

The Gardener

VOL. 32, NO. 2  FALL 2009

Delaware Center for Horticulture



Peter Lindtner (left) and Eric Robinson work together planting some of the first crops at the new urban farm.

From vacant lot to fresh veggies

Delaware's first urban farm delivers a healthy harvest for all

Walking through Wilmington's 11th Street Bridge neighborhood a year ago, chances are you would not have looked twice at the empty lot tucked behind the row homes at 12th & Brandywine.

Today, this forgotten quarter-acre has a new look and a new purpose. It has been transformed into Delaware's first urban farm – a lively hub of social activity, hard work, and best of all, fresh-as-it-gets, delicious produce.

Fresh produce for many of us is always available, always abundant. We take for granted the easy access to healthy fruits and vegetables at our supermarkets and specialty grocers. But finding affordable and fresh food can be a daily challenge for residents in low-income urban neighborhoods. With just three supermarkets serving 73,000 people in the City of Wilmington, if you don't have a car, your only option may be pre-packaged items from a convenience store.

How it all began

The Delaware Center for Horticulture (DCH) has been helping people transform abandoned, trash-filled lots into community gardens for many years. In 2007, the Wilmington Urban Farm

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Coalition was formed from a diverse group of community members, local farmers, non-profit leaders and government officials. The vision? To create a model for teaching low-income residents how to raise and sell healthy food right in their own neighborhoods.

This spring the dream became a reality as ground was broken at 12th & Brandywine in east Wilmington. More than 50 volunteers built 19 raised beds and filled them with rich topsoil and compost. A shiny new fence was erected to support espaliered fruit trees, herbs and cut flowers.

The success of the first season has far exceeded expectations on many levels. Neighborhood residents participated enthusiastically, some bringing two and three generations of their family with them. Professional horticulturists volunteered as trainers, and even they have been astounded by the exceptionally vigorous and beautiful plants grown by these novice farmers. A bi-weekly farm stand was run on-site by teenagers from Camp FRESH, a summer program of Christiana Care. Cool-weather crops such as leafy greens and root vegetables will supply crunchy salads all winter long. Perhaps most importantly, the urban farm has become a community gathering space, building new connections between neighbors who never knew each other before.

Goals for the future include on-site composting and installing additional raised beds that will accommodate more farmers. Six families are already on the

waiting list for 2010. A hoop house is planned (a simple half-round structure) to extend the growing season and allow farmers to start their own seedlings, reducing costs and increasing the variety of produce grown and sold.

Who's who of the Wilmington Urban Farm Coalition

A wonderful array of people have contributed time and talents to bringing Delaware's first urban farm to fruition. Key leaders include:

- **Alice Davis** – experienced gardener, long-term community garden volunteer and a lead trainer of the novice farmers.
- **Tom Davis** – photographer and videographer documenting the urban farm's progress, and providing free use of his images to DCH.
- **Zack Davis** – landscape designer and creator of original bed layout. He also recruited a business colleague who excavated the site pro bono.
- **H.G. Haskell** – farmer in Chadds Ford. He donated more than 50 yards of soil, compost, woodchips, and many hours of advice and expertise. (*Read more about H.G. on page 7.*)
- **Stephanie Jervey** – community member involved in the earliest planning stages and now gardening in her own plot.
- **Jeff Kline** – board member of New Castle County Habitat for Humanity. Part of the farm site is owned by Habitat, and he helped secure its use.



Stephanie Jervey (left) and Amber Johnson (right) work with children from the 11th Street Bridge neighborhood to prepare the new raised beds for planting.

- **Peter Lindtner** – former head of horticulture at Hagley and one of the lead teachers at the urban farm.
- **Sarah Loomis** – AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer with DCH who energized and welcomed others into the farm and created a blog highlighting each milestone.
- **Ann Mattingly** – DCH Community Gardens Manager and prime mover behind the whole project.
- **Eric Mayer** – carpenter who constructed the raised beds with a ledge for sitting that invites easy planting, harvesting and visiting with each other.
- **Eric Robinson** – a leader in the 11th Street Bridge community and instrumental in building support for the urban farm in his neighborhood.
- **Adele Carter & Cindy Stephens** – neighborhood residents and farmers, enjoying the opportunity to grow food with their children.
- **The Wright family** – Verna, her son J.L., and her grandkids represent the multi-generational aspects of the urban farmers.
- **City of Wilmington employees** – helpful people at Real Estate & Housing facilitated the leasing of seven city-owned lots for the farm, and Public Works allowed irrigation from city water hydrants.

Hungry to learn more?

Meet some of the fascinating people behind the urban farm and hear stories from their perspectives. Enjoy a slide show of stunning photography taken throughout the evolution of the project.

You're invited to our Annual Meeting & Reception on Wednesday, October 14. The event at the Delaware Center for Horticulture in Trolley Square is open to the public and runs from 6:00 – 8:30 p.m. Bring a friend! The cost is \$10 per person. Cocktails and delicious appetizers (that include locally-grown ingredients) will be served.

Celebrating the success of the first season is only the beginning. The Urban Farm Coalition hopes to replicate this model in other neighborhoods that lack access to healthy, fresh food. 🌱