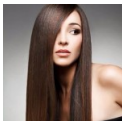




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FASHION NEWS & CULTURE **SHELTER** FOOD SEX

## THE SEATTLE URBAN FARM COMPANY KICKS OUT HOMESTEADERS FOR A NEW URBAN AGRICULTURE

by K. Emily Bond on August 15, 2012 in **SHELTER**

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*"Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness."*

Pop quiz, first question: to whom is that first quote attributed? The answer, friends, is founding father Thomas Jefferson who would probably spew corn kernels out of his coffin at the backseat American agriculture has taken to **special interests** and the (industrialized) **food lobby**. After regaining his composure, he'd probably tip his hat (had he worn one) to the pioneering brethren and sistren of today who are revitalizing agriculture from the comfort of their own backyards.

Urban agriculturalists Colin McCrate and Brad Halm are two such citizens. The founders of **Seattle Urban Farm Company** have recently come out with a book outlining pretty much everything you need to know about edible gardening (dare we call it **homesteading** of the urban variety). Using case studies of just about every type of urban and suburban lot, they map out irrigation solutions, design strategies, soil prepping and container gardening how-to's.



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We reached out to Colin with a few nagging, lingering questions of our own. Here's what he had to say:

### Where does one begin? Basically, what do I need to plant to get a decent edible garden going?

It's easy to grow food at home...but it is even easier if you take a few minutes to plan things out before you get started. Whether you are thinking about setting up a few containers **on your deck** or tilling up your entire backyard, there are a few basic things to you will want to address before putting your plants in the ground.

#### Like what?

Access to **sunlight and water**: Your garden must receive at least 6-8 hours of sunlight per day for healthy growth and productivity. Think about your options for garden locations and consider sun exposure as the number one priority.

Second priority is to make sure that it will be easy for you to get water to your plants on a regular basis. It is easy to end up hauling buckets of water across the yard or knocking over pottery with an unwieldy hose, so take the time to **figure out a watering system beforehand!**

Bear in mind that vegetables are "heavy feeders." This means that they absorb large amounts of nutrients from the soil as they grow. In order to produce a maximum harvest, each crop needs an **adequate supply of plant food**. Nutrients are supplied by compost and **organic fertilizers**, and both should be added to your soil before each season begins.

Make sure to **follow the plant's (or seed's) recommended spacing requirement**. Many beginning gardeners assume that, if they plant their crops closer together, then they will get more food per square foot. But that's not quite how it works. When crops are planted too closely together, they compete for sunlight, water and nutrients. When forced to compete, plant growth is stunted, production is limited and crops are more susceptible to pest and disease pressures.

Finally, choose crops that you are excited to grow. Certain crops give a higher yield per square foot of planting space, but it is also important to choose plants that you are really psyched about growing. It will make them easier to take care of.

#### What plants get you psyched?

A few of our favorite crops for small gardens are Head Lettuce, especially Deer Tongue, Flashy Trout Back; Arugula, Rocket and Surrey; Bush Beans; Summer Squash; Radishes, of the Cherriette variety; Cilantro; Basil; **Tomatoes**, like Sungold and Black Prince.

#### All of the above is basically pornography for our food writers. When should we start planting?

Planting dates vary widely depending on your climate and the crop you want to grow. In temperate parts of the country (much of the east coast, west coast and the Midwest), most crops are planted in the spring and early summer. For many gardeners, the majority of planting happens between early March and late May.

Most people don't realize that it is possible to continue planting throughout much of the summer and even into the fall. Planting a crop

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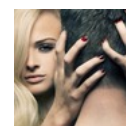
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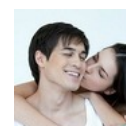
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several times throughout the season is called “succession planting” and it allows the gardener to spread out their harvest over a longer period (its better to have 2 heads of lettuce per week all season than to have 20 heads all at the same time!) and to really make the most of the limited space they have available.

### **What’s the best coast for edible gardening?**

Every region of the country has its benefits and drawbacks...The east coast has very hot summers which allows for rapid plant growth and huge yields, but that area also has some of the most prevalent pest and disease issues which have been known to frustrate many a beginning farmer. Much of the west coast has a temperate climate that allows for a long, slow growing season where certain crops can be harvested almost year round. On the downside, in the more mild parts of the coast, like our Pacific Northwest, cool summers can make some of the most coveted crops difficult to grow.

The incredible soil quality of the Midwest makes that region one of the best places in the world for food production...of course season-long droughts can shift your perspective on things a little bit...

### **What’s your favorite tomato variety and why?**

Now that I have been living in the Pacific Northwest for almost 10 years, my expectations of a tomato plant have shifted dramatically. Given the nature of our climate, large slicing tomatoes (and sometimes even Romas) are difficult to ripen. They perform better in a greenhouse, but are more likely to encounter disease problems in those conditions. In the PNW, Sungold cherry tomatoes are without a doubt the best tasting, best producing plant you can grow. They are incredibly vigorous and healthy; and just about everybody who tries them gets addicted.

Generally speaking...I still think Sungold is the best cherry tomato for any climate, San Marzano are amazing Roma tomatoes, and the Cherokee Purple is my favorite slicer.

### **What’s the story with your cropping headquarters?**

Seattle Urban Farm Company operates out of a house in North Seattle. The HQ is affectionately referred to as “Moonbase,” a title that attests to our location at the city limits and because we figure that our work is pioneering intensive gardening techniques that will be implemented in future moon colonies or something like that.

### **What crops do you recommend for vertical gardeners?**

Vertical gardening can be as simple or complex as you want it to be.

The simplest vertical gardens are built with hanging pieces of string or wooden or bamboo stakes. If you have a spot that will work well for a row of tall crops, consider planting pole beans, cucumbers, tomatoes and winter squash like pumpkins or butternut. These are all vine crops that produce better, have less disease problems and look great when supported on a trellis.

There are also some pretty cool perennial edibles that make great vertical elements in a garden like hops, grapes, kiwis, and columnar apple trees.

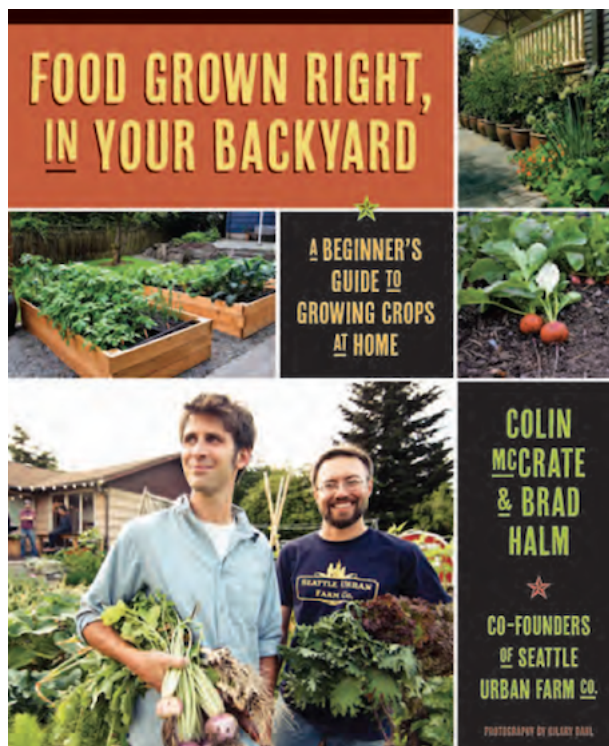
There are all sorts of more complex vertical gardening systems on the market today. Some allow you to plant in soil and others are set up as hydroponic or aeroponic systems. The concept of building narrow, tall planting containers makes a lot of sense for people with limited square footage of sunny real estate. I think we will see a lot of gimmicky and well-functioning vertical garden systems in the next few years, but it is important to do your homework on the products because some of them are very far to the gimmicky end of that spectrum.

### **What’s your take on the homestead naming controversy?**

I think that putting a trademark on the phrase “urban homestead” was, at best, ill-advised. I believe that, if our society values the progress that is being made on sustainability and farming issues, then the people who work on those issues should be compensated (just like any other discipline). I think that, in this case, the move seemed more like a money-grabbing, overly-capitalistic strategy that alienated their community and potential allies instead of helping to foster a healthy homesteading economy. Based on my limited understanding of trademark law, “urban



homesteading” is a wholly descriptive term and shouldn’t even be permissible as a trademark anyways.



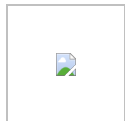
***Food Grown Right, In Your Backyard*** authored by Colin McCrate and Brad Halm is available for purchase now through [Mountaineers Books](#).



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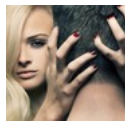


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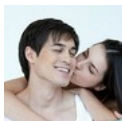
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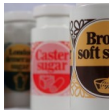
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