

Nurseries, Garden Centers and the Local Food Movement

By Horticulturist Sam Maupin

It is important to recognize the value of nursery and greenhouse growers in the local food movement. These businesses provide the community with plants needed for growing productive gardens. Professional growers also share important experiential knowledge with their communities and influence the development of local landscapes. Nurseries and garden centers benefit from interest in home-grown food, and should be actively supporting the local food movement.

Communities would not have access to locally grown plants for home gardening without independent nurseries and garden centers. Short growing seasons are limiting for many of our favorite fruits and vegetables. Greenhouse growers provide vegetable starts that give home-growers a needed head start at the beginning of the season. Nurseries propagating fruiting trees and shrubs are fueling the interest in permaculture and food-forests. Garden centers allow everyone access to a variety of plants that keep landscapes healthy, and people who are connected to culture and environment.

The wisdom held by professional growers is important for the success of the gardening community. Experienced growers are the best resource for new and transitional gardeners. Sharing awareness of the possibilities and limitations of the local climate helps others navigate the growing seasons. The inspirational value of this interpersonal communication cannot be replaced with internet and literature research. Growers who become a trusted source for information inevitably influence the way the community gardens and develops the regional landscape.

There are many sides to the local food movement, and supporting independent nurseries and garden centers should be a priority. They provide the plants needed for home gardening, which is at the heart of local food. Growers and retailers should be proud to be empowering people to participate in the natural world in a meaningful way through gardening.