In April of this year, Josh Barney, an Evanston resident, contacted SEED and generously offered up his family's front lawn to us to use as an organic vegetable garden. Fortunately, the Barneys' house was on Orrington, right across from campus, a convenient location for a Northwestern-student-run garden. Emily Wright, Rachel Heydemann, Jackie Beard, Hannah Pitt, and I eagerly met with Josh and his wife, Erin, to discuss possible designs for the garden and logistics. Since we did not have much experience with organic vegetable gardening, we reached out to The Talking Farm, an Evanston non-profit, for advice and collaboration. We invited Linda Kruhmin, a Talking Farm board member and skilled gardener Ruth had worked with before, to attend our first meeting. Linda proved to be an invaluable fountain of knowledge from day one, and also created a strong connection between us students and a fabulous Evanston resident.

After coming up with some preliminary designs and running a lead test and a nutrient test on the soil, we began to hammer out the logistics. At this point it was early May, and we decided that considering how late in the quarter it was, we would start small this year with two small raised beds and a border of flowers. Hannah, a graduating senior, took the lead on acquiring materials for the garden. She successfully bargained with local vendors who sold us materials at a discount – everything from topsoil to wooden boards.

Simultaneously, we reached out to other Northwestern staff and student groups so as to create a larger coalition behind the garden. We began to work with Northwestern Community Development Corps (NCDC) because of the service nature of the site and so as to gain more manpower. Hannah met with Steve Camburn of Facilities Management to get some advice on
building the garden. Additionally, we contacted Campus Kitchens about donating the food grown in the garden to their meals. The Barneys had requested that the food go to people who truly needed the food, so we thought that giving the food to Campus Kitchens, a student group which makes and delivers meals to community members in need, would fit right in line with the Barneys' vision.

On Friday, May 29, we set to work building the garden. We dug up the grass where we wanted to place the two raised beds, laid out the wooden border, and then moved the topsoil with mulch into the bed. On June 6, with the assistance of Linda, we actually planted the seeds (which she so generously provided to us for free) in the two raised beds. We planted a wide variety of vegetables: swiss chard, lettuce, edamame, peppers, green beans, tomatoes, broccoli, kale, chives, baby corn, and parsley. Linda gave us a check list of things to do at our visits to the garden over the summer. Before the quarter ended, we gathered a list of SEED and NCDC members and other students who would be in the Evanston area over the summer and interested in tending the garden. Since I live in Highland Park and knew I would be home for the summer, I offered to spearhead the project of taking care of the garden. I set up a volunteer schedule on a Google Doc and sent it out to the summer volunteers.

Over the summer, a volunteer came twice a week – once on Sundays and once on Wednesdays – to weed and water the garden, along with doing other random tasks. Sadly, I discovered the difficulty of getting volunteers to do work in the summer. Fortunately, there were a few committed volunteers who helped to make the garden bloom. We were able to harvest the swiss chard, lettuce, and kale on a weekly basis as early as late June. Most of it went to Campus Kitchens, but on the weeks when there was only a small amount of lettuce to harvest, it logistically did not make sense for us to give it to Campus Kitchens. On those weeks, we gave
the lettuce to the Barneys. We also harvested parsley and chives on a weekly basis from the end of June onwards. In late July, I harvested the edamame, which unfortunately only had one round of full growth. We were able to harvest broccoli nearly every week in August and early September. The green beans became ready for harvest in late August. For all of these vegetables, much like the lettuce, when we were able to harvest a substantial amount, we gave the food to Campus Kitchens. When the harvests were smaller, we gave the food to the Barneys.

A few plants did not work out as well as we would have liked. This summer was not a great summer for tomatoes, as the weather was not as consistently hot enough as it would ideally be for tomato growth, but we did manage to grow about twenty tomatoes. Some of these tomatoes still had not turned red by September, but we gave those to the Barneys to put on their window sill to ripen. The baby corn did not grow to harvestable proportions due to the tomatoes' rapid growth and takeover of the three corn plants next to them. The peppers also did not grow to fruition, again because of the tomato plants' vivacity. Two peppers did grow to be harvestable, though, which was exciting but not very useful.

Throughout the summer, the volunteers and I got to know the Barneys and their two adorable sons, Benjamin and Jasper, who sometimes "helped out" in the garden. Benjamin helped me water the garden one day with his little watering can, and other times helped to pick out small weeds. Connecting with this delightful family of Evanston residents was a unique and rewarding experience which allowed us to overcome the typical "town-gown" boundaries. Additionally, Linda came to the garden a few times throughout the summer to check in and offer advice. Whenever something appeared wrong or strange, I would email her and get a response back within a few days telling me what to do. This collaboration with a member of an Evanston
non-profit expanded SEED's connections in the larger community and also bestowed experiential knowledge on us.