

## URBAN FARM INSPIRES NEIGHBORS AND VISITORS

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I have a good friend whom I call Margaret the Condo Gardner. Her garden is quite the contrast from mine, but she will tell you that it is every bit as gratifying.

Most everyone I know who enjoys gardening shares this same sentiment: Growing your own food really grows on you! From condo-size to farm and everything in between, the rewards are much the same. And it really is so simple to do.

I started gardening with my family at the age of 13. Today, 34 years later, many people know me as Farmer Greg because I have transformed my home into the Urban Farm.

I live in north-central Phoenix, on a street with 24 other 1940s-built homes, and I've landscaped my one-third-acre lot entirely in edible plants. These include 60 fruit trees and a wide variety of integrated herbs, vegetables and edible flowers. In addition to my goal of fresh food, the Urban Farm also is designed to inspire visitors to look anew at where their food comes from and consider growing some of their own.

During the past few years, I have opened the Urban Farm to visitors so that they can explore and ultimately learn how to create their own urban edible delights.

Margaret visited about three years ago, attended some of our classes and tours, and then volunteered to plant and nurture the gardens at the Urban Farm in an effort to learn more. She began dreaming about how she could create her own garden and started walking her neighborhood to look for a suitable venue.

She made an interesting discovery: The alleys and streets in parts of Phoenix are lined with edible treasures such as figs, citrus and other fruit. As a way to meet her neighbors and possibly discover a garden plot for herself, she began asking permission to pick the fruit. Then, one day, she stumbled across Meg's place, a backyard with a densely overgrown garden plot that faces south. She had never met Meg and with some trepidation knocked and found a young woman who was more than happy to share her garden space.

Meg offered her gardening tools and tips on how to easily and inexpensively enrich the soil using steer manure, bone meal and mulch. For Margaret, this was a dream come true, a place to reconnect with the Earth and grow some heavenly greens, herbs, and flowers that are more abundant than she would have imagined. And by sharing her leftover garden goodies she is carrying forward the tradition of sharing the surplus and inspiring others to do the same.

Aside from the most fulfilling benefit of growing your own food, gardening offers an expanded relationship with the world around us. By growing and eating what is in season, you also get a fresh and more nutritious meal.

On a deeper level, the act of cultivating plants throughout the year enhances our connection with nature's cycles; where rainwater goes and how we can save and use it; and how seeds develop into heads of broccoli,

lettuce, tomatoes, sweet peas and edible flowers.

Whatever size your patch, plot, yard or farm, gardening provides a simple and satisfying way of renewing our connection with fresh food as well as creating a special sense of community.

Recently, Margaret summed it all up when she said, "I am no longer a consumer and an observer. I am a gardener!"

***Greg Peterson owns the Urban Farm ([www.urbanfarm.org](http://www.urbanfarm.org)), a sustainability showcase home on one-third of an acre in central Phoenix, and is the host of the television series "Smart Spaces: Inside & Out." For information on living a green lifestyle, or to weigh in on his Billion Bag, Bottle, & Bulb Challenge, visit his Web site at [www.YourGuideToGreen.com](http://www.YourGuideToGreen.com).***