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Join the Urban Grown Revolution!

Vegetable gardening is reliving its glory days. All around the country, there is a renewed focus on gardening for the simple goal of producing fresh, nutritious food.

These days, folks ask important questions about what they eat. Where did it come from? Was it coated in chemicals? Is it fresh? How far did it travel to my table? Who grew the food? Is this the most nutritious food I can provide my family?

This new awareness is fueling a new movement: urban farming. No, it's not an oxymoron. Even tiny plots of land are being dedicated to satisfying the most basic human need, FOOD. Those brave enough to give it a try will find dinner in their own back yards – quite literally.

Alicia Ellingsworth, Farm Manager at the Gibbs Road Farm, home base for Cultivate KC, is an expert urban farmer. Certified organic since 1997, the 2 acres of farmland produces vegetables, fruits and herbs for commercial distribution to restaurants, to Brookside Farmer's Market customers and to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) members.

For urban farmers like Alicia, efficient use of space is imperative to their business. But even newbie gardeners can make use of their techniques.

Alicia's tips for home gardening:

Act fast. It's important to get your seeds in the ground as early as possible. "You can't get these days back," she says. Just remember that a late frost *could* ruin those early plantings, but you can always plant more seeds! A calculated risk of planting early in the season can have a big return.

Succession planning. Plan your garden so that something will always be coming into season. Examples:

- Stagger your plantings. Sow one section of a lettuce bed with mixed greens, then wait 2 weeks to sow another section, then another 2 weeks for a third section. You'll extend your harvest by an extra 4 weeks!
- Plant sweet potatoes and harvest the greens during the early summer months. (Don't pick them clean!) Enjoy eating the greens through mid-July, at which point you should leave them alone to grow so the sweet potato tubers can develop in the ground, to be harvested in the fall.

Intercropping. Planting two non-competing crops in a close space makes efficient use of small beds. For instance, tomato plants need room and must be spaced several feet apart. While they're small, plant the

area around them with quick-harvest lettuces and other greens. After you harvest the greens, the tomatoes will mature and fill the space.

Try a new veggie. Have you only ever grown luscious tomatoes? Maybe it's time to branch out. Alicia suggests bok choy.

Don't forget the favorites. Alicia's recommendations for someone getting to get started are:

1. **Carrots** – If your kids think carrots are 2" long and grow in plastic bags, you better plant some, stat! Be amazed at how a beautiful, sweet carrot can grow from a tiny black seed. Plant them in July to serve the sweetest, homegrown carrots at your Thanksgiving meal.
2. **Garlic** – Garlic scapes shoot straight up, then curl in artful little squiggles that can be snipped and sautéed for their mild flavor. In June, they'll begin to shoot up again. That's the time to dig the bulbs for mature garlic.
3. **Kale** – Kale is one of the most nutrient-packed veggies you can grow. It prefers cooler weather, so start planning now for a fall and early winter crop.
4. **Spinach** – Spinach is another crop that prefers cool weather. But with a little bit of luck, it can actually grow year-round. It can even be harvested throughout the winter!

Alicia urges Kansas City to support their local farmers, but also try producing themselves. "Growing food is both powerful and humbling. It's powerful because you're feeding those around you, but humbling because all you're doing is caring for a tiny seed. You can't take too much credit for what it grows."

Can you handle even more inspiration? Visit the over 60 farms on the Cultivate KC's Urban Grown Farms and Gardens Tour **June 22 & 23, 2013. Visit www.cultivatekc.org to find out more!**

Emily Parnell is a freelance writer who enjoys growing edibles, lookables, ideas and her children.