



Figures. Dr. Tooley's daughter, Tessa (1).
Dr. Tooley and Tessa in the garden (2).
Dr. Tooley's garden (3-5).

THE FRUITS OF MY LABOR



Gardening for mindful, sustainable living.

BY ANDREA A. TOOLEY, MD

I am an oculoplastic and orbital surgeon at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. I did my residency at the Mayo Clinic and an oculoplastic fellowship in New York City. My husband, Kyle, and I loved living in the city, but we knew we eventually wanted to live out in the country on a lot of land. I love gardening, and my dream is one day to live on only food that I have grown or raised.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

My husband and I have been together since I was in college, and we have been married for 8 years. He relocated with me for medical school, residency, fellowship, and now back to the Mayo Clinic, where he is a physician's assistant in orthopedic surgery. He introduced me to cooking when I was in college, and I've enjoyed

it ever since. I've also always loved going to farmers markets. I think they are where my initial interest in gardening and growing my own food began.

My first real foray into gardening was during residency. Kyle and I lived in a small townhouse that didn't have a backyard, but a community garden was located about a 10 minutes' drive from our house. We decided to rent a plot there, and we would drive to the plot after work to water our crops. The community aspect of the garden was fun because each plot had something different. Some people grew flowers; others grew just one type of vegetable. We grew various things, including broccoli, tomatoes, lettuce, green beans, and snap peas.

After my fellowship, we returned to Minnesota and bought a log cabin on 16 acres. We have embraced the farm

lifestyle, although neither of us grew up on a farm or had any experience with one. Our first child, Tessa, was born in September (Figures 1 and 2). We waited until I finished my training to start a family. It has been a joy finally to put down roots, so to speak, in Minnesota after all those years of living in apartments and rental properties. I can't wait to share the joys of gardening with her.

BUILDING MY DREAM GARDEN

My husband and I took things slowly when we first moved in. It was July, so we didn't get to plant much that first year. The growing season is short in Minnesota. I start all my seeds indoors and keep them under grow lights in our mud room until it is warm enough to plant them outside.

We have about 2,400 square feet of gardening space (Figures 3-5). Our

goal is to grow and produce as much of our own food as possible. It's only our third year on this land, and the learning curve is steep. I have spent much of my free time reading books, watching YouTube videos, and learning about gardening through trial and error. I am not an expert, but my current goal is to grow most of the food we eat in the summer and store as much as possible for the winter months.

This past year, our potatoes, carrots, and onions lasted through February. We're growing more root vegetables this year, and I hope they last through the winter. I have also started canning and have stored tomatoes, pickles, apples, corn, green beans, blueberries, and more for the winter.

We bought a few chickens our first year here and now have 11 laying hens that produce eggs for us daily. Our long-term vision is to purchase animals to raise for meat as well.

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Gardening fills my soul. It's my favorite way to unwind after a stressful day. It's physical work, so it's not unlike a workout. Gardening also connects me with nature, and it can be a mindfulness practice. Sometimes, I listen to a podcast or an audiobook while gardening but not often. I prefer to let my mind be free to think about whatever I want while I dig holes in the dirt.

An obvious reward of gardening is that I can literally reap the fruits of my labor. It's impossible not to feel joyful when I see my little seedlings doing well and when I finally harvest a carrot or a particularly massive potato. All summer long, my husband and I make meals almost exclusively with things we've grown. I think that's special. ■

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