Happy almost fall! This edition of the newsletter is packed full of goodness. Read to the end and you will find a delicious recipe.

We are always looking for newsletter contributors! If you are interested in writing an article, please fill out the Google Form. Or email jayarger@ucanr.edu!

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Rejuvenation, Peace, and Community
MG Spotlight - Kevin Ridley
Interview by: Anastaysia Cole and Eloise Perrochet

Nestled in the Los Angeles neighborhood of West Adams lies an oasis; Good Earth Community Garden sticks out like a bright green dot on a blank canvas, a contrast to the loud rush of cars whizzing by on the hot blacktop of nearby major cross streets Jefferson and La Cienega Blvds. Here, the sugar bush and toyon sit firmly planted... present... and there is no rush.

Early this summer, we took a moment to converse with one of the locals at the garden, 2020 MG (Master Gardener) Kevin Ridley, on the topic of mindfulness in the garden. We chatted about the joy gardening has brought Kevin since childhood, what inspires him to continue, and
life lessons he brings to and from the garden. There is not ink enough to relay all of the conversation, but we are lucky to capture in this article some of Kevin’s many nuggets of wisdom. If you ever run into Kevin at the garden, take a moment to say hello!

On a quick note, let’s talk about mindfulness. A Berkley article describes mindfulness as, “maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environments, through a gentle nurturing lens.” Mindfulness is a more expansive concept than what can be described in one paragraph. But, in brief, mindfulness allows us to take a moment, become present and witness the beauty we call life. Especially in a metropolitan area such as Los Angeles, mindfulness in the garden is special. Gardening allows us to slow down, connect with nature at the roots, and connect with ourselves and others. Mindfulness is practiced all over the globe; the term goes by many names, can be described in many ways, and the experience is different for everyone. What does mindfulness mean to you?

Beginning the interview in the middle of the garden, we take our seats in solstice chairs under a blissfully shaded canopy accompanied by bugs crawling over our muddy shoes and the smell of freshly watered earth. Next to the canopy is Kevin’s carefully tended plot, bursting with beets, Pinkeye Purple hull peas, string beans, peppers, sunflowers, watermelon, cantaloupe, tomatoes, squash, and sweet potatoes. Hitting the red record button, we begin by asking Kevin where the seeds of gardening began for him. “As a kid I took horticulture in the seventh grade, ” Kevin says with a twinkle in his eye. Listening back to the recorded interview, we hear Kevin’s baritone voice just audible over the chirping of birds and sighing of wind.

**Eloise:** Do you still feel that same joy you felt for gardening as a kid?

**Kevin:** I do. I come here every day. Even days that I don’t need to come and water, I may come down to take a look to see what’s going on. You come and you sit here, you hear the birds, see the hummingbirds chasing each other - the visuals. The noises and things that you have here,
helps you disconnect from everything that’s going on. And you can have your hour and thirty minutes of peace before you have to plug back into the world and deal with whatever you have to deal with.

**Anastaysia**: What is it about gardening that’s so unique?
**Kevin**: Gardening shows us the complete cycle, and it’s something you can relate to life. When you get involved with something you’ve got to prepare the space, enrich it, plant the seed, water and nurture it so that you can reap the fruit of your work.

A lot of things we do in life, you don't really see the outcomes ... If a lot of people are involved, you just do your little part and you don't know what the outcome is, especially professionally. This is something that keeps me grounded, it allows me to check out from everything that's going on. I can sit down and just be at one with myself.

**Anastaysia**: What are three words you’d use to describe your relationship to the garden?
**Kevin**: Rejuvenation, peace, and community. You know, it’s kind of funny ‘cause you can use community, as in with nature, and other people that garden around you. When you look at us down at LA Green Grounds, you have people that come from all over and we have created our own community down there. We fellowship in addition to attending the garden. We talk about a whole host of issues.

**Anastaysia**: A host of issues pertaining to the garden or just in general?
**Kevin**: In general. ‘Cause people talk about current events, you name it. People share cooking techniques. People share gardening techniques, you name it, it probably gets discussed. One of the things is, it creates community you might not ever run across in life. Gardening - that kind of bond brings that group of people together. You’re able to share and exchange.

**Anastaysia**: What did the MG program do for you?
**Kevin**: You know it’s the teaching aspect and being able to share it with the community - finding people who may, or think they may, have the passion and providing the technical expertise to
help them realize what they think they want to try … You start saying, I can see where, as far as in a community, why you need to have these kinds of teaching spaces.

Anastaysia: What is one thing you want your students to know when you’re teaching a class? Kevin: I tell people that there’s really no wrong way because you can take seeds and throw them out in the dirt and they might grow. You know, we walk past cracks in the sidewalk and there’s plants growing out, so there’s not necessarily a wrong way. So the thing is, looking at different techniques and cataloguing things that you’ve tried. Don’t be afraid to experiment. Don’t worry about failure… I tell people - research, but don’t get caught in ‘I have to be perfect’. Just get out there and just try. And enjoy yourself, that’s really important.

Bringing the interview to a close, Kevin tells us that gardening is a symbol of uncertainty and resilience. “There’s a lot of variables that go into whether or not you are successful. Some things you can control and some things you can’t control. But, if it doesn’t work out, you just rip it up and try again next year.” Speaking about gardening with Kevin reminds us that there is always an opportunity for growth. Even though you may not see growth in the short-term, the long-term impact of small day to day actions matters. You matter. And through the mindful observation of the never-ending cycles of gardening, we are reminded of that simple fact.

Urban Farming: Food, Environment, Community
By Steven Brenner

Little Parrot Farm

Humble Beginnings
The evolution of the human community, or “urbanism” and the production of the food to feed these communities, or “farming” have been intertwined since their mutual humble beginnings. From the time that Homo sapiens first began living in semi-organized groups and trying to grow
food, the expansion of urban areas and the farms to feed them have grown in unison. Most early human settlements contained either a community garden which was mutually tended for the benefit of all, or individuals who would maintain their own family gardens.

The separation of food from the people
As communities developed into cities, larger gardens were required to meet the needs of the ever growing population. When the division of labor grew to the point that many residents of the community had nothing to do with the production of food, larger areas of land were dedicated to farming and were often relocated farther and farther from the city itself. The farms practically disappeared from view. These days many people, especially children, don’t even know where their food comes from.

Much of the food available in the local markets has travelled hundreds, or even thousands of miles to get to the grocery store shelves. This creates a very large and messy carbon footprint for the food that we eat. Yet, at the root of it, growing food is a simple process. Water, sun and soil, along with seeds for the crops we wish to grow is all that is really necessary. Add to that a little assistance from the gardener/farmer, and there we grow! We provide some help in the form of labor, and Mother Nature provides the magic that turns a seed into a flower, herb, tree or fruit.
Amy’s Farm

The emergence of “modern” Urban Farming
There have always remained the rebellious few who insist on growing their own food, and the occasional farmer who holds onto their land as the city surrounds them. In fact, there are still many small farms peppered throughout Southern California. And with the increasing popularity of Farmers Markets there is an easily accessible venue for Farmers to connect with their customers. This interaction also provides the opportunity for local communities to learn more about where their food comes from and the amount of work and resources it takes to bring this fresh food to the urban dinner table.

The idea of urban farming can at once be romanticized and idealistic, while still being fundamentally composed of hands in the dirt, back bending work. Organic farming practices, by
their very nature of not relying on chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, and often even avoiding mechanized tilling of the soil, require a great deal more physical labor than conventional farming. These organic methods of farming are usually carried out with a conscious awareness of the responsibility we have for the care of our environment. The modern farmer is faced with a much larger and more ominous set of decisions than any farmers before them. With habitat depletion, water conservation, chemical run-off, and GMOs all figuring into the equation of responsible land stewardship vs. earning a living, it can be a daunting task.

(Pictured: Sarvodaya Farm)

Fortunately for all of us, there are still a number of people drawn to a life of farming. There is definitely a calling to those who are inclined to hear it, and perhaps no better personification of rugged individualism exists than the modern Urban Farmer. In recent years, Urban Farming has made many gains, both in the ability of the farmer to do it on a manageable scale, and in the public’s desire to have chemical-free, local produce readily available to them.

There is a growing groundswell of support for ecologically sound alternatives to Big Box food retailers, and an expanding appreciation of healthy eating habits as well. Many urbanites are increasingly aware of the role they play in the wellbeing of the planet and seek to avoid produce which has travelled halfway around the globe, or was raised with a reliance on petro-chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

For the aspiring Urban Farmer, the growing network of Farmers Markets is a ready-made outlet to sell their produce direct to consumers, maximizing farmers' profits and allowing them to establish and maintain relationships within their community. This can be beneficial well beyond the opportunity for farmers to make a fair living from their goods, but also by connecting with the community in a way that can attract visitors and volunteers to the farm.

CSAs, or Community Supported Agriculture, is another way that urban farmers can ensure that they maintain a steady income while also supplying a reliable source of fresh, seasonal produce
to their customers. In the CSA programs, customers pay a monthly or seasonal amount for a subscription to a regularly scheduled delivery of seasonal produce. In many instances the customer is able to make selections from a “menu” to avoid receiving too much of one thing, or to get more of a family favorite. These programs also benefit the farmer by allowing them to collect some money in advance of a growing season. They can then use these funds to purchase seed and other needed farm supplies. And, the ability of urban farmers to sell their produce closer to the source also helps to reduce the carbon footprint of those farmers.

Beyond Farming
Urban Farms often become interactive community centers, offering a variety of educational, experiential and therapeutic activities. In a simple and profound way, a visit to the local farm is just plain fun. For kids, time on the farm also gives them an opportunity to learn about where our food comes from and how things grow. As adults, it's important to reconnect with the part of us that likes to play in the dirt. Chances are, there is a farm not too far from where you live, and most of them welcome visitors. As we become further detached from the simple joys of water, sun and soil, and the many benefits of simple hard work, a visit to your local farm can be a valuable and restorative experience.

By the very nature of this unassuming work, and by following the ebbs and flows not just of nature, but also of supply and demand, and the ever fickle news of what is and is not good for us, farmers often find themselves at the crossroads of development vs. nostalgia. Once again, the idyllic farmer has their hands in the soil and demonstrates that one of the oldest and most valuable (if not always highly valued) occupations is of tremendous importance to us all.

We need your photos! Are you completing volunteer hours out in the field? We would love to share what MGs are doing in LA County on our social media platforms! Please email photos and a short blurb of your workshops, classes, tabling events, school garden work, etc. to Jessica (jayarger@ucanr.edu) and she will share all the awesome work we are doing!
As we rush into the early fall, the garden takes a few turns. The robust tomatoes, which in our gorgeous California sunshine can produce year-round, start to slow down a bit. That’s when it’s time to start harvesting the green (and I do mean underripe, not the Green Zebra variety) tomatoes and making a wonderful chow-chow relish, or my personal favorite, fried green tomatoes.

Last year for our newsletter, I wrote up my Green Tomato and Cornmeal Pound Cake to share. This year, I went a little simpler and savory.

Use medium to large, firm tomatoes that haven’t yet started to show a blush of color. If you have tomatillos in your garden, this recipe works wonderfully with them too. While
it’s classic to make this recipe using bacon fat. I prefer my version to be vegetarian and gluten free. That way everyone can indulge.

Make sure to pull out your biggest cast iron pan to achieve an even, beautiful golden crust. When the slices are ready, serve alongside some remoulade, piccalilli or chow-chow* relish, fresh corn succotash, grilled fish and a bright sharp salad. Of course, don’t sleep on using a few cold slices in a BLT. Heaven.

There are a million ways to spruce and spice this up by adding an assortment of dried spices to the buttermilk. Go wild, or start simple and see what appeals to you. Old Bay, cayenne, black pepper, Everything But the Elote. The possibilities are endless.

**FRIED GREEN TOMATOES**

Recipe by Rachael Narins

Serves four as an appetizer or side dish

Gluten free and vegetarian

It’s best, when frying, to have all of your tools and ingredients out and ready before you begin, so that it all goes quickly and everyone can enjoy it immediately.

2 large green (underripe) tomatoes
2 cups buttermilk
2 cups fine cornmeal
Enough oil to fill a skillet to ¼” depth
Salt

**Steps**

1. Rinse the tomatoes and slice into ¼ inch thick rounds then set aside.
2. Fill a large skillet with the oil of your choice, to a depth of 1/4 inch. Turn the heat on to low while you prepare your frying station and the tomato coating.
3. Place clean towels on a wide plate, or set a wire rack over a sheet pan and place it near the stove.
4. Add the buttermilk to a shallow bowl. Pour the cornmeal in another bowl.
5. Season the buttermilk to taste with salt (or any spices you prefer).
6. Raise the heat under the pan to medium. Wait a minute or two and stick a chopstick or the end of a wooden spoon into the oil. When it bubbles you’re ready to fry.
7. Dip one slice of tomato at a time into the buttermilk, then the cornmeal, pressing down to coat heavily.
8. Add each slice to the pan, making sure not to overlap.
9. Let the slices fry for 4 – 6 minutes per side, then carefully transfer to the towel-lined plate.
10. Let cool slightly and serve with the condiment of your choice.

*Remoulade is a mayonnaise-based sauce similar to tartar. Chow-chow is a sweet and sour relish made with a combination of tomatoes, cabbage, peppers, mustard seed and vinegar. They are simple to make and can also be found in most grocery stores.

New Contact Reporting Policy

The MG statewide office has changed its contact reporting guidelines, effective July 1, 2021. Master Gardeners are no longer required to report gender, race, or ethnicity of community members based on visual observations. We are switching to voluntary self-identification for participants. You will be responsible only for taking a headcount at your Master Gardener activities.

Please list your headcount in the VMS. Here’s how: When posting your hours to a project, answer “Yes” to the question, “Do you have any Contact Information to report?” Since the VMS doesn’t have a place to report headcounts only, please post your headcount under “Unknown Male Adult” on the Contact chart.

Instructions on how to properly collect and report voluntarily self-identified demographic information is coming soon!