

Americas Best Farm

In the early months of 2014, with a small surplus of cash earned through the fundraising efforts of BestBuds, Americas Best Farm was born 25 February 2014. And with it came 5+years of knowledge and planning on how to—with diet—reduce the spread of free radicals in the body and eliminate stress. These were not, however, the focus of the energy and goals of Americas Best Farm; but did play a role, especially in the design and implementation phases.

Through BestBuds, a membership was acquired to the National Recreation and Parks Association in order to learn more about how to build and create a park for the above mentioned purposes. Research was conducted in to the Department of Interior procedures for procuring land and approving new parks. Local public officials were consulted on “Best Use” practices for current land use and community development. From there an assertion was made;

Urban Farming IS Social Welfare and Community Development.

The goals and focus of Americas Best Farm are based on how-to FIX the current predicament that America faces with respect to its youth and to the explosive growth of an elder populous. In addition, was the idea that during disaster recovery the oldest and youngest were most susceptible and we would increase the resilience of a community through a central urban location for these two audiences.

The city and county land banks have their own GIS mapping services that show vacant properties, as well as, future demolition sites. This was the primary method for determining land availability and approximations to key locations (i.e. churches, schools,

eldercare facilities etc.) In order to provide maximum benefit to the community certain conditions must be met.

1. First,

At least two streets must be joined together by the formation of this Urban Farm Park.

2. Second,

At least ½ of the residents from proposed streets must be 55+, or disabled living in their own home.

3. Third,

All those residents willing are invited to register and participate in bi-annual clean-ups, as well as pre- and post-harvest celebrations. Free food provided to seniors and kids under 10. *

We use Urban Farming to promote togetherness and gather the oldest and youngest in the community around a locally grown organic food source. Through carbon sequestration techniques (otherwise known as permaculture) and agro-forestry we are able to produce a lush, agriculturally diverse environment that will thrive with minimal input.

Originally inclined to provide a Free Gardens for Seniors program; there was much more benefit from having the presence of children than words can describe. The commensalism of the outliers of our population should not surprise anyone; but the systematic and effortless way in which they meander through what seems a daunting task should.

After canvassing the community door-to-door around the proposed site with seed catalogs to determine prospective species to be planted; many neighbors exhibited a

lack of interest and reluctance until children were present. Although our intention was to have separate events for kids and another for seniors, that proved counterproductive and non-conducive to the environment. So, the elders select the plants and the kids can plant the seeds.

All of the work in planning culminates when the ground is broken; because what has begun is half done. Having said that, please remember; Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance. The execution of construction in year one must be complete in 1-3 days. Essentially, that means that the soil must be covered within that time.

Permaculture practices and key-line design are used to achieve a self-propagating environment that requires no additional water, or fertilizer. Wind, water, and erosion happen naturally and foster fertility in a properly functioning environment existing in nature. We seek to utilize these “natural” processes by cultivating crops on mounds. This traditional form allows for maximum yield with minimal effort and was used by Native-Americans and others for thousands of years. Here, the tallest grow on the top of the mound and the smallest at the base. By using this method it is possible to obtain a yield from five or more plants in one area. Companion planting, as it is know, produces a variety of benefits to the ecosystem and the soil structure as well.

All of the real work happens under the ground though; during the planning process careful review of the watershed must be carried out for this reason. Water remaining stagnant, or frozen for a winter season, will decimate an entire microcosm of beneficial substructures which occur on a non-ending basis (especially in winter months). Lots selected should be dug and excavated to a depth of six feet before adding amendments. Amendments should be added in one foot depths, in subsequent layers and are as follows:

Beginning from the lowest depth add aggregate and, or stone larger than 1.75” anywhere water will pool. A large bed of ash is applied on top of the stone and can be achieved through a controlled burn of woodchip (note: only hardwood low in tannins). Next, select wood logs and rounds of appropriate hardwood such as Oak, Apple and Maple to be added over the bed of Ash (Bigger the better). These can often be obtained through a local tree service, or your local arborist. Follow that with a compost layer of plant-based food waste. There are many ways to achieve this; but make sure it is all plant based. The remaining layers are, in this order, worm castings, dehydrated cow manure, and peat moss. From there we cover with woodchip and leave undisturbed for a minimum of three days. Some seeds requiring tropical temperatures to germinate may be planted before covering with woodchips, all others must wait. That’s IT! Now you have a no-till organic bed ready for whatever this season may hold.

Strict rules for a fertile future dictates that all of the first years fruits must not be eaten; but return to the ground with its seed. Year two will be the first edible year with seed being returned only. Year three will begin the seed saving and community sharing.

All of the material put into the ground will provide plants with their nutrients in gaseous form by way of the chemical process of decomposition. These gasses are subterraneous and produced continually, providing a steady fertilized that is readily absorbed by plants and not wasted, or lost to runoff. Also, a layer of fungus called mycelium form in year two and provide plants with an interconnected web akin to our internet. All of this contributes to the overall structure and makes it easier to manage for kids and older adults.

After year two, just about anything planted will grow—It may not thrive, if in too close of approximation to other established plants—and plants can be added at any season. The work of bending down and pulling weeds is all but eliminated. The benefit of

planting on mounds allows fruits and vegetables to be harvested based on position relative to the mound and forces of gravity. Except for a few things meant for the kids (i.e. strawberries/ground cherries). All others are systematically chosen and worked into the design to produce the ease of use of a supermarket, combined with the feelings associated with the forest. This means that Cucumbers come from the sky and they also produce shade from the hot sun. Oh yeah, they do!

Furthermore, the design of each Urban Farm Park is individual. In that its design is determined by the residents and based off of their dietary needs, seed selection and other factors (i.e. sun exposure and prevailing winds). The collaboration and community develop happen as a result of this PLACE. Therefore, it is community development. It is focused on regaining and reestablishing social structures devoid throughout all our welfare systems and that is what makes it social welfare. A basic need provided for the common good, meant to uphold and strengthen core American values, and asserted through a coalition of the meekest of our population.

That is what makes it Americas Best. It is not that this is a park and Americas Parks were its best idea; although they were. It is certainly not the best farm. It is, the Best and brightest that America has to offer working in a concerted effort to regain the sense of purpose desired by all. The oldest of this generation instilling in America's youth the values of tomorrow and enriching their lives in the process. Being even more enriched, both find purpose and meaning at a time in life which is uncertain for either. In this respect we see and treasure what has been missing in this generation, as well as, carry-on and renew a legacy of Native-American culture.

Americas Best Farm desires to establish a system of Urban Farm Parks throughout the country. The goals will remain the same, as the structures change, so will the understanding and true purposes. It will begin in Cleveland, Ohio and commence henceforth from the parcel prefix 215 in the county of Cuyahoga to all others adopting and agreeing to be bound by these terms.

The Terms of the agreement shall be in the following categories:

- Land Selection
- Demographics
- Seed Diversity
- Sun, Wind and Water
- Yearly Tasks
- Future Use Materials
- Bridging the Gap
- Local Ordinances

Land Selection

The land must be obtained from repurposed lots of demolished homes within the past 10 years (effective January 2015). Commercial real estate and blighted land does not conform to the purposes of this organization. Urban farm parks should create a mutually beneficial community which promotes home ownership and inclusion into a vibrant subculture. Land that is selected should/must be such, that two parcels from separate streets create a corridor through which an entrance and exit may designed; and the overall flow of traffic may be considered. To that degree, the flow of water naturally occurs in varying degrees throughout the season; and this will be illuminated upon more in the coming sections. Careful care must be taken to ascertain the fertility of the soil structure. No attempts should be made to plant anything on soil that is contaminated from a variety of substances that may, or may not be detectable from soil tests and sampling. Planting crops like bamboo may help to determine if the soil structure can accommodate life. In order to be classified a farm, one must meet certain land requirements. These vary by state and county; but as a general rule a functional urban farm park will comprise a combination of 6 to 8 parcels, or more.

Demographics

Careful scrutiny of residents is taken by volunteers through door-to-door interactions on the proposed streets. At least half of the residents must be 55, or over, and/or living in their own homes. The location should/must be within one mile from at least two community facilities (i.e. school, eldercare, church, daycare, or playground). Residents should meet local eligibility requirements for low-income and/or TANF. Cultural diversity is not a requirement; but it does add to the overarching look and feel of mutual inclusion within the community.

Seed Selection

Based off of input received from resident interactions, seeds are selected. In addition to those chosen by residents, some plants are selected based off of dietary needs and others on the benefit they provide to the space as a whole. Certain plants thrive when planted together, and some do not play well. Altogether we would like to select only plants chosen by the community; but there are many that must accompany them. Selections of sedum for ground cover, flowers for pollinators, and seed bearing plants all come first. These are planted to accommodate the land and all the myriad of creatures needed. The song goes like this..."The birds and the bees bring the flowers and the Trees." In order to teach the birds and the bees to kids "someday", it is a good idea to model the appropriate social apparatuses first. We plant for birds and bees for the first year, or two; because they determine the fruitfulness of each successive harvest and we need their help.

Sun, Wind and Water

As the sun begins to rise in the morning, and in the evening when it sets, measure carefully to capture the radiance and glory of these two events. It is important that they be thoroughly enjoyed by all those within. Just as certain protections and screenings should be taken to alleviate plants from 12 o'clock sun exposure. Mounds should be orientated and positioned to take advantage of prevailing winds for seed propagation; but orientation should never expose a hillside to all day sun. For this reason, best practice dictates east to west earthen mounds of varying sizes perpendicular to the direction of prevailing winds. It is best to erect mounds to battle both, the north wind/or northeast and southwesterly winds respectively. These come in season and are followed by measurable amounts of water. Capture all of it if able and at all costs. Water is vital, and can be captured, stored, and reused in the proper system. Be ready to accommodate the seasonal flood and winds and direct them to their work. YOUR FARM!

Yearly Tasks

The sun, wind, water, birds and bees and many others have tasks and so should you. Gather the children and all the residents to clean twice a year following the rain in the spring and before the snow in the fall. During both times add manure and cover the roots of crops with what leaves are around. Do not water! Do not pull anything!

IF IN YEAR ONE JUST WAIT TILL YEAR TWO AND DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING.

IN YEAR TWO TASTE IT BUT DON'T SAVE IT.

IN YEAR THREE TASTE IT AND SAVE THE SEEDS.

IN YEAR FOUR TASTE AND SHARE, SAVE THE SEEDS.

IN YEAR FIVE DIVERSIFY THE CROPS, TASTE IT, SHARE, AND SAVE THE SEEDS.

IN YEAR SIX STORE AND PRESERVE, TASTE IT, SHARE WITH OTHERS, AND SAVE THE SEED.

IN YEAR SEVEN AND THEREAFTER

- SHARE THE AUNDANCE
- STORE FOR LATER
- TASTE AND EAT
- SAVE SEEDS AND SWAP

Future materials

The materials described here are needed on a recurring basis and should be procured in advance, or stored on-site where available. Dehydrated cow manure is a building block in the carbon sequestration process. Woodchips that do not contain cypress, eucalyptus, pine, cedar, or any other wood high in tannins. Hardwood ash in the quantities needed is virtually impossible to acquire by any means and even more hassle some to transport. The proper aggregate is the base of your future and should be viewed as such. Worm castings should be from an organic source and be made available in large quantities. Peat moss and compost vary considerably in commercial and retail stores. Consider never using either and procuring only the finest quality for this application. Never purchase compost from a human waste facility. In general save all scraps from anything grown and return it to the soil. Keep leaves for cover in the winter and waste nothing.

Bridging the Gap

Since the last great depression many things have changed; but one thing remains the same, all it takes to plant something is a seed and some dirt. This system of permaculture and agro-forestry is not like traditional means of farming and should be adopted by young and old alike to promote synthesis. We now have an internet for fact checking, community support and collaboration. This can become a tool also for preventative and proactive measures needed to assure the health and wellbeing of all those involved. There are a host of applications that can be developed to assure the overall use and effectiveness of this endeavor. While many older adults are reluctant to join the mainstream culture, most kids find it almost effortless to provide a conduit of information flowing freely out of the palm of their hands.

Local Ordinances

After adopting these procedures voters are encouraged to utilize the democratic system to promote adoption of these measures on a greater scale. Historic and preservation societies may be able to provide financial and other considerations through DOI grants. The Department of Agriculture also fosters programs for feeding both children during summer months, as well as catering to elderly and disabled citizens. Many localities are not structured for the establishment of newly declared public land. They need the people to express an interest and often help show them the way.