





WORKING TO ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY GARDEN

# Bringing *Farm to Table*

BY STACIE CALLAGHAN &amp; LAUREN GALANES

Food. Where do you get yours? Do you know its origin? How close is it to its natural state? How far did it have to travel to get to your table? These are all important questions in days of drought and dwindling oil supplies. Our relationship to food has changed immensely in the past 100 years. There are those who do not know that milk actually comes from a cow, or that potatoes grow underground, or that strawberries bear their seeds on the outside.

*Continued on page 54*



*Organic demonstration garden site*

## **Bringing Farm to Table**

*Continued from page 53*

John Gachina, President and Owner of Gachina Landscape Management, had a vision to help change that perspective. “This is something I have wanted to do for a long time. It is so exciting to see it come to life; there are so many benefits that will come of our garden project,” says Gachina. Gachina Landscape has partnered with JobTrain to create an Organic Demonstration Garden. Gachina’s Demonstration Garden, called the Farm, is located in Menlo Park and will help volunteers answer these questions and provide a living

classroom for learning the value of organic farming methods.

As members of the Bay-Friendly Landscaping & Gardening Coalition, “Gachina’s staff is dedicated to the creation of sustainable landscaping and devoted to stewarding the earth,” says Gachina. Gachina Landscape’s and JobTrain’s volunteers will plant, tend and harvest what is hoped to be abundant yields, as well as tasty menu items. The fruits and vegetables grown in the demonstration garden will be used in JobTrain’s culinary program, which is part of its training center.

In addition to using the produce at JobTrain, Gachina Landscape will

use the garden for client education and interaction. Clients will be educated on sustainable practices and how they can bring gardens into their work and/or home environments. Any extra produce will be offered to Gachina Landscape employees in a Farmers Market at a greatly reduced rate – offering affordable, quality produce to those who may not otherwise be able to afford it.

## *Starting the Project*

At the garden site, the weedy, compacted soil promised many hours of hand pulling grass and other

weeds once the crops were in and watered regularly. To combat this, Gachina Landscape donated labor and materials to get the area ready. The landscape company decided to sheet-mulch the bed areas and build bermed beds on top of the cardboard. The pathways were filled with arbor mulch, which helps conserve water and eventually breaks down to feed the soil. This method gave the young seedlings a healthy beginning before their roots needed to head down into the native soil. The mulched ground increased the water lens under the planted beds, encouraging deeper rooting.

Irrigation will be drip and programmed on a smart controller using ET rates. The smart controller will automatically adjust based on the current weather conditions, providing more or less water based on specific site requirements. Water conservation is essential to achieve the success of this garden.

The company will plant fruit trees, berry bushes, culinary herbs, some perennial food crops (artichokes, for instance) and an array of vegetables. Volunteers from JobTrain's construction trade class will build compost bins and storage sheds, and the culinary arts students will experience food production first hand. Additionally, Gachina Landscape hopes to build community through work on the garden. Food tastes better when you've worked to produce it, and twice as good when you share it.

Interested in starting your own garden? Here are some links to help you on your way:

- Bay-Friendly Landscaping & Gardening Coalition: Learn more about many Bay friendly methods at [www.bayfriendlycoalition.org/publications.shtml](http://www.bayfriendlycoalition.org/publications.shtml)
- Rare Seeds: Excellent source for information about seeds and growing; visit [www.rareseeds.com](http://www.rareseeds.com)
- Territorial Seed Company: This company has been around for a long time and has a lot of information on plants, as well as varieties for foggy climates; visit [www.territorialseed.com](http://www.territorialseed.com)

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## GET YOUR GARDEN READY!



If your homeowners have yard space to plant, share these steps in the next community newsletter.

**1** Choose your garden site. Full sun for most plants will keep you in production; full sun in the morning and partial shade in the afternoon will work as well.

**2** Prep the site. We recommend sheet mulching to prevent weeds. Mow the area as low as possible, cover with cardboard (recycled content preferred, remove all tape, staples, labels), overlapping joints by 6 inches or more.

**3** Alternatively, you can do the traditional rototilling and adding of compost to create your beds.

**4** Create beds 3 feet to 4 feet wide. Make the beds deep – we recommend 12 inches – as the soil will compact! Use excellent (preferably organic) soil with good quality compost to give your plants plenty of nutrition. Rake the tops flat and firm the sides. Fill between your beds with mulch (arbor mulch is a great, economical and environmentally sound choice).

**5** Now you're ready to plant. Seeds or starts will work, and 4-inch pots or 6 packs work best. Be sure to choose season appropriate varieties (i.e., tomato for spring planting, summer harvest; broccoli for fall planting, winter harvest).

**6** Water everything well, and keep it watered! Food crops generally want to be babied to produce the best flavor. Keep a journal if you are inclined, and your crops will improve each year. In the Bay Area, we can produce food year round.

**7** Harvest – enjoy the fruits and vegetables of your labor (and love)!