

# Support these Organic Farms to Help Transform Our Foodshed

My bioregion has a lot of growth opportunities and has made great strides within our local foodshed. The biggest sustainable access that anyone can have in relation to their local foodshed is to grow their own produce, like the veggies we grew (shown above) from our organic garden! The **Sustainable Food Center** has been a key player in transforming our community. They have advocated change, helped impoverished communities have access to healthier food choices, provided resources and education, and launched necessary services. They are available at some of the Austin farmers markets in some impoverished areas and have potential growth opportunities to branch out to other neighborhoods. The **Capital Area Food Bank** recovers a lot of food from many restaurants and farms and distributes it to poor communities throughout this region (Texas 2014).

There are several organic farms in Austin, some of which have been around for quite some time. **Tecolote** is an organic family farm a few miles from my home in Manor, which has been the longest CSA distributor in Texas (Kramer 2014). Their engagement in the food movement is through their contributions in living sustainably, local restaurant/co-op distribution, farmers markets in different counties, the slow food movement, and biointensive/sustainable/civic agriculture. These are some of the things I learned from this incredible farm by volunteering and working

for them. As a CSA shareholder or farmers market shopper you will be pleased to have access to specialty smoked peppers from David's famous outdoor wood smoker and other unique heirloom varieties that are boom-tastic! Chat about your next dish at the market with Katie!

**Green Gate** is an organic family farm about ten miles from my house that focuses on civic/sustainable agriculture, CSA distributions, some restaurant wholesale, meat/honey/dairy shares on-site from other farms, host to a bee colony from an offsite beekeeper to share the pollination benefits, promote community development and education through their New Farm Institute (Flynn 2014). I've had the wonderful opportunity to work and volunteer for Green Gate! Learning from Farmer Chip and Farmer Erin is a unique and magical experience. Something that you don't want to miss! **Help support them in building their NFI infrastructure and site. Donate!**

These two farms are very similar, especially since they are strong family farms, yet their focus is somewhat different. While Tecolote focuses on their direct market reach through face to face networking, Green Gate focuses on educating the community on food ethics. Not to sound exhaustive, I'm trying to simplify. They both represent farm gate to food plate, instill historical character at their farms and equally share traction in their fields. Green Gate has integrated permaculture design at their farm sites and they are open to the public to learn, offer children's farm camp programs, and alternative educational curriculum opportunities to local schools. They are the only organic farm in Austin that focuses on this. Green Gate provides additional SNAP benefits from the government

by doubling the voucher from \$10 to \$20 per day for produce when used on the farm (Banks, 2011).

There is a crucial demand in any city or town for people and children to have access to learning about where their food comes from. That ignites interest which can lead to change. Not all organizations who are involved in the foodshed allow others to learn from them through first hand experience. Although you can volunteer at several of the organic farms within this bioregion, that doesn't mean that people are begging to do so, especially if they don't care about the food movement or know why it's important.

**Urban Roots** in Austin is another organic farm with a civic/sustainable agricultural drive that teaches struggling teens a better way of living. This includes preparing food, field work, advocating change, and they team up with other local businesses to fundraise and raise community awareness for their mission. They stand out as leaders in their field in this arena and use their community engagements at the market, SXSW and other festival exposure, farm dinners, CSA, and fundraising events to propel their grassroots movement. Urban Roots attacks food security issues by providing produce to poor communities. Support their social movement, community impact, and farm! They are the funnest farm to volunteer for! Volunteer!

Although not all of the local organic farms have a mindset to transform lives through educational opportunities teaching volunteers or community members, they do in their face to face interaction at farmers markets, website exposure, grassroots involvement and CSA distribution. The need for expanding **SNAP benefit** access at all the farms and providing mobile access to local, fresh foods in different impoverished

neighborhoods is imperative to closing the gap between different populations who may be missing out on the local food system, necessary sustainable food transitions and food security.

For more information about volunteering at a local Austin or Manor farm please review my [Green Thumb-Texas Directory page](#). Or talk to your local farmer at your nearest food hub! Building new relationships through Community Supported Agriculture is a great place to start! Find a local CSA farmshare near you!

## Bibliography

Banks, Karen. *Central Texas Food Shed Assessment*. Central Texas Food Shed Assessment, Austin: Sustainable Food Center, 2011.

Flynn, Erin. *New Farm Institute*. 2014. <http://newfarminstitute.org/> (accessed December 22, 2014).

Kraemer, Katie, interview by Kristin Kay Schultz. *Tecolote Organic Family Farm* (November 14, 2014).

Texas, Capital Area Food Bank of. *Food Systems*. 2014. <http://www.austinfoodbank.org/advocate/issues-food-systems.html> (accessed December 22, 2014).

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## May Moments Bring Us Joy

Another Wednesday at the Manor Farmers Market. I

met quite a few wonderful people today! I always enjoy engaging conversations with others who are involved in similar projects and experiments at home. We were talking citrus and although I love this fruit dearly, it has been an ongoing challenge of mine to get our Meijer Lemon, Lime, and Tangerine to grow fruitfully in the past. I reluctantly gave up this winter only to find myself getting new varieties this spring and more literature. The fact that I didn't have a single book on the matter is quite silly since I am immersed in so many others that revolve around food and dirt. My most favorite reads this spring have definitely been carried around with me wherever I go, thinking I'll have a minute or two.

*How to Grow More Vegetables* by John Jeavons, which John recommended (Natural Gardener). When I interviewed him in March I asked, if you could suggest one book, what would it be, and that was the one he promoted. I encourage you to get your hands on a copy. It incorporates biointensive growing methods, how many plants and calories you need to feed a certain number of people, and companion planting, ecosystem balance, charts, soil fertility, sustainability, composting, open-pollinated seeds, propagation, seed saving, and of course so much more that I can't go into detail. You'll just need to get a copy yourself □ Build that library, put stickers-the ones you get sent to you in the mail with your address on them, in your paper passions and share them with your

neighbors and friends who could use to earn a little more. Currently also reading the \$64 Tomato.

In that past month we've literally transformed our backyard haven with Davin adding gates to the gardens closest to the house to prevent our feathered friends from embarking on beans, peas, eggplant, and grapes. For some reason Davin thought it'd be funny to show them new things they could eat, before he built the fence, which meant flock sitting was necessary.

Our biggest accomplishment of the year in promoting sustainability is from our direct influence and education to our friends and neighbors on the importance of growing your own food, harvesting rainwater, repurposing materials, and alternative methods to grow plants, fruits, and vegetables. Right before we got the April/May issue of Mother Earth(ME) we sent a subscription to our neighbors the Calebs, since they had begun their conquest in transforming their backyard. Once we got that issue in the mail the letter from the Editor of ME asked readers to send a subscription to someone new, I was gleaming with joy knowing that I did this right before they told others to! The stars are aligned. When affordability of growing a garden was brought up, I piped up, "you can't afford not to!" And thus their journey began. It has been extremely exciting watching them get enthralled in projects

that procure Mother Earth. More importantly their children are also learning new skills too! We will be sharing pictures with you and the impressive strides they've made since February. The picture displayed is a picture with one of their girls helping Davin with beak trimming. When the Calebs started asking some basic gardening questions I decided they needed more than my blundering mind so I put together a small resource booklet for them of some of the things that were important. I included crop charts for the year, Ag Extension charts on crops that do well in our county, companion planting information, farmer's almanac info, basic gardening principles for handling drought and intense heat, seed companies to order from and gave them a stack of my Spring seed catalogs from various companies. I also advised them on local gardening centers, online resources and opportunities that might interest them. We've also opened up our green library to them which includes books and old issues of Mother Earth News. They sprung forward and have already learned the ever challenging journey that attaining a green thumb isn't always promising and definitely not easy. They take pride in the fact that they have joined just in time to learn from all of our mistakes. It makes Davin and I chuckle for sure. We have had years of disappointment on growing certain crops here and are always researching this seasons insect challenges. We are very flattered that our methods of living have rubbed off on someone new,

especially a family of six! We are thrilled to exchange ideas and lessons learned each week. Gardening humility keeps us humble and surely reminds me of what I'm here for and what my great grandmother taught me.

I got extensions on my two research projects at the University. I hope to finish them in the next month. I still have marketing surveys for seaweed compost and can email you one if you are interested, message me on Facebook or send me a message through our contact form. The sustainable agriculture project on agrivoltaic methods is more like farming in a third world country. I'm learning new skills that I didn't know I had, including learning how to balance extreme circumstances in the dirt, adversity against all odds, farming in the field alone.

Our spring projects combine different endeavors. Davin's been keeping busy learning about Hugulkultur, bee collecting, watching countless Wranglerstar youtube videos, searching for Morels in Texas and Missouri, and fishing Trout. He also went to Engineering school for work and has been actively building new projects most every weekend. This past weekend he made a Heat Hut-a place for animals to dwell in the shade in the heat of the sun, three gates, and fenced in our greenhouse chicken coop, outdoor kitchen and shower, grapescape, long garden beds and clothesline lounge.

Some of our updated project pictures are shown. We will try to upload them by projects to our Project section on our site including new pictures of the updated Greenhouse and Chicken Coop that Davin finished in April. Some of the projects you see are my Ag Research Project on Agrivoltaic Systems, Heat Hut, Outdoor Garden Fencing, Spring Landscaping Projects in the front yard, Gardening Methods, Beneficial Insects, Rainwater Drip System, and Free Range Waterer.



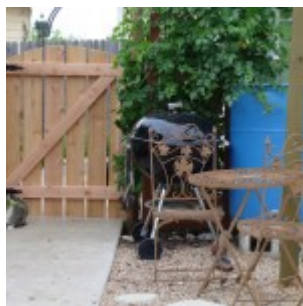
Papilio glaucus-  
Eastern Tiger  
Swallowtail



Herbs in the  
garden designated  
for beneficial  
insects



Davin's May  
Project 2014





Mic fenced in...



Herbs,  
Blueberries, and  
Table Grapes



Back Gate



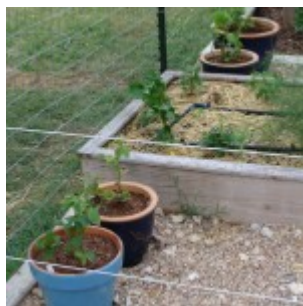
Cover for  
Tomatoes



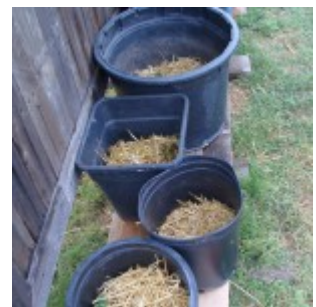
Tomatoes, Onions,  
Garlic, Peppers,  
Carrots,  
Radishes, Beets,



Pergola Garden  
Bed May 2014



Misty, Jubilee,  
Sweetheart,  
Sharpblue  
Blueberries



Container  
Gardening with  
Potatoes



Davin stapling  
the burlap down  
to the frame



Let your free  
range animals  
find shade from  
the sun!



Rafe on the new  
heat hut.



Make your own  
free range  
feeder!



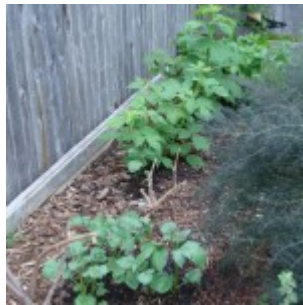
Easy to move free  
range water  
feeder



From the  
underside



Eversweet and  
Tristar  
Strawberries



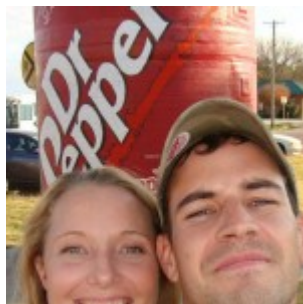
Herb Garden  
experiments



Cedar Hinged Door  
with lock for  
easy access.



Davin created  
this rainbarrel  
to collect rain  
from the  
Greenhouse coop  
which runs into  
the 4 drip  
feeders inside  
the coop.



Dublin, Texas in  
2011



The ladies  
grazing



Prickly Pear  
Cactus, Cana  
Lily, Esperanza,  
Thyme, Marjoram,  
Bulbine



Transplants and  
Turf



Front Garden Bed



Kristin's Spring  
2014 project:  
front lawn



After working  
soil, still  
digging...



Spreading Dirt,  
KK's project



New Front Spring  
Bed Near Curb  
March 2014



New Front Spring  
Corner Bed April  
2014, Kristin's  
Project



Garden Music



Ground I'm  
growing in,  
Kristin's Project  
for Sustainable  
Studies in  
Graduate School  
at Texas State  
University



More dirty  
madness



Sharpening the  
stakes



Measure the poles



Prop up the pole  
before you cut it



Cutting the stake



Bucket of 6 foot  
stakes



Sustainable  
Agriculture  
Project Spring  
2014





Control and  
Testing Site



Test site



Student  
Sustainable Farm  
Side Shade  
Paneling



Handpainted  
repurposed  
materials.