



Urban Harvest

Seasoned Gardeners Share Wealth of Knowledge

By Ray Sher, Homes Correspondent

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I recently taught an Urban Harvest class titled Spring and Summer Vegetable Gardening. I taught this class twice this spring, and the room was full of people eager to learn more about vegetable gardening.

A trend I have noticed the last few years is there are more young people taking these classes, and they seem to know more and ask thoughtful questions. Their enthusiasm is contagious. I come away with an appreciation that new generations of gardeners are emerging, those who will someday, perhaps quite soon, be teaching in the place of all us.

Usually on my drive home from the classes I think about how the practical skills will be transferred. Yes, skill can be learned by trial and error, which mostly is how I initially learned. But I did have a mentor, a next door neighbor who was an organic gardener. And later I had other mentors to work with in a permaculture garden called "Stone's Throw."

All new gardeners would benefit from gardening with others who have learned from others, and who know enough to avoid major mistakes in favor of successful techniques. One way to get this experience is from a gardening neighbor or joining a community garden that has excellent gardeners who are willing to mentor. The [Westbury Community Garden](#), which has more than 60 garden beds, recently decided to team each new gardener with a mentor. There are many things experienced gardeners think are intuitive - which are not - and which need to be shared with new gardeners. It is a way to lead that new gardener's enthusiasm to success in the way of abundant harvests.

For instance, it is better in Houston to start with a raised garden bed filled with high-quality garden soil, because clay soil, unless amended to make it better, has a more difficult time growing healthy plants. And planting vegetable seed at the right time is critical for germination and healthy plants, as different vegetables grow in their own temperature range.

Some vegetables require more fertilizer than others, such as corn requires much more fertilizer than snap beans. And some plants, such as tomatoes, benefit from phosphorous on their roots for better production. Some vegetables get diseases quickly if their leaves are

watered, rather than watering the soil. There are so many things to share it is hard to remember them all, until the occasion arises in the garden.

If you want to learn from experienced gardeners check out the Urban Harvest website for community gardens near where you live, and see if they want volunteers, or if they have beds available for gardening.

This column is sponsored by Urban Harvest. To find out more about community gardens, school gardens, farmers markets and gardening classes, visit www.urbanharvest.org.