



HOME

GROWN



**T**

It is the last Saturday in May, and a gentle afternoon sun is drying out the Homewood Community Garden in Squirrel Hill after a drenching thunderstorm the evening before.

About 15 gardeners are scattered across a maze of 20-by-20-foot plots on land owned by Homewood Cemetery. Bordering one side are woody acreage and the active cemetery beyond; on the other are Forbes Avenue and Frick Park.

Edgewood residents Theresé Tardio and Luke Miller are giving a tour of “Plot 5(A)—Full Sun,” as it is labeled on the site map, with a level of excitement that others might show for a beach house or mountain retreat. No wonder. After two years of inching their way up the waiting list (89 plots total), they are now in this special society. They have paid the \$36 annual fee, and have received keys to their gate, garden community rules, sustainable gardening guidelines and directions to the holiest shrine of the gardening religion: the community compost heap.

So what is the reward for enduring a waiting list? (There are 120 hopefuls for the Homewood site and similar numbers on lists at seven other community gardens in Pittsburgh’s East End neighborhoods and the South Hills suburbs.) What drives them to weed and plant and tend to their growing things so cheerfully through mud and muggy heat?

“For me, all I want is for my friends to say I make the best caprese salad they’ve ever tasted,” says Tardio. “And I know it will be, because it is as fresh as it can possibly be, and I know exactly where it came from and how it grew, because I did it myself.”

These dedicated urban-and-suburban gardeners are the truest of the True Believers in an exploding movement that fosters local sources of food production using sustainable methods.

If the thought of getting that close to the ground has you wincing at the prospect of nursing creaky knees or dodging pesky insects, take heart. The following pages offer a wide variety of programs, organizations, events and places that embrace locally and sustainably grown food at every level. *h*

—Doug Root, *h* staff



Joshua Franco

**FRESH AND FUN** Melanie Cheers, Chris Brittenburg and Ping Pirrung, Brittenburg's mother-in-law, don't have to do much marketing of their harvest from Who Cooks for You Farm. The eye-popping produce from the New Bethlehem operation is selling itself at the Monday Penn Circle West Farmer's Market in a parking lot in East Liberty. This market is one of about 20 in the Pittsburgh region that are organized through the Pennsylvania Buy Fresh Buy Local® program of the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture. For a list of area farm markets, see the pullout in the back of this issue. For a statewide view, go to [www.buylocalpa.org](http://www.buylocalpa.org).

Cul de Sac



# 3

PENNSYLVANIA'S RANKING  
AMONG STATES IN FARM-DIRECT  
SALES TO CONSUMERS

**FARM U** One of the most unconventional and forward-thinking grant bequests in the history of southwestern Pennsylvania philanthropy came to Pittsburgh's Chatham University in 2008. The Eden Hall Foundation granted a 388-acre farm in Allegheny County's Richland Township to advance the university's academic and research missions. Officials didn't waste any time making use of their newly extended campus.

Programs already in place at the farm include sustainability and environmental studies, landscape architecture and women's studies, and an environmental learning lab. Scheduled to begin this fall is a new master's degree program in food studies, making Chatham one of only a few universities in the country to offer a graduate program in that discipline.

Below: An environmental studies student in one of the farm's gardens; middle: the farm's bucolic setting, once a free vacation retreat for women workers at the H.J. Heinz Co.; bottom: Alice Julier, director of the food studies program, tours a greenhouse with Mikal Merlina, left, owner of The Rhizosphere, a local organic food consulting and marketing firm; and Dan Dalton, a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh. For more information on the program: 1-800-837-1290 or [www.chatham.edu/mafs](http://www.chatham.edu/mafs)



Chatham University



Duane Fleeter



Rachel Carson Homestead Association

## SUSTAINABILITY WITH A VIEW

What happens when you move a sustainable food festival from the hinterlands neighborhood of celebrated environmentalist Rachel Carson to the spectacular bridge named for her in downtown Pittsburgh?

Organizers at the Rachel Carson Homestead Association are betting that the Aug. 29 event at the high-profile location—the former Ninth Street Bridge and its river views—will attract a broader crowd. They also want to highlight the benefits of locally sourced foods: they're healthier, more economical and environmentally friendly.

First presented three years ago by the association in Springdale near Carson's childhood home, the Sustainable Feast brings together a mix of top local chefs who buy from local farms, farmers themselves who sell their wares at market stands, environmental protection-conservation organizations, and a growing number of eco-friendly and fair-trade vendors.

"It's all one giant sustainable street party," says Rachel Carson Homestead Executive Director Patricia DeMarco. "But there is an important goal behind it all. We need more retail stores to sell local, sustainably produced foods, and we need more consumers asking for that option at their favorite grocery stores and restaurants."

Festival goers also can learn about community-supported agriculture programs—how to buy directly from a local farm, says DeMarco. Families buy a "share" ownership in a farmer's crop and receive a basket of fresh, in-season produce at regular intervals.

Participants in this year's Sustainable Feast include some of the hottest chefs and restaurant names in town: big Burrito Restaurant Group, Six Penn Kitchen, Fede Pasta, Salt of the Earth and more. Farmers include Turner Dairy, a collective of small family dairy farms that do not use genetically engineered growth hormones. Event partners are Eat 'n Park Hospitality Group, Slow Food Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture and Whole Foods Market. *To find out more about Rachel Carson and other activities of the organization, visit [www.rachelcarsonhomestead.org](http://www.rachelcarsonhomestead.org).*

**BUY FRESH, BUY LOCAL** Since 1992, the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture has helped farmers learn from each other and build relationships with consumers looking for fresh, local and sustainably produced food. PASA's driving vision is transforming agriculture and food systems in Pennsylvania to make local farms more viable, improving the land and bringing health benefits from more nutritious food to all residents. PASA builds bridges between diverse sectors of the agricultural industry, ensuring the healthiest, most nutritious food "from farm to fork." At right: PASA's list of Pittsburgh's urban farms. *For more information about farms statewide: [www.buylocalpa.org](http://www.buylocalpa.org).*

—Mia Farber, Western Regional Office, PASA

**Braddock Farms**  
Grow Pittsburgh  
Braddock Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15014  
[www.growpittsburgh.org/growpittsburgh/Projects/BraddockFarms](http://www.growpittsburgh.org/growpittsburgh/Projects/BraddockFarms)

**Churchview Farm**  
Churchview Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15236  
[www.churchviewfarmpgh.blogspot.com/](http://www.churchviewfarmpgh.blogspot.com/)

**Frick Greenhouse**  
Grow Pittsburgh  
7227 Reynolds St.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15208  
[www.growpittsburgh.org/growpittsburgh/Projects/FrickGreenhouse](http://www.growpittsburgh.org/growpittsburgh/Projects/FrickGreenhouse)

**Garfield Community Farm**  
801 N. Negley Ave.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15206  
[www.garfieldfarm.com](http://www.garfieldfarm.com)

**Hazelwood Harvest**  
97 Courtland St.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15207  
[www.hazelwoodharvest.org](http://www.hazelwoodharvest.org)

**Healcrest Urban Community Farm**  
Hillcrest Street & North Pacific Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15224  
[www.healcrest.com](http://www.healcrest.com)

**Mildred's Daughters Urban Farm**  
1100 Normahill Dr.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15201  
[www.localharvest.org/farms/M6753](http://www.localharvest.org/farms/M6753)

**Garden Dreams**  
**Urban Farm & Nursery**  
810–812 Holland Ave.  
Wilkinsburg, PA 15221  
[www.mygardendreams.com](http://www.mygardendreams.com)

**Landslide Community Farm**  
3 Allequippa St.  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
[www.landslidecommunityfarm.org](http://www.landslidecommunityfarm.org)

## PLANNING A GARDEN

# 101

*First Person: Julie Pezzino, executive director, Grow Pittsburgh*

Garden planning is essential—even if you're not an expert gardener. Soil testing is the essential first step when starting a new garden. (It can be done infrequently once a garden is established.) Test soil in mid-August, so that there is time to amend the soil before winter. Important measurements include pH, phosphorous, potassium and, most important, the presence of toxic elements such as lead. The local cooperative extension can answer questions about metals and toxicity.

After testing, you are ready to prepare the garden site. The area should receive at least six hours of sunlight, be fairly flat and be easily accessible. September is a good month to prepare, leaving time for any grass to die and for amendments to incorporate themselves into the soil. Breaking ground in fall also allows planting to begin as soon as the ground thaws in March.

In January, you should begin a more intensive phase of garden planning. Before purchasing seeds, consider where and when each crop will be planted, how much space each requires and numbers of plants. Rotating crops around the garden each year is good practice. Also, the productive capability of the garden can be maximized by planting in succession. Crops planted in early spring, such as lettuce, may be replaced by summer crops, such as squash, once the temperatures rise. The best gardeners often draw maps of their area, one for each growing season.

If you are working in an established garden, the first step is to take notes during the year's gardening experience. Notes can be as simple as "Mid-May: small black bugs devour salad turnips." Or, the process can be more detailed—a daily log, for instance, that includes rainfall amounts and temperatures. The most helpful notes tell you when and where each crop was planted, what diseases or pests were noticed and how well the crop produced.

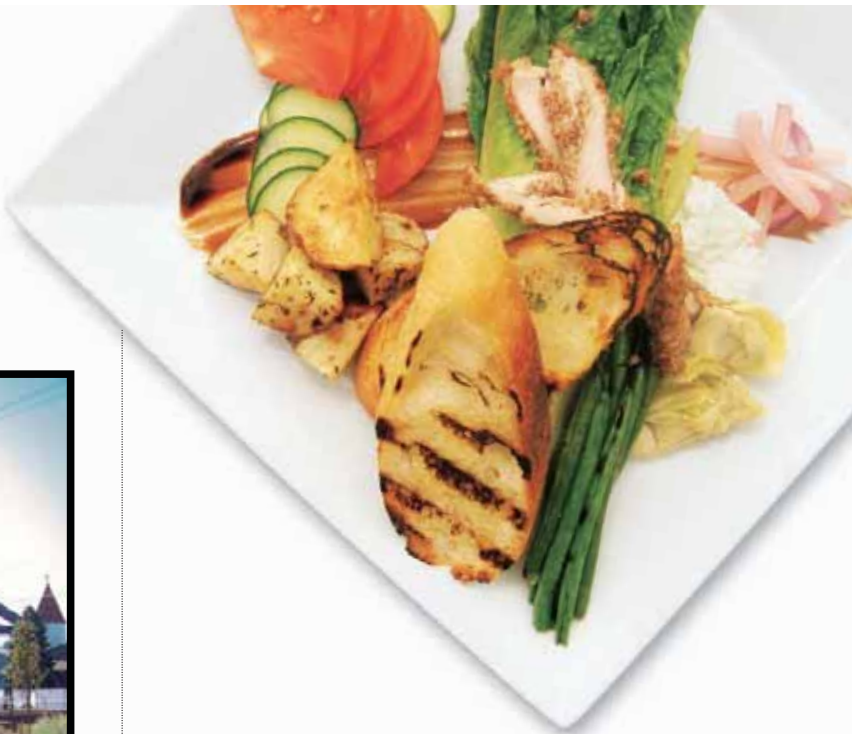
With note taking, journal recording and map drawing completed, your down-in-the-dirt experience will be very rewarding. *For more information: [www.growpittsburgh.org](http://www.growpittsburgh.org).*



Grow Pittsburgh



**GROW BRADDOCK!** A set of raised flower and vegetable beds just off the main street of Braddock is part of a football-field-sized urban farm operation designed to turn around the community's economic fortunes, after it was decimated from the loss of the steel industry in the mid-1980s. Set, ironically, against the backdrop of an abandoned steel mill, Braddock Farms is a premier demonstration project of The Heinz Endowments-funded Grow Pittsburgh, whose mission is to promote urban farming and sustainable agriculture. Braddock Farms also employs many young people in the community, who have few part-time job options. It is one of nine urban farms in the City of Pittsburgh. For a complete list of farms across the state, go to [www.buylocalpa.org](http://www.buylocalpa.org).



**CAFÉ HEALTHY** One reason that Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh's Schenley Park can claim to be the world's most energy-efficient and sustainably operated conservatory is that its Café Phipps, located at street level near the entrance, is Green Restaurant Certified. The seasonal menus feature locally grown and organic foods such as the ingredients in the café's signature Pecan Chicken Salad Niçoise, above, and sustainably produced wines. All cups and flatware are compostable, all water is filtered on site and leftover food waste is composted. For summer/fall hours: [www.phipps.conservatory.org](http://www.phipps.conservatory.org).



Joshua Franzos

Shipping is a terrible thing to do to vegetables.  
They probably get jet-lagged, just like people.

ELIZABETH BERRY, NEW MEXICO FARMER & AUTHOR KNOWN AS "THE BEAN QUEEN"