

Miramar's Micro-Urban Farm Yields More than Bountiful Harvests

While many cities have embraced the "Green Movement" and implemented community gardens, Miramar is pioneering something a little unique in the South Florida region, an initiative that expands on the community garden concept – a micro-urban farm.

The 3,100-square-foot Miramar Community Garden is a project championed by Miramar Mayor Lori C. Moseley. "Unlike your typical community garden, it is a micro-urban farm where people can learn about the sources of fresh produce, receive vocational training in sustainable agriculture and learn about the importance of environmental stewardship," explains Moseley, a member of The U.S. Conference of Mayors Advisory Board.



Miramar Mayor Lori C. Moseley

Decentralized Urban Farming

While community gardens generally provide qualified applicants with a fixed number of plots to harvest individually, the Miramar micro-urban farm provides a communal area where individuals can work together, learn from experts and from each other, and experience how small areas can become engines that drive productive growth.

"Urban farming is an environmentally and economically sustainable system that creates a network of secure healthy food sources of naturally grown vegetables and fruits, while providing a continuing source of local living wage jobs and training in the agricultural industry," says architect Michael Madfis, who designed the garden and is a leading proponent of decentralized urban farming. He also hopes to secure a skilled

farmer who is assisted by volunteers and earns a living from wages generated by 75 percent of the harvest profits; the volunteers would receive a share of the remaining 25 percent.

A Green Garden and its Eco-Friendly Components

The vision for the garden was transformed from a simple raised-bed garden into an efficient farming system. The city provided the land, basic materials and guidance. The project is supported by resident-volunteers. "You have to work the garden to reap its bounty – its sweat-equity," explains Moseley.

Some of the garden components are:

- Raised Planter Bags ("Jack Bags")



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- are made of an innovative fabric that helps aerate the roots, promotes flower and fruit proliferation, increases resistance to diseases and accelerates plant growth.
- Fencing has been repurposed from a building scheduled for demolition.
- Rain Barrels are twelve 96-gallon recycling containers retrofitted and interconnected to capture rain from an adjacent roof.
- Rainwater is channeled from the barrels to the crops by using Drip Irrigation.
- Composting Barrel is also a 96-gallon recycling container retrofitted to turn 360 degrees, which churns the contents and produces compost tea.
- A Florida Wildflower Garden is planted around the perimeter of the project to attract pollinating insects.

Educational and Vocational Training with a Social Experience

Miramar resident volunteers have been actively involved since the garden's first planting on May 22, 2010, producing the following results:

- The garden blossomed successfully and has afforded the opportunity to become a hands-on laboratory to eager volunteers – even though it was started in May during the worst time to start a garden in Florida.
- The group meets every Thursday at the garden and the meetings have become social events where members outdo each other by incorporating freshly picked crops into specialty dishes. (Volunteer member Scott Lewis has been nicknamed "Mr. Besto-Pesto" for his ability to transform freshly cut garden lemon-basil into something the group considers "the best pesto ever!") Other succulent dishes from the garden have included, mint tea, pickled habaneros, callaloo with codfish, rosemary scones with oregano infused butter, and golden brown breaded okra accompanied with an herb dressing.)
- The micro-urban farm is viewed as an outdoor classroom where educational events are already being held.
- The group is currently collaborating

with DeVry University to create a blueprint for an urban farm and to fund internship opportunities to pair agriculture students with a micro-urban farm as a business enterprise.

Basic Elements of Miramar's Program

The city purposely selected a site for the garden with specific properties, including plenty of direct sunlight, open public access, proximity to a nearby roof for rainwater harvesting and ready access to electricity, water and parking.

The garden was funded 100 percent by corporate sponsors, offering them great marketing value for their contributions and organizations. Among the garden's financial supporters were Whole Foods Market, Florida Power & Light, Memorial Hospital Miramar, Spirit Airlines, Hampton Inn and Suites, All Service Refuse, and Ana G. Mendez University System.

Local restaurants also chose to become founding sponsors, not solely for the marketing benefits but also for the right of first refusal over the harvest to include in their signature dishes. Ongoing financial sustainability for the garden is currently being coordinated by volunteers and these include offering the harvests at local green markets and other sustainable events.

For more information about the Miramar Community Garden, visit the website www.ci.miramar.fl.us/green/garden.



Left to right, Miramar Vice-Mayor Barbara Sharief, Miramar Mayor Lori C. Moseley, Miramar City Manager Robert A. Payton and his daughter Krista, Miramar Assistant City Manager Wazir A. Ishmael, Ph.D., and his son Aaron.



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