

Local Food Project at Airlie

-A Self-Guided Tour-

Did you know that the lettuce you had at lunch was grown a mere 1/10 of a mile from the kitchen door? The Local Food Project at Airlie currently includes this 1 acre garden and the passive solar hoophouse. Using sustainable and 100% organic agriculture practices, the garden's focus is on producing maximum yields from a minimum area of land, while improving soil quality.

The organic vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers we grow are delivered directly to the Airlie Center kitchen where they are prepared into the delicious meals our chefs are known for. Airlie's kitchen also purchases additional fruits and vegetables, meats, dairy and wine from local producers as part of an extensive initiative designed to lessen the Center's overall environmental impact.

The Local Food Project at Airlie is a small-scale example of a working local food system. Two year-round gardeners along with 2-3 seasonal interns plant, tend, and harvest crops on Airlie land, assuring a regular supply of fresh, local produce for the Center's guests. The Local Food Project at Airlie also provides community outreach on topics related to local food and sustainable agriculture through brochures, tours, workshops, and conferences.

To learn more about our food production system and view upcoming events, visit our website at www.airlie.org or check out our blog at sixteenfootladder.blogspot.com. To learn more about Airlie's numerous green initiatives, visit www.airlie.com.

FOR A SELF GUIDED TOUR...

Follow the numbered signs to learn more about some unique areas of our garden.

1. Herb Garden (on your left after you enter the garden)

This aromatic section features a variety of culinary herbs that Airlie chefs love to integrate into their menus. We grow several common herbs including thyme, oregano, sage, mint, rosemary, and lavender. Orange and yellow flowers will help you identify Calendula, which can be used to treat skin wounds, burns, and stings. You'll also notice a plant with fuzzy, pale green foliage—this is known as Lambs' Ear and its purple blossoms attract bees throughout spring and summer. Airlie hosts several "Enviro-Bees" apiaries kept by Environmental Studies on the Piedmont to support these important pollinators of wild and cultivated plants. (Check out the honey available at Airlie House.)

2. Parking Space Garden (turn left at the first path intersection and walk about 20 feet)

This 9x19 foot plot is the same size as a typical U.S. parking space and demonstrates the "Biointensive" gardening method, which allows more food to be grown in a smaller space. The beds are prepared through a process called double digging, which loosens the soil to a depth of about 2 feet. Seedlings can be planted closer together since they'll be able to take advantage of more deeply loosened soil. A similar garden could easily be started in a small front yard in the city or behind a suburban townhouse, providing a bounty of fresh vegetables for a typical family. This tiny growing area is the star of one of our annual workshops—"Small Space, High Yield Gardens."

3. Feed a Family Garden (right next to the Parking Space Garden)

New in 2009, this 700 square foot section garden is designed to provide enough summer produce to feed a family of four. The layout includes a staggered pattern of short and long beds (creating a fun zig-zag pathway) which demonstrates how a family might create a small veggie-growing plot in their own backyard. The soil is prepared with a broadfork—a two-handled tool with a row of metal tines at the bottom. This loosens the soil and encourages root growth, without damaging soil structure. Local Food Project gardeners

also monitor the effects of the nearby oak tree on the Feed a Family Garden (shade, water, roots, etc.). During the 2009 growing season, the Feed a Family Garden produced 12 pounds of zucchini, 9 pounds of cucumbers, 25 pounds of tomatoes, 14 pounds of cherry tomatoes, 30 pounds of watermelon, and more.

4. Medium-Intensive Vegetable Beds (walk along the south side of the garden and loop back toward the entrance)

These rectangular sections make up the main part of our garden. The soil is prepared mostly by broadfork and beds are maintained with other handtools like English spades, garden forks, buckle (or hula) hoes, and rakes. We grow dozens of different varieties of vegetables, from early-season crops like lettuce, broccoli, cabbage, and kale, to summer favorites like tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and okra. In June, we harvest succulent berries from two strawberry beds. Late summer features sweet watermelons or honeydew. In an average year, the Local Food Project provides approximately 3,000 pounds of produce to the Airlie Center kitchen. By growing a wide range of crops, we not only supply a diverse assortment of food for the Center's guests, we also lessen the risk of insect attack to any one species. Long swaths of fabric row cover also protect the plants from insects, rabbits, and ground hogs, and allow plants to grow during cooler months at the beginning or end of the summer season.

5. Passive Solar Hoophouse (walk back out through the garden entrance gate and take a left to head to the hoophouse)

2008 marked our first fall/winter season growing cool weather crops in this protected structure, which allowed the Local Food Project to continue contributing fresh produce to the Airlie Center kitchen all year long. The frame of the hoophouse was constructed by community members during a Local Food Project workshop. Layers of thick plastic cover the frame to hold in heat on cold days and protect vegetables from wind. Although the hoophouse isn't heated, soil temperatures will remain warm enough on sub-freezing nights to keep plants growing. In addition to providing a protected growing area, the hoophouse also serves as a warm gathering place for guests and other visitors during the winter.

6. Compost Bins (walk to the north side of the hoophouse)

Last year, the Airlie kitchen provided almost 20,000 pounds of food scraps to the Local Food Project's compost piles. In addition to keeping a bulk of waste out of the landfill, composting the scraps adds a necessary source of nitrogen to the process of making our own fertilizer. The four-square compost bin design allows us to manage daily deliveries of food scraps while keeping carbon-rich plant matter (dead plant stalks and stems from the garden) close by for convenient layering. The compost bins show how food waste (originally grown in our garden and by other local food producers) comes full circle to provide vital nutrients for another year's crops.

Thank you for visiting the Local Food Project at Airlie!