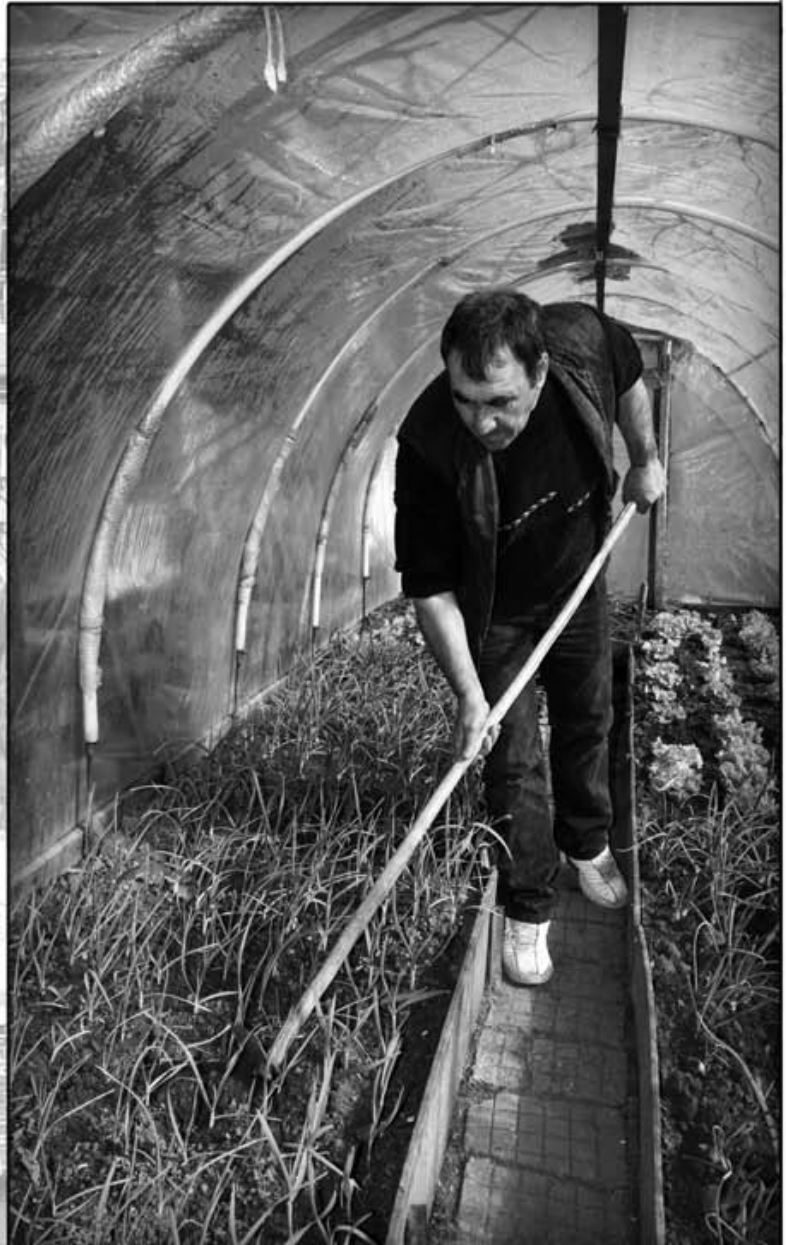


Urban Agriculture

(UA) Is No Longer an Oxymoron



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Think “urban” and you probably envision a sea of buildings made of concrete, steel, and glass; “agriculture” conjures up “amber waves of grain.” Marry the two terms, and you’re no longer talking about cities or farming, but the nexus of the two and much, much more. Urban agriculture is at the center of communities (e.g., community gardens), city planning, and youth/leadership development in cities around the world.

Today, you can’t pick up a newspaper [<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/04/07/EDQA1IS8CB.DTL>] or listen to the radio [<http://thedianerehmsshow.org/shows/2010-10-05/environmental-outlook-vertical-farm/transcript>] without some mention of food costs or food quality and/or security [<http://thekojonnamdishow.org/shows/2011-04-06/global-food-security>]. Walk past any elementary school, and you’ll likely see a garden designed to teach children where their food originates — in the ground, not on supermarket shelves. Michelle Obama’s victory garden may have garnered more press than any single Rose Garden event [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2011/03/16/first-lady-michelle-obama-hosts-white-house-garden-spring-planting>].

The rise in the cost of food has generated renewed interest in urban agriculture by communities; proponents of healthier eating have reinvigorated the market for organic food; and



increased costs of energy and, therefore, transportation, have made locally grown food sourcing more cost-effective as well as fresher. Practitioners, local governments, and advocacy groups are seeking resources that will help them understand how to produce more food locally and the effects of growing that food on the community and the environment. And if all the sustainability issues were not enough, urban agriculture policies are intertwined with planning for livable cities with greening for beautification.

What Is Urban Agriculture?

According to the MetroAg Alliance for Urban Agriculture, a group of dedicated organizations, projects, and individuals involved with urban agriculture in North America, UA “is the growing, processing, and distributing of food and other products through intensive plant cultivation and animal husbandry in and around cities.” In case you thought that this was just a sideshow to “real” farming, the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture and National Resource Inventory, a survey of the nation’s non-federal lands conducted by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in cooperation with Iowa State University, indicates that 91% of fruit, nuts, and berries, and 78% of fruit and melons are grown “on the urban fringe,” that is, around cities.¹ Typically, urban agriculture includes backyard, indoor (e.g., hydroponics), and roof gardens (apartment dwellers with balconies are referred to as vertical gardeners). If you are lucky enough to have a backyard, you can have a garden and grow fresh produce and share it with your neighbors and friends. Should you choose not to use that plot of land, you could enter the new “sharing economy” by allowing others to farm the space [<http://www.sharingbackyards.com/>].

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Table. Resources for Urban Agriculture

Resource	Description
News	
AgriFeeds [http://www.agrifeeds.org]	Agricultural news and events aggregator
Alltop Top Agriculture News [http://agriculture.alltop.com]	Pulling agriculture news from ScienceDaily, Medical News Today, USDA Agricultural Research Service, USDA Economic Research Service, AWIC, Global Voices Online, Purdue Agriculture News, Illinois IGNN, Zibb.com, BIG News Network, ANR News Blog Feed, Mongabay.com, Ranch Partners News, Farm Policy, Ohio State University Extension News Releases, EurekaAlert, AgWired, Food & Farming Canada, Agriculture Guide, AgCo Blog, Beef Matters, Texas Agriculture Talks, Soybean Review, Big Picture Agriculture, and RealAgriculture.com, among others
City Farmer [http://www.cityfarmer.info]	For the past 33 years, City Farmer has encouraged urban dwellers to pull up a patch of lawn and plant some vegetables, kitchen herbs, and fruit. The website is a collection of stories about urban farmers from around the world. Available as an RSS feed.
International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists [http://www.iaald.org]	News blog and RSS feed of the Association often features stories concerning urban agriculture. There is also an AgInfo blog [http://iaald.blogspot.com], discussion list, and journal (<i>Agricultural Information Worldwide</i>). The website features training resources for agricultural information management.
The New York Times [http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/a/agriculture/urban_agriculture/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=%22urban%20agriculture%22&st=cse]	<i>The New York Times</i> has a Times Topics recap of all stories it has run concerning urban agriculture since 1980.
Urban Agriculture News [http://www.urbanagriculture-news.com]	Provides a review of daily news pertinent to the community of practitioners and developers that are planning and practicing alternative farming in cities. Every day Urban Agriculture News reviews articles from throughout the world, selecting those that are relevant to UA. References to these articles are published daily on the website. A subset are packaged as a newsletter and delivered monthly by email. The intention of the newsletter is to promote an economically viable, environmentally sound, and culturally acceptable integration of farming with the urban environment.
Organizations	
American Community Gardening Association [http://www.communitygarden.org]	Founded in 1979 in order to help gardening programs share their limited resources and thereby benefit from each other's experience and expertise, this binational (Canada and the U.S.) nonprofit membership organization of professionals, volunteers, and supporters of community greening in urban and rural communities supports community gardening by facilitating the formation and expansion of state and regional community gardening networks; developing resources in support of community gardening; and encouraging research and conducting educational programs. The association recognizes that community gardening improves people's quality of life by providing a catalyst for neighborhood and community development, stimulating social interaction, encouraging self-reliance, beautifying neighborhoods, producing nutritious food, reducing family food budgets, conserving resources, and creating opportunities for recreation, exercise, therapy, and education. Sign up for its newsletter or join the listserv at http://communitygarden.org/connect .

Table. Resources for Urban Agriculture

Resource	Description
Organizations (continued)	
American Farmland Trust [http://www.farmland.org]	Founded in 1980, American Farmland Trust is the nation's leading conservation organization dedicated to saving America's farm and ranch land, promoting environmentally sound farming practices and supporting a sustainable future for farms. As the vital link among farmers, conservationists and policymakers, it's focused on ensuring the availability of the land that provides fresh food, a healthy environment and lasting rural landscapes. The website features a robust section concerning farmers' markets and the studies and reports posted here often deal with urban agriculture, such as "Sustaining Farms on the Urban Edge."
American Horticultural Society [http://www.ahs.org]	One of the oldest national gardening organizations in the country, founded in 1922, this organization is a trusted source of high-quality gardening and horticultural information, blending education, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship with the art and science of horticulture.
American Planning Association [http://www.planning.org]	Features UA at http://www.planning.org/research/urbanagriculture .
BC Food Systems Network [http://www.fooddemocracy.org]	Most helpful here is the Links & Resources page at http://fooddemocracy.org/links.php covering Canada's Food Policy, Indigenous Food Sovereignty, Nutrition & Health, Food Access, and Farming & Gardening websites and documents.
Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association [http://www.biodynamics.com]	The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association (BDA) is an association of individuals and organizations in North America that are committed to the transformation of the whole food system, from farm to table. Biodynamics is a worldwide movement for the renewal of agriculture based on an understanding of the spiritual forces at work in nature and in human social life. From this understanding, a particular form of organic farming has been developed that continues to grow and evolve around the world. The Spring 2011 issue of the association's journal, <i>Biodynamics</i> , is devoted to UA.
CABI [http://www.cabi.org/Default.aspx?site=170&page=999]	CABI is a not-for-profit international organization that improves people's lives by providing information and applying scientific expertise to solve problems in agriculture and the environment. It produces key scientific publications, including CAB Abstracts — the world-leading database covering agriculture and environment. The blog [http://cabiblog.typepad.com/hand_picked] can be received as an RSS feed.
Community Food Security Coalition [http://www.foodsecurity.org]	North American coalition of diverse people and organizations working from the local to international levels to build community food security. Dedicated to building strong, sustainable, local, and regional food systems that ensure access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food to all people at all times. It provides a variety of training and technical assistance programs for community food projects; it supports the development of farm to school and farm to college initiatives; it advocates for federal policies to support community food security initiatives; and it provides networking and educational resources. Join the next conference taking place May 19–21, 2011, at http://www.foodpolicyconference.org .
Culture & Agriculture [http://cultureandagriculture.org]	The Culture & Agriculture (C&A) Section of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) aims to develop the study and understanding of agrarian systems from a holistic, social science perspective, and to link academics and practitioners concerned with agrarian issues, agricultural development, and agricultural systems through dissemination of scientific research, encouragement of effective instruction, and to encourage application of knowledge to public policy. Sponsors workshops, panels, and sessions at the AAA annual meeting, a column in <i>Anthropology News</i> and <i>CAFÉ Journal</i> , a peer-reviewed journal publishing position papers, discussions of theoretical developments and methods of inquiry, and results of empirical research on topics concerning the interrelationship of culture, agriculture, food, and the environment.

Table. Resources for Urban Agriculture

Resource	Description
Organizations (continued)	
Food Secure Canada [http://foodsecurecanada.org]	Works to unite people and organizations working for food security across Canada and globally. The publications section of the website is rich, but it is hidden behind the Learn More tab.
FoodRoutes Network [http://www.foodroutes.org]	Learn all about buying local, sustainable agriculture, grass-fed and organic products, and food safety.
Garden Organic [http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk]	U.K.'s leading organic growing charity has been at the forefront of the organic horticulture movement for 50 years and is dedicated to researching and promoting organic gardening, farming and food. Garden Organic's scientific research aims to develop and improve the techniques used in organic agriculture and to advance the knowledge of organic production systems, focusing on commercial organic horticulture in temperate areas and on sustainable agriculture in developing countries. The site is a rich resource of news, events, and information concerning crop technology; pests, disease and weeds; economics, marketing and policy; soil nutrient dynamics; landscape; and amenity horticulture.
Green Roofs for Healthy Cities [http://www.greenroofs.org]	Increases the awareness of the economic, social, and environmental benefits of green roofs and green walls, and other forms of living architecture through education, advocacy, professional development, and celebrations of excellence.
Growing Power, Inc. [http://www.growingpower.org]	Transforms communities by supporting people from diverse backgrounds and the environments in which they live through the development of Community Food Systems that provide high-quality, safe, healthy, affordable food for all residents in the community. Develops Community Food Centers, as a key component of Community Food Systems, through training, active demonstration, outreach, and technical assistance.
LocalHarvest, Inc. [http://www.localharvest.org]	Community Supported Agriculture: Use this website to find farmers' markets, family farms, and other sources of sustainably grown food in your area, where you can buy produce, grass-fed meats and many other goodies. There is a monthly newsletter, a list of events, and a community discussion forum.
National Gardening Association [http://www.garden.org]	Gardening research and news
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition [http://sustainableagriculture.net]	Alliance of grassroots organizations that advocates for federal policy reform to advance the sustainability of agriculture, food systems, natural resources, and rural communities. Site consists of publications, a newsletter, and a blog.
Networking Association for Farm Direct Marketing and Agritourism [http://www.nafdma.com]	Trade association dedicated to nurturing the farm direct marketing industry. Its actions are driven by those whose daily lives are dedicated to this way of life. Its members support their family farms by selling millions of dollars worth of farm-grown produce directly to consumers at farm stands, farmers' markets, pick-your-own farms, consumer-supported agriculture, agritourism venues, and other ever-growing innovations in direct producer-to-consumer agricultural marketing methods.
Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security Foundation (RUAF) [http://www.ruaf.org]	An international network of seven regional resource centers and one global resource center on Urban Agriculture and Food Security. RUAF provides training, technical support and policy advice to local and national governments, producer organizations, NGOs, and other local stakeholders. Read the <i>Urban Agriculture</i> magazine; view videos and slideshows; review RUAF books, papers, conference proceedings, and policy briefs; participate in distance learning courses [http://moodle.ruaf.org]; or search the databases from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC — Canada), U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO — Italy), African Studies Centre (ASC — The Netherlands), and The Urban Agriculture Network (TUAN).

Table. Resources for Urban Agriculture

Resource	Description
Organizations (continued)	
SmartGrowth [http://www.smartgrowth.org]	Communities around the country are looking for ways to get the most out of new development and to maximize their investments, including mixed land uses. You can filter resources, news, and events by state and date.
Sustainable Table [http://www.sustainabletable.org/home.php]	Sustainable Table celebrates local sustainable food, educates consumers on food-related issues, and works to build community through food
Urban Land Institute [http://www.uli.org]	Founded in 1936, the institute now has members in 95 countries worldwide, representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. ULI initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues, proposing creative solutions based on that research. <i>UrbanLand</i> , the institute's magazine, often features articles concerning urban agriculture—the latest is in the Jan. 18, 2011, issue, "Urban Agriculture: Practices to Improve Cities."
World Hunger Year [http://www.whyhunger.org]	Founded in 1975, WHY is a leader in the fight against hunger and poverty in the U.S. and around the world. Convinced that solutions to hunger and poverty can be found at the grassroots level, WHY advances long-term solutions to hunger and poverty by supporting community-based organizations that empower individuals and build self-reliance, i.e., offering job training, education, and after school programs; increasing access to housing and healthcare; providing microcredit and entrepreneurial opportunities; teaching people to grow their own food; and assisting small farmers. WHY connects these organizations to funders, media, and legislators. Sign up for the monthly enewsletter.
Government-related agencies and research institutes	
AGRIS [http://agris.fao.org]	Search the International Information System for the Agricultural Sciences and Technology
Agriculture Network Information Center [http://www.agnic.org]	Voluntary alliance of members based on the concept of "centers of excellence." Member institutions are dedicated to enhancing collective information and services among the members and their partners for all those seeking agricultural information over the Internet. Collectively, the Alliance harnesses the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 80 information and subject specialists • More than 60 topics covered comprehensively • Full-text and web-based resources • Participation from five countries with collaborative contributions from many more
AgriLinks Knowledge Driven International Development Portal [http://kdid.org/agrilinks]	A new space for agriculture specialists and practitioners to access current information and resources on important agricultural and food security related topics and issues
AgrowKnowledge [http://www.agrowknow.org]	National Resource Center for Agriscience and Technology Education Clearinghouse
Colorado State University Extension Program [http://www.ext.colostate.edu/index.html]	Online publications on a host of agriculture topics, including horticulture, yard and garden, and insects
EGFAR [http://www.egfar.org/egfar/website?contentId=-1&]	Brings together those with the power to shape and determine the future of farming and puts the needs of the poor at the center of agricultural research for development. Acts as a catalyst for change, the mechanism enabling all those concerned with the future of agriculture and its role in development around the world to come together and address key global needs. Particularly strong in ICT and KM, making it one of the "go to" resources for librarians and information specialists for any aspect of agriculture.
Farmland Information Center [http://www.farmlandinfo.org]	Clearinghouse for information about farmland protection and stewardship. It is a partnership between the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and American Farmland Trust. Laws, literature, technical resources, and statistics are available on a national, state, and local level.

Table. Resources for Urban Agriculture

Resource	Description
Government-related agencies and research institutes (continued)	
National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service [http://attra.ncat.org]	Provides information and other technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, extension agents, educators, and others involved in sustainable agriculture in the U.S.. Maintains searchable databases [http://attra.ncat.org/directories.html], a calendar of events [http://attra.ncat.org/calendar], and publications relevant to sustainable agriculture and some of the “systems” approaches associated with it.
Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education [http://www.sare.org]	The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program has helped advance farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound, and good for communities through a nationwide research and education grants program. The diversity in membership of the regional administrative councils reflects SARE’s commitment to serve the whole spectrum of the agricultural community, including farmers and ranchers along with representatives from universities, government, agribusiness and nonprofit organizations. SARE’s national outreach office is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture. It operates under cooperative agreements with the University of Maryland and the University of Vermont to develop and disseminate information about sustainable agriculture. SARE Outreach maintains the website and publishes a variety of print and electronic resources for farmers, agricultural educators, and consumers. It also hosts SANET-MG, a sustainable agriculture listserv with more than 700 subscribers from around the globe.
United Nations Food & Agricultural Organization [http://www.fao.org]	Search the Corporate Document Repository at http://www.fao.org/documents/en/docrep.jsp .
United States Agricultural Information Network [http://usain.org/index.html]	Organization for information professionals that provides a forum for discussion of agricultural issues, takes a leadership role in the formation of a national information policy as related to agriculture, makes recommendations to the National Agricultural Library on agricultural information matters, and promotes cooperation and communication among its members
Networking with others	
Aqua-hyponics [http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/aqua-hydroponics]	Yahoo! group for those interested in mixing fishkeeping and hydroponics
Foodplanning — Urban planning and food systems [http://mailman2.u.washington.edu/mailman/listinfo/foodplanning]	Designed to connect urban planning academics and practitioners who are interested in examining connections between urban planning and policy and the food system
FoodWaterShelter [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FoodWaterShelter]	Yahoo! group that discusses subjects related to sustainable and independent living in urban and suburban areas
Kitchen Gardeners International [http://kitchengardeners.org]	A nonprofit community of 20,000 kitchen gardeners from more than 100 countries who answer each other’s questions through blogs, forums, and social networking; work with partners around the world; organize local, national, and global activities; and sow high-impact projects

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For years, community gardens have been used as an antidote to blight in poor neighborhoods, pulling the community together in a social endeavor that brings fresh produce to an area often without access to reasonably priced goods. The benefits that 4-H clubs extolled in rural areas are transferred to youth groups to educate and develop leaders. For example, Growing Food & Justice for All [<https://www.growingfoodandjustice.org>] is an “initiative aimed at dismantling racism and empowering low-income and communities of color through sustainable and local agriculture.”

The table starting on page 38 suggests starting points for conducting research, whether you are a gardener turned farmer or a youth group leader who wants the local zoning board to grant permission to use that empty lot at the corner as a community garden.

The reason that information professionals need to consider the subject — and why *Searcher* magazine commissioned this article — is that the types of organizations interested in UA, and the resources that need to be consulted, often lie buried within larger entities, ancillary to their primary function. Some of the most helpful sites are crowdsourced, which goes against all that we learn about investigating the authenticity and authority of sources used. You do have to be careful, but often it’s the practical wisdom of those who have battled local ordinances and lobbied city hall that will prove most helpful. ♦

Endnote

1. Lawson, L. (2005). *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.