

A Step-By-Step Guide

HOW TO GROW AND SELL PRODUCE IN NYC

Brought to you by
New Markets For New Americans

The story of how a group of New Yorkers came together and transformed a vacant lot into a community garden has been told over and over through the decades.

This zine honors and builds on the long-term tradition of residents solving food inaccessibility in their communities. From seed to farm-stand, we advise urban growers on the best products to grow in the city, to all the steps needed to start a garden, to resources available to support your enterprise.

Community gardens in urban landscapes vary from site to site and are started with different goals in mind. Some gardens are started because New Americans wanted to grow the food from their country of origin that may not be available to them locally. Other gardens are meant to beautify the community and serve as an oasis in

concrete-laden landscapes. Whatever the reason, it provides a tangible solution to a service or a resource that the community lacks. Created by the community, for the community.

Urban growers in NYC sometimes come from families and backgrounds that imbue them with gardening skills they transfer to urban landscapes. West Indian Grannies, down south Grandmas, and Mexican Abuelitas can be seen toiling on raised beds, sharing generations of green thumb techniques, alongside recipes for the items they grow. Gardens are sites of multi-generational learning for all food processes, from seeding to compost.

Black and other POC communities had always returned to the land in times of societal crisis and targeted disinvestment in their communities. The economic downturn of the 1960's and 1970's saw an uptick in community gardens as profit-centered landlords abandoned projects they could no longer fund. During the pandemic in 2020, one in four Black residents experienced food insecurity. In response, more Black folks living in marginalized communities planted



New Roots Bronx Site. Photo credit: New Roots.



Oko Farms. Photo credit: Caroline Tompkins, Vogue.

gardens and converted what were once, abandoned spaces into places of comfort, nourishment, and retreat.

Gardens seed more than food for communities. Victory gardens were encouraged during World War 2 to supplement wartime food shortages. Hattie Carthan (the namesake of one of the best-known community gardens in Bed-Stuy that hosts a farm stand) planted and preserved trees in her native Bedford Stuyvesant community long before the city created an agency that supported greening NYC. What kind of revolution can you seed as you create more food access in your community?



La Finca del Sur

What to grow in NYC

Looking for ideas on what to grow? Here are some crops that grow well in NYC and are popular in immigrant communities of color.

Bitter Melon

Origins

Bitter melon, also known as cerasee, karela, and countless other names is a bitter fruit eaten across Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. It belongs to the same family as squash, melons, and cucumbers.

Uses

The flesh and leaves are edible. To reduce the bitterness, it's helpful to blanch it or salt it before cooking. Bitter melon goes well with the strong flavors found in curries like cumin, chiles, and coconut. Bitter melon can also be dried, pickled, frozen, and stored for long periods of time.



Photo by Karen Christine Hibbard



ENY Farms, photo by Sam Anderson

Bitter Melon Growing Tips

Bitter melon requires a lot of water to thrive, but the bitter components of the plant help to naturally repel pests. Bitter melon grows well in hot and humid environments. It is a vining plant that can grow 20 feet long. Grow it on a trellis to protect the fruit from damage and make it easier to harvest.

Find it at: Red Hood Farms, 560 Columbia St, Brooklyn, NY 11231



Callaloo

Origins

Jamaican callaloo, also known as amaranth, is a plant with origins in South America and is commonly grown for food in the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia.

Uses

The leaves, seeds, and roots of the callaloo plant are edible. Callaloo is also the name of a dish found across the Caribbean. Callaloo was created by enslaved Africans who mixed African and indigenous crops together to create a nutritious plant-based dish. Depending on the region, the dish is made from either callaloo leaves or other local leafy greens.



ENY Farms



Callaloo Growing Tips

Callaloo is a great choice for urban farmers. It takes very little maintenance and grows in soils low in nutrients. Callaloo is known for self-seeding. Once you've grown it once, it'll probably come back in the same place next year. Callaloo is so resilient that you'll often find it growing as a weed. Consider keeping it around for food!

Find it at: East New York Farms, 620 Schenck Ave, Brooklyn, NY 11207



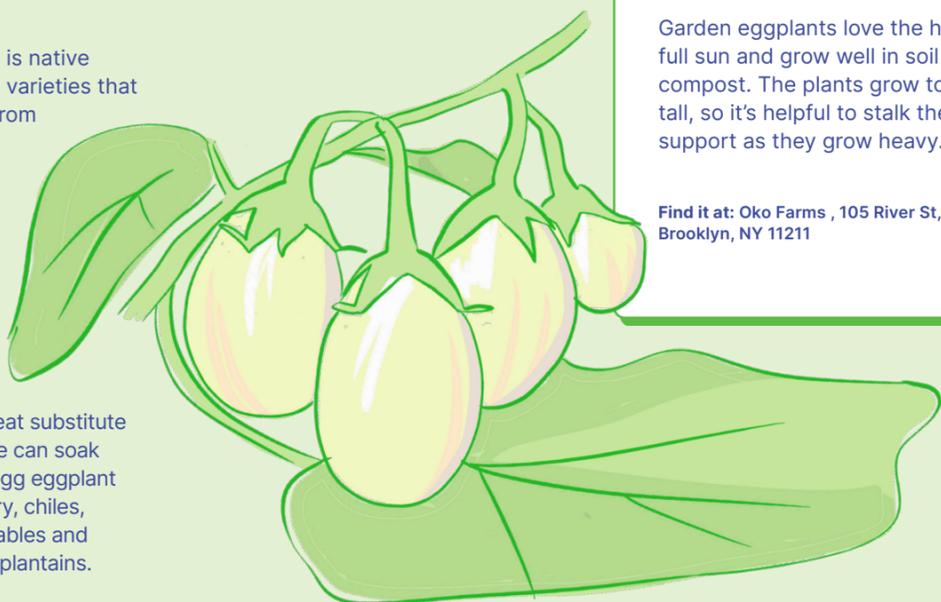
Garden Egg Eggplant

Origins

The garden egg eggplant is native to Africa. There are many varieties that come in different colors from green to yellow to white.

Uses

The fruit of the plant is edible, along with the young leaves. The fruit is eaten raw, boiled, sautéed, or in stews and soups. Garden egg eggplant is often used as a meat substitute because its spongy texture can soak up a lot of flavor. Garden egg eggplant is usually cooked with curry, chiles, or grilled with other vegetables and served with rice, yams, or plantains.



Garden Egg Eggplant Growing Tips

Garden eggplants love the heat! They need full sun and grow well in soil with a lot of compost. The plants grow to be up to 5 feet tall, so it's helpful to stake them for extra support as they grow heavy.

Find it at: Oko Farms, 105 River St, Brooklyn, NY 11211



Oko Farms, photo by Sam Anderson



Getting set up

1

Find your growing space

It is much easier to join an existing community garden than to create a new one.

Find your nearest community garden on the GreenThumb website.
Online: on.nyc.gov/3mFI08r



Remember that everyone in these spaces is a volunteer. Be patient with people, and respect their time!

2

Work with your community

If you're growing in a communal space, you have to respect and work with your local community. Take time to connect and ask questions like:

- What do people usually grow in this garden?
- What have the other gardeners here been working on recently?
- Are there any community meetings I should come to?
- Is there anything I should be extra careful about here?



NYC's different growing spaces



Community Gardens
Community gardens are often organized through GreenThumbNYC, on land owned by the Parks Dept. Gardeners will have a usage agreement that renews every four years. NYC gardens often grow in raised beds.



Backyards
For New Yorkers with outdoor space, planters, window-boxes, and plant pots can be enough to get a small crop. Be careful about planting straight into the soil—many areas of NYC have contaminated soils.



Indoor growing
A small plant pot in a sunny place can be enough to get started! Try growing herbs, hot peppers, and microgreens. You can also easily sprout grains and beans indoors. If you have more space, grow lights can help sun-loving plants.

Growing

3

Get materials for growing

Growing good food requires good soil, seeds, planters, and more.

Partnerships for Parks and Citizens Committee for NYC are non-profit organizations that can help draft proposals for grants.
Online: www.citizensnyc.org/



Note that to access grants, your community garden might need to register with GreenThumb.

You can buy edible seeds and plants using SNAP benefits!



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Improve your growing skills

You will need to continuously improve your technical skills and understanding of your growing conditions. Think about what you can learn on your own and from others in your community.

GreenThumb has hosted an annual Grow Together conference for community farmers every spring since 1984!
Online: on.nyc.gov/3tw8rrg



Compost is the soul of any garden! Learn more about composting from makecompost.nyc
Online: www.makecompost.nyc/



The GreenThumb Gardeners' answers frequently asked questions about the policies that govern community gardens.
Online: on.nyc.gov/3HJ5e49



Cornell Cooperative Extension offers training programs and resources for growing food in NYC.
Online: bit.ly/3HlepRQ



Tips for success!

Learn from your community. More experienced growers can give you advice on local conditions or specific plants.

Take careful notes on how well your plants are growing. How much soil, sun, and water do they like? What date did you plant and harvest?

Your first attempts are likely to fail! Don't give up—it will take time to grow delicious food.



Getting ready to sell

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Choose how you are going to sell

There are different ways to sell produce from your garden. Depending on what you decided to do, you may need different permissions.

The GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook covers all of the policies about selling produce from community gardens.
Online: on.nyc.gov/3HJ5e49



You can't generate personal income from selling food grown on land owned by the Parks Dept. All money has to be reinvested into the garden.

Farmstand in your community garden

This is the easiest way to sell your produce! No permits or permissions are needed.

Farmstand on the sidewalk

Selling produce on the street requires several licenses: a Mobile Food Vending License, a Green Cart Permit, and a food safety certification.

Learn more about the Green Cart Permit system on the NYC Business website or by calling 311.
Online: on.nyc.gov/3xKwQvX



Get a table at a local farmers market

Find a list of NYC Greenmarkets on the GrowNYC website.
Online: bit.ly/3zszwB



Your garden could also host a farmers market for other producers. Learn more about starting a market from nycgovparks.com.
Online: on.nyc.gov/3NMNpgp



Talk to the people operating the market to learn if you need additional permits!

Sell produce to local chefs and restaurants

Find local chefs who are interested and can be flexible enough to cook with what your garden produces.

Create a small CSA

Organizing a small Community-Supported Agriculture program could be a good way to engage people and guarantee sales of produce.

Learn more about starting a CSA from the Farm Bureau Financial Services.
Online: bit.ly/3Hp22nO



Sell produce at a local store, like a bodega

The easiest way for a local store to sell your produce is to buy it from you wholesale and resell it to their customers.

If you are NOT using a community garden, you can also sell directly via a local store, with the store owner taking a cut of each sale.

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Use your produce to make food products

You can use your produce to make jams, salsas, pickles, teas, herbal soaps, and more. However, making these products often requires having other licenses and permits.

See the GreenThumb Handbook for an overview of what licenses you need.
Online: on.nyc.gov/3HJ5e49



Learn more about the licensing for making food products from the other booklets in this series.

Legal tips!

If you want to say that your produce is organic, your growing space has to be certified. This process is expensive, and usually not worth it for community gardens and at-home growers. There are other words you can use instead, like 'sustainably grown', that do not require certification.

Avoid making any claims about the health benefits of your produce! This is closely regulated by the Federal Government.

Selling

7

Prepare your food for selling

Your produce might need cleaning or trimming before you sell it. This might require crates, cleaning equipment, and storage space.

Be careful NOT to do anything that counts as "processing" unless you are a licensed food processor and using a commercial kitchen. Slicing, freezing, canning and dehydrating etc. all require a license! See the booklet on making value-added food products.



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Set up your selling space

Think about the how you will transport and display your produce. You might need to purchase shelves and a table. You might also want to make labels to clearly show what your produce is.



Improving your soil over time

Good soil means good food, so caring for your soil is the most important part of growing produce. Maintaining healthy soil takes time and dedication. Respect and improve your soil year after year by following these tips.

Compost is your best friend. Start a compost heap, and add the compost to your soil at least once a year.

Change which plants you grow in which places each year to prevent pests and avoid diseases. Some plants, like beans, can also help fix more nitrogen into the soil.

Plant cover crops like grass in the early Fall after harvesting, and dig them into the soil in early spring. This protects and feeds the soil.

Don't water excessively, because this can leach nutrients out of your soil and take all the air out of your soil.

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is one of a series of three on how New Americans can start earning money from growing, making, and selling food.



Want more support?

311

24/7 access to all of New York City's government services and information.

Text: 311-692
Call: 311 or 212-NEW-YORK (212-639-9675)
Online: portal.311.nyc.gov/

NYC Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture

Summary of the key New York City programs and regulations for growing and selling produce.

Online: www1.nyc.gov/site/agriculture/index.page

NYC Parks Dept. GreenThumb

GreenThumb provides programming and material support to over 550 community gardens in New York City.

Online: greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/

GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook

The GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook covers all of the policies about selling produce from community gardens.

Online: greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/pdf/gardeners_handbook.pdf

This booklet was created by the New Markets for New Americans working group for the Urban Design Forum's Forefront Fellowship.

The goal of the working group is to demystify the process of starting a food business and lower the barrier to entry.

If you have feedback on this guide, please email us at NewMarketsForNewAmericans@gmail.com