

Restaurant Rooftop Gardens: Five Of America's Best

by [Laurel Miller](#) ([RSS feed](#)) on Jun 15th 2012 at 12:00PM

From where I stood on the roof of Bastille Cafe & Bar in [Seattle's](#) Ballard neighborhood, I could see flocks of seagulls circling nearby fishing boats, as I catch whiffs of brine, gasoline and *eau de canal* water.

Despite the industrial marine supplies and salmon canneries across the way, up here I was surrounded by buzzing honeybees and dozens of varieties of produce, from heirloom French beans and *petit pois* to herbs, tomato starts, lettuces and cucumber vines.

Bastille is part of an emerging breed of urban restaurant (many of which are located in [hotels](#)) popping up across America. Not content to just source food locally, today's seasonally- and sustainably-driven chefs and restaurateurs are installing rooftop gardens and beehives to augment the product they purchase from family farms.



Bastille's chef harvests honey

Many of these restaurants offer public tours of their rooftop gardens, greenhouses and hives, so even city-dwellers (or line cooks) no longer have an excuse to remain clueless about where their food comes from – and the public can't get enough. With the [urban farming](#) movement – backyard produce, chickens, bees, even dairy goats – at critical mass, savvy chefs, concerned about their [carbon footprint](#) and wanting more control over the production and quality of their ingredients, have turned their rooftops into kitchen gardens.

Few restaurants can spare the labor or have staff experienced in cultivating crops, which is where small businesses like [Seattle Urban Farm Company](#) and [Ballard Bee Company](#) come in. The Urban Farm Company's services include construction and maintenance of residential backyard farms, rooftop gardens, educational school gardens, and on-site gardens at restaurants and businesses. With regard to the latter, chefs and cooks receive education as well, and become involved in caring for and harvesting crops and collaborating on plantings based on menu ideas.

Corky Luster of Ballard Bee offers hive hosting or rental, where homeowners keep hives on their property, in exchange for maintenance, harvesting, and a share of the honey. Bastille keeps hives, and uses the honey in cocktails and dishes ranging from vinaigrette's to desserts.

Following is the short list of rooftop garden restaurants that have served as inspiration for imitators, nationwide. Here's to dirty cooks, everywhere.

[Bastille Cafe & Bar, Seattle](#)

Seattle Urban Farm Company owner/founder Colin McCrate and his business partner Brad Halm and staff conceptualized Bastille's garden with the restaurant's owners three years ago. After substantial roof retrofitting, rectangular garden beds were installed. Over time, beehives were introduced, and this past year, plastic children's swimming pools were reinforced with landscape fabric and UV-protective cloth, expanding the garden space to 4,500 feet.

In summer and fall, the garden supplies chef Jason Stoneburner and his staff with 25 percent of their produce for Bastille's French-inspired seasonal cuisine. Housed in a lavishly restored, historic 1920s building, it has the vibe of a traditional Parisian brasserie, but here you'll find an emphasis on lighter dishes as well as cocktails crafted from boutique spirits and rooftop ingredients.

Every Wednesday, Rooftop Garden Tours are hosted by Seattle Urban Farm Company, and include a complimentary Rum Fizz, made with Jamaican rum, mint, sparkling wine, bitters and (of course) rooftop honey. Cost is \$10 per person; limit 10 people. Contact the [restaurant](#) for reservations.

[flour + water, and Central Kitchen, San Francisco](#)

Thomas McNaughton of popular [Mission](#) pizzeria flour + water opened his newest venture on May 9. Both restaurants have rooftop gardens, and Central Kitchen is a lovely, modern rustic sanctuary serving simple, seasonal fare that highlights [Northern California](#) ingredients.

In addition to beehives, Central Kitchen is producing peppers, zucchini, tomatoes, berries, figs, citrus and herbs in a 2,000-square-foot space. Lexans (heavy-weight plastic storage containers used in professional kitchens) serve as garden beds, while herbs flourish in a converted Foosball table. Talk about recycling!

Uncommon Ground on Clark, Chicago

This big sister to the new Edgewater location features a 2,500-square-foot garden with solar panels to heat water used in the restaurant. Everything from beets, eggplant, okra and bush beans are cultivated, including rare seed varieties from the Slow Food "Ark of Taste." The Ark is dedicated to preserving the "economic, social, and cultural heritage of fruits and vegetables," as well as promoting genetic diversity. Expect refined crunchy granola fare with ethnic flourishes.

Roberta's, Brooklyn

This insanely popular Bushwick restaurant made national headlines when chef Carlo Mirarchi was named a 2011 Best New Chef by Food & Wine magazine for his wood-fired pizzas and way with rooftop produce, including some heirloom varieties.

Mirarchi, who is passionate about urban farming and community involvement, uses two repurposed cargo containers on the restaurant's roof for cultivating crops, and keeps a [blog](#) about the evolution of the garden.

[Photo credits: *honeycomb*; *Laurel Miller*; *tomatoes*, Flickr user [Muffet](#)]

In this video, Chef Robert Gerstenecker of [Park 75](#) restaurant at the Four Seasons Hotel, Atlanta, talks rooftop gardening and beekeeping. He grew up on a family farm and dairy in Ohio.

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