. Last spring, I got hired at Whole Foods which gave me even more knowledge about food, for example, from team member training classes that inform workers about the importance of nutrition in everyday life.

Meanwhile, I plan to go back and talk/listen/learn with Mr. Proum some more...



## Melon Recipe Taste Competition

On October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Chef Henry Lee from Sodexo Hong Kong joined the AsAmSt 423 class as a special guest tasting judge of melon dishes created by students. Chef Lee happened to be visiting UMass Boston that day thanks to Sodexo's Global Chef Program. With the encouragement of Diane D'Arrigo, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Campus Services at UMB, Chef Lee specifically visited the AsAmSt 423 class and shared some of his own melon stories and career experiences as an elite chef in Hong Kong.



*Sodexo Global Chef Henry Lee at UMass Boston Cafeteria, October 2010 photo: Peter Kiang*

Joining Chef Lee on the panel of tasting judges were Ms. Judy Khy — well-known local Asian American community activist, food blogger, and former UMB AsAmSt student — and Ray Chiu, AsAmSt student and provider of the homegrown squash from his family's backyard garden that was used by one student group [see Squash eggroll recipe below]. All of the fuzzy/hairy melons used for the competition were provided courtesy of AsAmSt student staff member, Frances Chow and her family's backyard garden.



*Backyard Family Garden, October 2010*

*photo: Frances Chow*

## **Melon and Squash Recipes**

by Qiongjiu Guo

Here are two melon recipes:

First, peel off the melon, and cut it into half. Steam the half melon about 5-7 minutes, and cut into smaller shape. Prepare the wood ear and fry them along with melon in vegetable oil about 10-12 mins, depends on how ripe or soft you want. Lastly add some medlar and less salt for looks better.

Second, with another half melon plus chopped garlic in oil, stir-fry for 7-10 minutes. Add some water and boil for another 3-4 minutes, while adding pre-cooked shrimps. Depending on how heavy the taste that each person wants, add some salt. If needed, spicy sauce can be available on the side.

Saute garlic, onions and tomatoes

Add Shrimps

Add  $\frac{2}{3}$  of water

Simmer

Add squash (cut into bite size)

Cover and simmer





*At the Melon Recipe Tasting Competition, October 2010*

*photo: Peter Kiang*

### **Wintermelon and Pork Ribs Soup (Canh Bo Thịt Heo) Soup Recipe**

by Tom Nguyen

Water	Fish Sauce
Wintermelon	Black Pepper
Pork Ribs	Salt and Sugar

1. Put water into pan, leave it in to boil. Once water is at a boil, put in pork ribs till it is cooked.
2. Next, slice the wintermelon and put it into the pot for 5 minutes, till it is tender.
3. Add the seasonings in, fish sauce, black pepper, salt, and sugar. Try to even it out. See how it tastes to your likings.

*Soup prepared by Tom Nguyen and Thuan Hien based on this recipe using a fuzzy melon from Frances Chow's garden received special commendation from the panel of judges at the 2010 Melon Recipe Tasting Competition.*

**Fresh Squash Eggroll Recipe** by Thomas Nguyen with fresh squash from Ray Chiu's family garden



*Photo provided by Raymond Chiu*

Package of 25 egg roll wraps  
2 tablespoons of curry powder  
5 scallion stalks

1 lb of ground pork  
2 teaspoons of black pepper  
One egg yolk

1/2 lb of squash  
2 teaspoons of salt  
Pot of corn oil

Chop scallions into small pieces; Chop squash into small pieces; Steam squash to make it soft; Mash squash and remove skin; Mix pork, pepper, salt, scallions, squash, curry into large bowl. Use hands to properly mix everything. Peel egg roll skins piece by piece and lay them on plate criss-cross each other and put wet paper towel on top to keep moist. In small bowl separate yolk from egg white and beat it. Use medium sized spoon to judge filling for each egg roll. Place egg roll sheet on plate or pan like a diamond. Place filling on bottom corner and start rolling up. Once u reach halfway, fold in both sides. When u almost reach the top, brush some egg roll on top corner to create a tight sealing wrap. Do this for the rest and adjust filling as necessary. [Optional. Soak half package of white vermicelli and chopped soaked shiitake mushrooms into mixture.] Fill up a pot halfway with corn oil or vegetable oil and put in some cloves of garlic for some flavor and to see if the oil is hot enough. Once the garlic starts bubbling and crackling then it's good. Fry until light brown and it's good to go. Substitute pork for tofu if vegetarian.

*The following prepared dish (with recipe) by William Wu and Dao Duong was selected by Chef Henry Lee as his favorite traditional dish from the Fall 2010 AsAmSt 423 Melon Harvest Cooking Competition.*



# Dried Shrimp Fuzzy Squash (\*Award-winning)



## Ingredients:

- 1 Real big fuzzy squash.
- 1 Pack of Dried Shrimp.
- 3 Garlic cloves.
- 1 Tablespoon of Salt.
- $\frac{1}{2}$  Tablespoon of dried red chili pepper.
- 5 Tablespoon of vegetable oil.



## Preparation:

1. Peel the fuzzy skin of the squash.
2. Cut the squash in  $1\frac{1}{2}$ " slices.
3. Chop the garlic in real small fine pieces.
4. Heat up the wok then add the vegetable oil.
5. Add the salt and wait until the oil heats up.
6. Add the minced garlic with the pack of dried shrimp, fry for 1 minute.
7. Add the squash and continuously mix it with a spatula.
8. After 2 minutes of mixing, turn the fire low and cover the wok, let it cook for 5 minutes, uncover it and do some more mixing with adding the pepper, then cover it again for another 5 minutes.
9. Turn off fire, uncover, and ready to serve.



*White Gate Farm, Dracut MA October 2010*

*photo by Maryanne Chow*





AsAmSt 423L Boston's Asian American Communities, Fall 2010

Photos: Peter Kiang

**Acknowledgements** [apologies to anyone inadvertently not included]

**Fall 2010 AsAmSt 423L students**

Undergraduates: Chris Quigley, Dao Duong, Qiongjiu Guo, Joe Yee, Jim Burke, Juan Carlo Gaspar, Kevin Tan, Malissa Lach, Maryanne Chow, Thomas Nguyen, Thuan Hien, Tom Nguyen, William Wu;  
Graduate Student Teaching Assistant: Laura Ng

**Guest Presenters/Participants in Class**

James Bui, Gulf Coast Vietnamese community organizer and UMB AsAmSt instructor  
Henry Lee, Sodexo Global Chef based in Hong Kong  
Judy Khy, Community Activist; Food Blogger; former UMB AsAmSt student  
Raymond Chiu, UMB AsAmSt student fellow and homegrown squash provider  
Frances Chow, UMB AsAmSt student staff and homegrown fuzzy melon provider  
Jimmy Lal and Nikum Pon, Cambodian American graduate students from University of Washington  
Eric Wada, Artistic Director, Ukwanshin Kabudan Ryukyu Performing Arts Group, Honolulu  
Tammy Chu, documentary filmmaker based in Seoul; director/co-producer of the film, *Resilience*  
Diane D'Arrigo, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Campus Services at UMass Boston  
Sơn Ca Lâm, Joiner Center staff; Applied Linguistics graduate student; UMB AsAmSt alumna  
Baifeng Sun, Associate Director, UMB Confucius Institute with Fall 2010 UMB Chinese Visiting Scholars including Chongyi Guo, Liang Heng, Yanru Ping, Fengmin Xue, Jiaolan Yan, Xu Yan, and Xin Li  
Terry Quach, UMB AsAmSt student; South Shore YMCA Program Volunteer

**Community Field Trip Presenters/Hosts**

Rechhat Proum, Farmer, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project at White Gate Farm, Dracut  
Jennifer Hashley, Director, New Entry Sustainable Farming Project, Lowell  
Visoth Kim's family, Lowell Farmers Market and New Entry Sustainable Farming Project  
Bunrith Lach and Family, Developer/Entrepreneur, Pailin City and Pailin Plaza, Lowell

Chris Albrizio, Green Programs Director, Asian American Civic Association; UMB AsAmSt alumnus  
Jason Chou, Founder, 8centric; Executive Director, MA Asian American Commission; UMB alumnus  
Frances Ma, Social Service Manager, South Cove Community Health Center; UMB AsAmSt alumna  
Raymond Ng, Entrepreneur, Chinatown Café; UMB alumnus

**For more information, contact:**

Dr. Peter Kiang, Professor and Director  
Asian American Studies Program  
Wheatley Building, 2 Floor, Room 097  
University of Massachusetts Boston  
100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393  
617-287-5658; 617-287-7614  
Email: [peter.kiang@umb.edu](mailto:peter.kiang@umb.edu)  
Web: [www.asamst.umb.edu](http://www.asamst.umb.edu)  
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/UMass-Boston-Asian-American-Studies-Program/46642856725>

© 2010 UMass Boston Asian American Studies Program