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Bastille's Rooftop Garden Raises Urban Farming to New Heights [Photo Gallery]

by RVO on August 6, 2010



If there's a vanguard for the back-to-the-future, "Victory Garden" era in horticulture and landscaping, Colin McCrate is leading it. As the recession stretches out, garden-happy Seattleites are switching flowerbeds and shrubs into edible greens, fruits, and vegetables. At McCrate's [Seattle Urban Farm Company](#), the requests for residential farm landscaping (and [chicken coops](#)) keep increasing.

"It's definitely true," said McCrate, atop Ballard's [Bastille](#) restaurant (5307 Ballard Ave. N.W.), where he's installed a prototype rooftop garden. "More and more people are taking advantage of yard space to supplement their food needs. The sale of vegetable seeds has gone through the roof."

Seattle's climate, even in a cloud-shrouded summer like the one we are currently experiencing, is perfect for cultivation of greens, herbs, vegetables and fruit, particularly native apples, cherries and plums. Rain and peek-a-boo sun makes for perfect growing conditions.

Some local gardeners have always made a sport of growing food products, and [Seattle's P-Patch network](#) has been flourishing since the hippie-intensive 1970s. But now, people are farming for keeps, both residentially and commercially.

"Our customers are constantly surprised at the yield from even a small plot," McCrate commented.

A few years ago, Bastille's James Weimann and Demming MacLise purchased a building on the resurgent Ballard Avenue. (If you haven't been over there recently, make plans. It's as nice a mix of retail and restaurants in the city). Their goal was to create a restaurant that adhered to the strict demands of French cuisine, namely the use of fresh ingredients. They succeeded in spades, but not before an intensive remodel and some bold thinking.

[Weimann and MacLise hit on the idea of a rooftop garden](#). What could be fresher than the harvest from a two-flight walk-up garden?

McCrate, who designed the innovative rooftop beds for Bastille's produce, estimates



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that with 800 square feet of garden, the restaurant is currently meeting about 30 to 40 percent of its needs for fresh greens and herbs, including red leaf lettuce, Miner's lettuce, arugula and peppercress. "They are, however, getting 100 percent of their basil and rosemary needs, which both do very well in Seattle."

Weimann and MacIse may not see a positive return on their investment for a number of years, but patrons get an immediate, positive return in every bite. And as innovators in the rooftop garden field, they've been [raking in the media coverage](#). The garden is "poised to become a Seattle landmark," said [Eat, Drink and Be.](#)

Bastille is not the only restaurant or urban enterprise doing a bit of intensive farming. Venerable [Canlis](#) has a terraced garden in its North Queen Anne Hill location, and, two years ago, Maggie McKelvy, a manager of HomeStreet Bank's Ballard branch, led an effort to turn [a bed in the bank's parking lot into a vegetable-producing space](#).

McCrate believes efforts like these are just the first steps of a widespread movement to reclaim food. It's hard to argue with him. Just two years ago, separate incidents with contaminated lettuce and cilantro generated a great amount of fear about the safety of our industrial-strength food chain, and the quality of produce like greens, fruits and vegetables that should be served as fresh as possible.

"Producing your own food allows for a measure of security," said McCrate. "Anyone can plant a vegetable bed or a fruit tree. It takes no more water or soil than a flower bed, looks almost as beautiful in the yard, and produces a tangible and edible benefits."

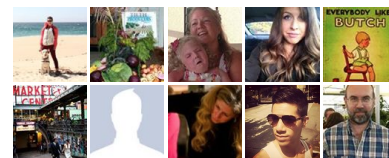
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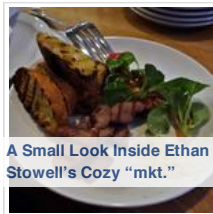
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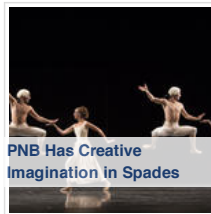
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1.  Naomi on [August 9, 2010 at 9:28 am](#) said:

If you also own a restaurant and want a rooftop farm, but don't want to or know enough about farming to farm it yourself, you can lease out the roof to an Urban Farming Company. Join a growing trend. List your roof on <http://www.seglet.com> and receive offers from Urban Farmers to profit share the proceeds from your roof.

It's interesting, fun, positive PR, and more.

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2.  DIYSeattle on [June 19, 2011 at 6:48 am](#) said:

This is very nice. <http://www.DIYSeattle.com> finds it refreshing to see some design and function working together.

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