



common ground

JULY 2008 | SF | FREE

GROW YOUR OWN WAY

Urban homesteaders
reinvent the family farm

THE AYURVEDIC KITCHEN

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SALUD!

What you should be
sipping this summer



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CHOCOLATE, YOGA
AND NAMASTE
VEG-O-LUTION
BOTTLEMANIA



grow your own way

Believe it or not, with a little ingenuity, you can turn dirt into food!

BY JEANNE STORCK

THEY'RE TRADING LAWNS FOR lettuce, bringing hens into the family fold and harvesting honey just steps from their back door. They're the new urban farmers, and they're coming soon to a yard near you (if they're not already there).

As climates change, fuel prices rise and food shortages loom, a growing number of city dwellers are realizing that converting a home into a homestead makes ecological and economic sense. At San Francisco's Garden for the Environment, organic gardening classes sold out two months in advance. Landscape architect Colin McCrate of Seattle Urban Farm Company reports Seattlites are clamoring for backyard vegetable plots. The movement even has its own campus — earlier this year the Institute of Urban Homesteading opened its doors in Oakland, California, offering city slickers the chance to train in the rural arts of gardening, beekeeping and food preservation.

Urban farming isn't an entirely new concept. During World War II, Americans produced almost forty percent of the nation's food in backyard Victory Gardens. This summer, San Francisco is resurrecting the idea, replacing the manicured lawn in front of City Hall with vegetable beds and encouraging residents to do the same. »



PHOTO: RIZZI PFCOM

Jessica Dally gets down with her city chickens, Ginger and Marilyn

Good food guru Michael Pollan only fed the plant-it-yourself fervor in an Earth Day essay for the *New York Times* magazine. "Rip out your lawn, if you have one, and if you don't — if you live in a high-rise, or have a yard shrouded in shade — look into getting a plot in a community garden," Pollan implored. "Measured against the Problem We Face, planting a garden sounds pretty benign, I know, but in fact it's one of the most powerful things an individual can do — to reduce your carbon footprint, sure, but more important, to reduce your sense of dependence and dividedness; to change the cheap-energy mind."

So when your neighbors suddenly decide to landscape their front yard with fava beans or put a beehive out back, don't look askance. They're the vanguard of a new American food movement — one that is easy enough to join. For inspiration, check out five urban homesteaders leading the way.

Radical Home Ec in Seattle

When Jessica Dally offers a piece of her homemade cheese to someone who's used to grocery store fare she always tells them: "This is the best cheese you'll ever taste." It's her way of coaxing people to try something fresh and handmade — and she gets a kick out of watching their faces light up when they realize how good it is.

Cheesemaking is one of the many kitchen arts Dally has mastered, along with gardening, soapmaking, canning, tending chickens and keeping bees. She recently joined forces with *Slow is Beautiful* author Cecile Andrews (New

Society Publishers, 2006) to form Seattle Free School, where she's now teaching an updated, more radical version of home ec.

Dally picked up cheesemaking skills while working at Samish Bay Cheese, a small organic dairy farm in Skagit Valley, Washington. She can rattle off a mouth-watering list of cheeses she's since learned to make at home — mascarpone, cheddars washed in red wine, Gouda and *chèvre*. The tools, Dally explains, are simple and inexpensive: a quality cheesecloth from a kitchen supply store, starters, rennet and a cheese mold. She encourages beginners to improvise equipment from what's at hand. Pots for pasta can do double duty for cheese or soap making, and there's no need to buy an expensive cheese press when some round weights and a colander will do.

Spending time in the kitchen and tending her plants and poultry have given Dally a sense of confidence and community. When she started her vegetable garden, she was doubtful tea plants would grow in the Seattle climate, but she tried it anyway and the plants flourished. When she took on a brood of chickens, they sparked conversations with the neighbors. "At first they found it curious and thought I was weird, but when they finally heard more about it, they were excited." And she's become a hit at dinner parties and family gatherings. "If I don't give gifts of handmade cheese now, people are disappointed."

The Farmer In The Hood

Novella Carpenter starts every day with the same quiet ritual. She scoops up her goat, Bebe,



PHOTO: ANDY ESKINSON

Novella Carpenter cuddles up with Bebe and Bilbo on an Oakland afternoon

Kelly Coyne and Eric Knutzen have an American Gothic moment on their LA farm



places her on a stand in the laundry room of her house and gently (but firmly) milks her. Bebe waits patiently, munching on a bowl of grains while another goat, Bilbo, occasionally pokes his head in at the door.

Novella and her partner Bill rent a rambling apartment in a rundown part of Oakland one block from Interstate 980. Ten years ago, they began squatting the weed-ridden vacant lot next door and developed it into a mini farm that now blooms with raised vegetable beds, apple and plum trees, beehives, a hen house, one turkey and a few Nigerian dwarf goats.

The goats are a recent addition that Carpenter took on four months ago, signing herself up for a rapid, intense apprenticeship — milking, caring for hooves, birthing and dehorning. She's mastered milking and can brew up a decent cappuccino from the two cups she gets daily from Bebe. Cheesemaking is next.

The child of back-to-the-landers, Carpenter thought she wanted to become a vet, but her life took a different turn. She studied English and biology in college, went on to earn a degree at Berkeley's School of Journalism, where she studied with Michael Pollan, and now writes on urban farming and sustainable practices. In a sense though, she's not far off from her original dream.

In the backyard, the turkey wanders, clucking to no one in particular. The goats munch fragrant sprays of hay and alfalfa trekked in from the nearest farm supply store (a hard thing to find in the inner city). An ailing lemon tree Carpenter rescued from a friend mends in some freshly dug soil, and on the front porch rabbits nibble lettuce and carrots, enjoying the harvest of one of Novella and Bill's late-night dumpster dives.

Carpenter's online diary is a vivid catalog of small daily acts undertaken with a strong desire to learn where her food comes from — where gleaned olives from the side of the road, grafting an apple tree or pondering the dilemma of raising two pigs for slaughter are literally food for thought. Her memoir about life as an urban farmer is due out next year from Penguin Press (novellacarpenter.com).

A Regular Middle Class LA Farm

Eric Knutzen and Kelly Coyne's city farm began its life as a simple kitchen garden. Motivated by an interest in eating fresh and local, Knutzen and Coyne assessed the spare 1,750 square foot backyard of their 1920s Silver Lake bungalow in Los Angeles and saw the possibility of a food forest. To get there, they poured over gardening manuals, learning through trial and error what worked in their Mediterranean climate. Eggplant and broccoli were too fussy.

There's No Place Like Homestead

READ

- » *The Toolbox for Sustainable City Living* by Austin Texas homesteaders the Rhizome Collective (rhizomecollective.org), an all-around, do-it-yourself guide for creating locally-based, ecologically sustainable communities
- » *Edible Estates: Attack on the Front Lawn*, LA artist Fritz Haeg's manifesto for making food, not lawns (edibleestates.org)
- » *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* by Harold McGee (Scribner)
- » *Putting Food By*, by Janet Greene (Plume)

BROWSE

- » Read Garden Girl's tips of the trade on gardengirltv.com or browse the archives on kitchengardeners.org
- » Get cheesy with cheesemaking.com, dairyconnection.com, fiascofarm.com or leeners.com
- » Everything you ever wanted to know about the birds and the bees and more can be found on backyardhive.com, beeculture.com, scientificbeekeeping.com, backyardchickens.com and thecitychicken.com
- » Sow your wild (organic) oats with the help of victoryseeds.com, seedsofchange.com, bountifulgardens.org or groworganic.com

GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY

- » **The Ecology Center of San Francisco** This locally grown nonprofit empowers the Bay Area to create just and regenerative city communities (eco-sf.org).
- » **Garden for the Environment's** nationally acclaimed one-acre demonstration garden hosts classes on organic gardening, urban composting and sustainable food (gardenfortheenvironment.org).
- » **Institute of Urban Homesteading** K. Ruby's classroom gathering place for gardening, permaculture, kitchen arts, herbal medicines and creativity (sparkybeegirl.com).
- » **San Francisco Beekeepers' Association** SFBA's meetings — held the second Wednesday of every month at Randall Museum — keep the Bay Area abuzz (month.sfbee.org).

recipes

Yes You Can

Where some see just a tasty, homemade treat, others see a declaration of independence from "cheap energy mind." No matter where you fall on the spectrum, we suspect you'll be hooked on the DIY deliciousness of a pantry stocked with summer's fresh flavors.

Made-it-Myself Mascarpone

RECIPE COURTESY OF JESSICA DALLY, SEATTLE FREE SCHOOL

Put up jam from a summer windfall of fruit, pair it with a dollop of your own mascarpone, then do a happy little OMG-this-is-so-good dance.

1 pint (or more) half-and-half
1 pint heavy cream
¼-½ teaspoon tartaric acid

You'll also need:

High-quality cheesecloth
Cooking thermometer



DIRECTIONS Heat cream and half-and-half to 190°F. Add ¼ teaspoon tartaric acid and stir for several minutes. The mixture will slowly thicken into a runny cream-of-wheat consistency, with tiny flecks of curd. If the cream does not coagulate, add a speck more of the tartaric acid and stir for another 5 minutes. Be careful not to add too much tartaric acid or a grainy texture will result. Line a colander with a double layer of high-quality cheesecloth. Pour the curd into the colander and drain for 1 hour for a traditional mascarpone texture. Drain for up to 12 hours in a refrigerator for a whipped cream cheese texture. Place the finished cheese in a covered container and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks. Yield: about 1 pound



Leather Breeches

RECIPE COURTESY OF NANCE KLEHM

This recipe is based on an old Southern dish. After the harvest, green beans were threaded on a string, then hung from the cabin rafters to dry. Once dried, the beans resembled leather trousers or "breeches" hanging on a clothesline.

DIRECTIONS Blanch green beans for two minutes in salted water and drain. String beans on strong thread, leaving a slight space between each bean. Hang your green bean garland in a dark, dry place with good air circulation. In about 2 weeks they should be thoroughly dry, and you have your leather breeches! You

can store these in glass jars on a shelf in your cupboard or pantry. Munch on them dry as a healthy snack, or soak them and use them for cooking.

Rosemary thrived. They put in Italian strains like Borlotto beans, purple Sicilian cauliflower, rapini and arugula and in the process rediscovered the good bitterness natural to Italian food. "We've lost a whole world of flavors to bland supermarket produce," Knutzen laments.

Their "compound," as they wryly refer to it, has since grown to include chickens, greywater irrigation, a home brewing system and a fleet of bikes. Last summer they pushed their homestead's boundaries even further and planted corn, beans and squash in the parking strip in front of the house — challenging the idea that a front yard requires a lawn. They were worried the neighbors and city would disapprove, but to their surprise and delight, the vegetable patch sparked more curiosity than complaints.

The little patch is also a perfect example of the permaculture they practice, in which planting vegetables beneficial to one another in the same plot increases efficiency and reduces labor. In this case, the beans provide nitrogen to the soil, the corn provides a stalk for the beans to climb and the squash provides mulch, which conserves water and keeps down weeds — the perfect time saver for a duo who jokingly call themselves "lazy urban homesteaders."

Knutzen advises other aspiring homesteaders to take it slow and to be persistent. The couple have gathered their experiences into a how-to manual, *The Urban Homestead* (Process Media, June 2008), which touches on vegetable gardening, poultry, DIY cleaning products and beer making — all outlined with a sense of play and fun. "Living sustainably doesn't have to be heroic or motivated by guilt," Knutzen says. "You want it to be inspiring. For us, it's about incorporating things like home growing and riding a bike into a regular middle class life." Follow their adventures at homegrownevolution.com.

Edible Chicago

If you happened to find yourself on a deserted island, Nance Klehm would be a good person to have on hand. She manages to live almost entirely from the food her Chicago garden produces, foraged edible plants and what she's able to preserve — and she does this in a cold-climate city where the growing season lasts only four months.

Klehm grew up on a Midwestern farm and moved to the big city at 18. But despite her

new digs, Klehm couldn't shake her connection to the soil. She's now built an urban farm on what she calls a "scattered acre" made up of her yard and roof as well as the yards of friends and neighbors — a social network bound together by food.

When she runs through the items she stores and preserves, she paints a picture of a pantry full of mason jars swimming with luscious fruits and vegetables from A (apples) to Z (zucchini). She cans soups, chutneys and sauces, ferments sauerkraut, kimchi, wines and vinegars and makes sourdough bread from starter. Faced with a windfall of 300 pounds of apples, she presses cider. When raw milk is available from early summer through late winter, she makes cheeses and yogurt.

It's a whirlwind of a list, and she admits she often puts in 80-hour weeks, preparing food, designing gardens, managing a large greenhouse for a homeless shelter and teaching her Living Kitchen classes on breadmaking, cheesemaking and medicinals.

Klehm also forages in the wild spaces of Chicago, harvesting edible plants where others see only an overgrown lot. Dandelions are weeds to some, but the makings of a great wine to Klehm. "Foraging brings out our gathering instincts, our innate curiosity to discover," she enthuses. On the monthly walks she leads, Klehm pulls people into areas of the city they've never been and teaches them to engage physically in our overly virtual world.

Sharing food knowledge is key for Klehm; she believes recipes should be communal and spread by word-of-mouth. "Ask your grandmother, your father, an older neighbor or a friend what foods they preserve and learn from them. Once you have a plan to put up something like marinara or peach jam, invite friends over and make a day of it."

"I don't use recipes," Klehm admits. For her, good food is not about a set of directions written on a piece of paper, but about walking into the world and making magic out of what you find there.

Back To the (Oak)land

As a child, K. Ruby transplanted a weed from her family's garden, potted it and tended to it in her room, showing a carefree disregard for the rules about whether a plant was good or bad, useful or not. All grown up, she's still got a flare for maverick experimentation.

Earlier this year she opened the Institute of Urban Homesteading in Oakland, California where she's translating her background as an educator and gardener into a living classroom comprised of city folk gathering in kitchens and backyards to learn the lost arts of growing, cooking and storing their own food. "This knowledge skipped a generation," Ruby says. "In the 70s everybody knew how to make



PHOTO: JAN STURMANN

yogurt or bake bread, but today people have this idea that it's so hard when in fact it's fairly simple."

Ruby attributes resurgent interest in urban homesteading to forces like the Slow Food movement and locavorism. If her class enrollment is any indication, the idea of returning to simple, Do-It-Yourself living is more popular than ever. Beekeeping and organic gardening sold out, breadmaking is filling up quickly and they've actually had to add extra classes to the schedule.

The idea for the Institute evolved over time. After running a non-profit for twelve years, Ruby decided to take some time off to cultivate her garden and teach herself to lead a more sustainable lifestyle. "I'm something of a homebody," she admits. She took botany and beekeeping classes, grew vegetables and installed beehives in her backyard. But all this time, she had a nagging feeling she should be out in the world.

When her friends started having babies in their 30s, they talked about how Ruby should open a camp for the kids where they could learn to cook and garden. They'd call it Ruby Camp. Ultimately, the idea took shape as the Institute of Urban Homesteading, a place where Ruby hopes to completely reinvent the word "housewife" and give home economics — a body of knowledge once considered second-rate — a new life. 🌿

Jeanne Storck, a Bay Area website designer and freelance writer, is now planning a backyard vegetable garden.



PHOTO: MAURENE HILL

Nance Klehm dices up foraged treats for dinner