

# Portland Garden Dinners Delight

*Al fresco feasts feature dream gardens, local chefs and green-thumbed celebrities*

BY KERRY NEWBERRY

Languid summer nights in the Pacific Northwest indulge the senses. Warm breezes sigh through the leaves of elms and maples, constellations dance in azure skies and wine glasses “Cin cin” as imbibers toast the season.

What better time than now to dine al fresco in a glorious garden. Better yet, since it is Portland, why not add a local,

Greg Higgins, executive chef at Higgins Restaurant and Bar, and a pioneer of sustainable dining in Portland cooked for the inaugural Chef in My Garden dinner from his own organic beds, “he is an amazing organic gardener,” adds Lippoldt.

Celebrating its fifth summer, from the end of July through the month of August, each dinner in the series highlights a local chef, garden celebrity and unfolds in a spectacular home garden, ranging from a secret Ganesh garden

a family is assigned a mentor, supplied with a variety of plants, seeds and starts and can attend seasonal workshops offered year round for free, explains development director Libby Upham.

Seasonal workshops range from a Tour de Coops (urban chicken keeping) and Wondrous Worms (the art of composting) to Planning a Pizza or Salsa Garden and canning, pickling and food preservation. These workshops address food security and healthy eating by empowering low-income families to grow fresh foods for themselves, friends and neighbors in their own back yard.

At its peak, the network of volunteers reaches close to 1100 garden artistes, many involved in the home garden program, in addition to other creative edible landscape projects serving youth, families and partner organizations.

Youth Grow, an education and service learning program launched in 2000, strives “to create lifelong vegetable eaters and growers,” connecting kids to their food sources through interactive after school workshops and garden clubs and reaching around 600 students annually.

The Partner Gardens program, akin to the home garden program, facilitates garden installation, seeds, plant starts, classes and mentors for three years in partnership with other nonprofits, apartment complexes and schools. Currently, Growing Gardens works with Elementary Schools, Housing Authority apartment complexes and other non-profits



Scott Dolich, owner/chef of Portland's Park Kitchen in the garden of Anne Marsh and Gary Fears in last year's dinner series. Photo provided.

to assist in the planning of these larger gardens. Since 1996, the organization has installed 35 Partner Gardens.

“We are very volunteer focused,” says Lippoldt, “this is an intentional philosophy. The program is not just about helping low income people; it's about helping our whole community understand what it's like to be low income and face some of these food challenges and how to help people become more reliant and food secure.”

More significantly, with time in the garden, life long friendships are forged. “It's recognizing our commonalities. It could be that people love food or love gardening,” continues Lippoldt. “This is a way of sharing those passions and connecting people that may not otherwise have a chance to interact.” ♦

*Kerry Newberry is a vineyard-hopping, Pinot sipping food and wine writer for regional publications*



## Garden Dinner Details

Dine from late afternoon 'til twilight at one of the four Chef in My Garden fundraising dinners, from 4 to 9 p.m. Tickets are \$125 per person per dinner (\$80 is tax-

deductible). Seating is limited and advance purchase is required. For more information call 503-284-8420 or visit [www.growing-gardens.org/donate/chef-in-my-garden.php](http://www.growing-gardens.org/donate/chef-in-my-garden.php)

**JULY 29** Chef Kenny Giambalvo of Bluehour at the urban farm of Rachel and Dean Mullin. Garden Celebrity: “The Doyenne of Dirt,” Ketzell Levine, maven horticulturalist, author and NPR Senior Correspondent.

**AUGUST 5** Chef Brad Root of Roots Restaurant in Camas, Wash. and Chef Jenn Louis of Culinary Artistry at the garden of Lisa Wence and Dan Partin. Garden Celebrity: Heather Flores, author of “Food Not Lawns” and edible landscape enthusiast.

**AUGUST 19** Chef Adam Sappington of the Country Cat at the garden of Marilyn and Bob Woods. Garden Celebrity: Mallory Gwynn, also known as the “Garden Guy” and host of the weekly TV show “Simply Gardening.”

**AUGUST 26** Chef Eric Bechard of Alberta Street Oyster Bar & Grill at the garden of noted wilderness and landscape photographer, Larry Olson. Garden Celebrity: Mike Houck, executive director of the Urban Greenspaces Institute and co-editor of the book, “Wild in the City: A Guide to Portland's Natural Areas.”

innovative chef to that garden. Perhaps some boutique wines, a green-thumbed pundit or muse and a dinner party about the size of a family reunion.

Five years ago, Debra Lippoldt and board members brainstormed this feast for the senses as a fund-raiser for their local non-profit organization, Growing Gardens. “We were trying to figure out something tying into eating locally out of your yard and bringing people together for the things that connect us—good food and good conversation,” said Lippoldt, executive director of Growing Gardens.

with a bubbling urn to a sunken boulder garden surrounded by original art work made by the owners.

It is simply the simpatico of gardens that connects the dinner series and the mission of Growing Gardens. For ten years the organization has been engaging green-thumbed volunteers to build organic, raised bed vegetable gardens in backyards, front yards, and balconies and the nooks and crannies in between.

The program supports low-income households for three years in gardening basics and beyond. During this time

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