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A growing season to remember

Posted by: [The Michigan Citizen](#) Posted date: **March 15, 2013** In: [Fresh Ideas](#) | comment : **0**

By [Ashley Atkinson](#)

[Special to the Michigan Citizen](#)

As the days grow longer and temperatures begin to rise, Detroiters are welcoming spring by dusting off shovels and preparing for a productive growing season. Over the coming months, hundreds of residents will break new ground by starting or expanding community or market gardens in the city; thousands will grow vegetables at home for the first time; and tens of thousands of the city's existing urban gardeners and farmers will celebrate City Council's approval of Detroit's Urban Agriculture Ordinance making growing food in Detroit legal — finally!

The Detroit Urban Agriculture Ordinance will help to encourage and facilitate urban gardens and farms in the city, while providing standards to protect neighborhoods from the unintended negative consequences that sometimes accompany food production. The passage of this long-awaited legislation will make it legal at last for urban gardeners and farmers who have invested sweat and equity into vacant lots for years to legally purchase land, build food businesses and create jobs.

This year will mark many other important changes and opportunities in the city, in our food system and beyond. Alternative food outlets including farmers' markets, farm stands and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs are popping up throughout the city. Community-based institutions are opening their kitchen doors to cooking classes and food entrepreneurs. Dozens of new restaurants and food stores will serve residents, and Whole Foods Market, a national chain, will open a store in the city this summer.

During these transformative times let us embrace and build on the power of urban gardens and farms to grow the demand for these services, while feeding families, building and strengthening relationships, stabilizing neighborhoods and inspiring entrepreneurship, creativity and self-reliance.

Let us also remember that growing food, like rebuilding communities, is an art that cannot be rushed. Although urban gardening and farming in Detroit has been around for more than a century, the growth of participation in gardens and farms has been slow, steady and sustainable for the last two decades. If you'd like to experience the slow joy of growing fresh, delicious fruits and vegetables at home or in a community or market garden, contact the folks at Keep Growing Detroit.

Keep Growing Detroit is a new urban agriculture-focused organization serving the residents, community-based organizations and businesses of Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park. Keep Growing Detroit is also the new home of the Garden Resource Program, a program that has been bringing high-quality vegetable seeds, seedlings and other garden resources to urban gardeners and farmers for nearly a decade. The Garden Resource Program will kick off another growing season with seed distributions this month at the following dates and locations:

- March 16 in Region West-
- March 19 in Region North

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Kevyn D. Orr
Financial and Operating Plan
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- March 21 in Retion South
- March 23 in Region East

For information on becoming a member of the Garden Resource Program or our other resources, call 313.757.2635, e-mail keepgrowingdetroit@gmail.com or visit www.detroitagriculture.net.

If you're interested in learning more about what's happening in Detroit's Food System and get involved, attend The Detroit Food Policy Council's annual summit April 4-6, an event that will bring together more than 400 people to celebrate the local food experience of Detroit and expand community engagement in local food system activities. Our theme for this year's event, "What's On Your Plate?" will explore issues of healthy food access, food nutrition and education, food sovereignty and overall health of the food system. The theme also asks participants to explore what other issues — such as education, employment and safety — are priorities for community members and how the food system intersects those priorities.

To register for the event or for more information, visit www.detroitfoodpc.org or call 313.833.0396.

Ashley Atkinson is co-director of Keep Growing Detroit, a member of the Detroit Food Policy Council and adviser to the Restaurant Opportunity Center-Michigan.

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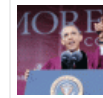
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