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## Tulsa gardener has green thumb despite extreme heat

by: MIKE AVERILL World Staff Writer

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A message written on a stone on Everett Tottress' front porch sums up his approach to retirement: "An hour in the garden puts life's problems in perspective."

Tottress retired from the Army after 22 years as a sergeant in special operations, airborne, with a number of injuries including degenerated disks in his neck and back and carpal tunnel syndrome in both wrists. But he doesn't let that keep him from his lifelong passion of gardening.

"I love it. It's my therapy," he said. "A lot of it is tips passed down from my grandparents to my parents."

This summer, Tottress is growing tomatoes, cucumbers, banana peppers, cantaloupe, watermelon, corn, mustard greens and strawberries.

"I've got some neighbors on a special list. I'll fix them baskets of fruits and vegetables because I always have more than I need," he said.

On Aug. 18, Tottress will be at the Chamberlain Park and Community Center giving free haircuts to kids 12 and younger.

"The kids and parents have to buy uniforms for school. If I can cut their hair and help them build confidence and self-esteem and save them some money, I'll do that," he said. "When you give your blessings, you'll see blessings in return."

One benefit coming back to Tottress is a new roof and siding on his home from Rebuilding Together Tulsa through its disabled veterans program.

"I never thought that would happen," he said. "I can't afford it. A new roof and siding on my house - that's a blessing."

Jennifer Barcus-Schafer, executive director of Rebuilding Together Tulsa, said she was amazed when she saw Tottress' garden for the first time.

"You pull up and see this beautiful yard and all the plants he has growing in this heat," she said. "He told me about his gardening tips and everything he does in his community, and it was a perfect fit."

Barcus-Schafer said his work with neighborhood kids and the community center make Tottress the "epitome" of what her organization is about.

"It's kind of like the perfect puzzle pieces fitting together. He's in need but providing so much himself. He's so deserving of this," she said. "Not only are we grateful for his service to the country, but the service he provides to his community is beyond amazing."

Jesse Carradine, Chamberlain Park and Community Center's manager, said people such as Tottress are

important to the center.

"It works best when the community comes to us and says, 'This is what we want to do.' Tottress will come in and say, 'I want to give free haircuts,' or 'I want to teach the kids how to fix their bicycles,' " he said.

"Each community center is different, but for ours, people like Tottress are very important."

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### **Tottress' gardening tips**

Everett Tottress said the key to his garden's success is a thick layer of tree mulch.

He gets his free from the city of Tulsa's green waste site and treats it for insects.

"The mulch has several benefits," he said. "It holds the water in like a sponge. The top part will be dry, but underneath it's moist. It makes it so that I can water twice a week and everything stays green and healthy."

Tottress, who has been gardening in his yard for more than 10 years, said another benefit of the mulch is that it ultimately breaks down, perpetually making the soil dark and rich.

He said he waters his plants at night.

### **Original Print Headline: Tulsan's garden defies weather**

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### **Associated Images:**



**Everett Tottress checks some of the plants in his garden on Monday. Most Tulsans' plantings don't look as healthy. CORY YOUNG / Tulsa World**



**Everett Tottress, an Army veteran who maintains a large garden in his backyard, gives away fruits and vegetables to his neighbors. CORY YOUNG / Tulsa World**



Everett Tottress shows off some of the plants in his garden. CORY YOUNG / Tulsa World



**Everett Tottress's garden is thriving despite the heat and twice-weekly waterings. CORY YOUNG / Tulsa World**



**Everett Tottress, an Army veteran who maintains a large garden in his backyard, gives away fruits and vegetables from the garden to his neighbors. Tottress is slated to receive a new roof and siding from Rebuilding Together Tulsa. CORY YOUNG / Tulsa World**

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