

back to school

I recently wandered to the north side of the city to my alma mater, Loyola University Chicago, for an alumni event and naturally had to spend some time wandering around campus.

It really does look so different! There's a new gym, a new student union and even a new quad area, but what caught my eye the most was a new greenhouse.

The Ecodome, as they call it, is 3,100 square feet of growing space that utilizes aquaponics systems and vertical farming elements.

This isn't the only food production area on campus either. Loyola has three green roofs, the most of any campus in the U.S., that feature dozens of raised beds growing cut greens as well as flowers. Also, in 2014, they added beehives to the gardens.

According to the school's Urban Agriculture program, the food produced is not just to be eaten on campus but is also distributed to the Loyola Farmers Market, area restaurants and local food pantries.

As a former student, I can say that the campus' focus on the environment is nothing new, but the steps they've taken in recent years impress me.

I distinctly remember years ago eating at the Loyola University Retreat & Ecology Campus, about 50 miles from the city of Chicago. Located on 100 acres, the campus now has a large farm for sustainable food operation, a plant sale, a farm stand and gardening classes.

When I was there, someone made a comment about how delicious the vegetables tasted, and Chef John, whom everyone adored, replied, "Well of course, I just harvested them this morning."

all about food

More and more people are coming to realize just how rewarding it can be to grow some of their own veggies or herbs. And what better place for them to turn to than your garden center?

This issue has a cornucopia of articles related to edible gardening.

Start on page 12 to read some of the hard facts about who is growing edibles and to discover how some garden centers are drawing extra attention to the category with display gardens and community involvement.

As I write this, it's almost outdoor farmers market season in Chicago, and I seriously can't wait. On page 16, you'll get a close look at how two very different retailers have embraced farmers markets and made them a successful component of their businesses.

Flip to page 32 for an article on food crop treatment and how minimum risk pesticides might help you get the most money for your crop before it heads out the door.

Then, on page 34, you'll find the story of Chad Corzine, a garden center shopper in a candle-making family business who took his desire to live a healthy lifestyle and create a balcony garden and turned it into a business.

Let's just say that when I walked into my local garden center a couple weeks ago, I saw his product on the shelves with one of its "new arrivals" tags. That one made me smile, and now you'll have to check out what it is.




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