

Team 'Herban' Garden

Team Herban Garden is composed of local urban farmers Brian DeSmet and Randy Tempel. The Team has close connections to many people and organizations working on urban agriculture and they would lean on some of them for assistance in creating the "Herban" Garden. These connections include Lincoln University Extension, Gateway Greening, Slow Food St. Louis and the EarthWays Center at the Missouri Botanical Garden.

Objective: Turn the vacant city lot into an herb garden that will be a demonstration garden as well as produce income for part-time youth gardeners.

The Garden will have a two-prong approach to growing. We will grow herbs for income, while using some land to grow more standard (and culturally relevant) fruits and vegetables for home consumption by those working on the garden.

Herbs would be used as a cash crop to create part-time employment opportunities for neighborhood and to raise money for programming. Herbs could be expanded into other high-value crops for sale at farmers markets or directly to restaurant chefs. Grants for youth development and urban agriculture could be targeted to support programming.

Long-term goals would be to grow the garden to include multiple city lots, thereby created a decentralized urban farm that can employ and feed the people that work there. Community members would tend the garden and we would ensure they are educated in GAP (good agricultural practices) and food handling safety.

Fresh cut herb sales could be a community project to help neighborhood youth earn supplemental income, experience entrepreneurship, and uniquely develop an overlooked market niche. Sales can be made at the existing neighborhood outlets like farmers market and grocery co-op. Plant sales can also be organized as a group effort, conducted onsite.

Horticultural speakers can be invited to speak and educate the neighborhood about growing food and eating healthy. We would design the garden to allow community events and to emphasize its use as a neighborhood activity hub. This should help the neighborhood appear more pedestrian-friendly, with an attractive layout that respects the dignity of pedestrians.

The produce would be prepared at monthly dinners onsite. That way people could congregate and build community, as well as getting a taste of good, healthy food and seeing where it all came from. The concept is replicable for other neighborhoods with their own unique character.

Goals:

1. A neighborhood garden as education site and generator of useful plants, which can enhance the appeal of a cooking culture, increase health, and stimulate agrarian economic activity.
2. Create a youth development program with part-time jobs working on the garden and selling herbs/produce.

3. 'Herban' garden in partnership with St. Louis Herb Society. Herbs are not demanding and therefore not discouraging, a good segue into a prolonged garden interest, are pleasing to the senses, can be part of a design such as a four square garden to beautify barren urban lots.

4. Further the greening of the community by ramping up a decentralized farm. Achieve community self-sufficiency through achievement of both local access and local demand. Achieve individual self-sufficiency by empowering with skills to grow and increased valuation of fresh whole foods/embrace of a slow food culture.

Team Bios:

Brian DeSmet – Brian has been active in the St. Louis local food movement since moving to the area in 2006. He manages the Schlafly Farmers Market and has been a volunteer and/or paid staff at the Tower Grove Farmers' Market since 2009. As a staff member of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment, he organized a statewide Farm Bill education tour in the spring of 2011. He has been a home gardener since 2007 and participated in the EarthDance organic farming apprenticeship in 2009. In 2010 and 2011, he had a small CSA (community-supported agriculture program) growing food on urban lots. In 2011, Brian also oversaw Truck Farm St. Louis, a mobile educational farm in the back of a pickup truck that reached over 1500 people that season. He plans to bring back the Truck Farm for a new season in 2013 with the help of Slow Food St. Louis, where he has been a volunteer for several years. Brian also participated in The Food Project's Winter Institute, a three-day introduction to their urban agriculture/youth development model, in 2009.

Randy Tempel – Randy is a St. Louis native and has been involved in our local agriculture since 2009. He spent three years as farmhand and farmers' marketer for area organic vegetable and fruit farms. He also sustainably keeps bees at his south city residence. In the interest of strengthening local food security through the winter months he planned, grew, and marketed cold-loving vegetables for St. Louis' urban winter markets. His current role is a community garden coordinator for the Community Action Agency of St. Louis County, performing community outreach to involve and activate low-income neighborhoods to achieve the benefits of gardening. As assistant farm manager for CAASTLC's Seeds of Hope Farm in Spanish Lake, he continues to craft a tiered CSA designed to increase access to fresh produce, supervise volunteers, and build partnerships with Operation Food Search, Lincoln University Cooperative Extension and other area agencies to help meet common goals of increasing food security within St. Louis County's food deserts. He has recently secured support from two area public elementary schools to involve students in outdoor classroom and other educational opportunities on the farm.