



[eats + drinks]

SQUIRTS TILL THE DIRTS

School gardens flourish through CitySprouts

FOODSCAPE BY CHRISTINE LIU

On a drizzly day dotted with ruby-hued fallen leaves and a calming dampness, I join Jane Hirschi, founder and executive director of CitySprouts, on a visit to the joint garden shared between Amigos and Martin Luther King Jr. schools. In this cafeteria-adjacent courtyard, which was sheer cement merely three years ago, the beds bloom heartily—herbs, cabbages, apple trees, strawberries—under the guidance of garden coordinator Francey Hart and the hands of countless students, teachers, parents and community members.

Established in 2000, CitySprouts aims to integrate school gardens district-wide in Cambridge's public K-8 schools, incorporating the resource into the existing teachers' curriculum. Thanks to CitySprouts, already 10 of the 13 schools have established these outdoor classrooms, where "food education becomes part of everyday education," as Hirschi puts it.

"Two third-grade classes will bury fish parts for the Three Sisters Garden of beans, corn and squash; it fertilizes the soil before you plant the seeds," explains Hart. "We cook a lot in the garden, too. You have kids begging for thirds of collard greens." Everything is tended organically, and a composting system anchors the mini ecosystem.

Given the fundamental lesson it teaches among the particulars, pleasures and policies of food, it so fits that CitySprouts is this year's beneficiary of Flavors of Fall, an annual, Cantabridgian chef-helmed benefit thrown for five years running at the Charles Hotel. Honor Lydon, general manager and executive editor of Boston Chefs (the sponsoring host), describes how each year's event successfully raises funds for various Cambridge nonprofits, and "last year it was just over \$11,000, so that's the low end of our goal this year."

As a hotbed for developing CitySprouts' model, Cambridge is only the beginning. "My hundred-year dream is that every public school in the country has a garden, where you can't imagine a school without one, like a library. I'm really into evaluation and the impact on kids. To show what school gardens can do and what difference it can make," Hirschi reflects. "It's too important not to do it now."

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM PARTICIPATING CHEFS

What's the primary distinction of Flavors of Fall from other local benefits?

One nice thing is the scale of the event—a great group of restaurants just from "this side of the river," enough chefs to provide a variety of tastes, but not so many that it is overwhelming. It also benefits an organization that is in our direct community.—Carolyn Johnson, chef de cuisine at **Rialto** [One Bennett St., Charles Hotel, Harvard Sq., Cambridge. 617.661.5050. rialto-restaurant.com]

How does it feel to be able to directly contribute to CitySprouts' cause?

CitySprouts, expanding on Alice Waters' ideas about teaching children about food growing and sourcing from the earliest ages, is absolutely terrific, and we're so proud they're based in Cambridge. Their mission is one we very much appreciate and stand behind.—Mary-Catherine Deibel, co-owner of **UpStairs on the Square** [91 Winthrop St., Harvard Sq., Cambridge. 617.864.1933. upstairsonthesquare.com]

What was the most memorable thing from any of the annual Flavors of Fall events you've been involved in?

Most memorable, to be honest, is probably having an ex-girlfriend on one side of me and a cook I fired on the other. A little uncomfortable.—Jason Santos, executive chef of **Gargoyles on the Square** [219 Elm St., Davis Sq., Somerville. 617.776.5300. gargoylesonthesquare.com]

Anything on the menu that attendees can look forward to at this year's event?

We're going to be doing small, passed dessert items, including miniature pumpkin whoopie pies.—Peter Davis, chef of **Henrietta's Table** [One Bennett St., Charles Hotel, Harvard Sq., Cambridge. 617.661.5005. henriettastable.com]

What do you believe is the most lasting impact of Flavors of Fall on the city?

They set a good example, that young start-ups can make a go of it in Cambridge and make a difference in their community by being smart and active.—Nick Zappia, co-owner of **The Blue Room** [One Kendall Sq., Cambridge. 617.494.9034. theblueroom.net] @