



Lettuce Ink

LettuceLink



Lettuce Link connects low-income communities in Seattle with fresh organic produce, gardening information and resources to grow their own food.



Marra Farm coordinator Sue McGann with a harvest of beets

Have you been to Marra Farm?

When the Marra family purchased the land in 1920, it is unlikely that they anticipated the extent of the changes that their community would go through in the course of the twentieth century —freeways and warehouses paved over gardens while Spanish replaced Italian and Japanese as the language heard on the streets. Yet today, the Farm remains an oasis of open space in a neighborhood where houses and industrial lots intermingle.

gardening, nutrition and the environment.

In 2008 we logged over 4,100 volunteer hours and cultivated 14,000 pounds of food. From apples to zucchini, all of the food grown at Lettuce Link's giving garden at Marra Farm is donated to the Providence Regina House food bank in South Park, located only a few blocks from the farm. In a neighborhood that lacks a grocery store, it's that so many local families had access to healthy, fresh produce.



Bench at Magnuson P-Patch

For the past 10 years, we have worked with a coalition of partners to steward these four acres of land in Seattle's South Park neighborhood to grow food for the community.

We invite you to come visit us at Marra Farm this season. Come help plant, weed, harvest, teach kids or simply walk around and enjoy the variety of crops and growing techniques throughout the farm.



The land continues to evolve, as Seattle Public Utilities recently established a series of bio-filtration drainage swales along the eastern side of the farm, to help filter hazardous sediments out of local waterways.

Marra Farm was recently featured in a new "Community Stories" video on the Seattle Channel. View it at:

www.seattlechannel.org/videos/video.asp?ID=3170805

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Children from South Park arrive at the farm each spring and summer to learn about

Magnuson Gives

Standing in the midst of the Magnuson P-Patch it's easy to see how the gardeners donated over 4,000 lbs of produce last year. "Giving Garden" signs are scattered throughout, with 11 beds dedicated to growing food for those in need. Chris Beduch tends one of these beds, as part of a team of volunteers who plant, tend, harvest and deliver produce.



Chris Beduch next to the food bank garden signs at Magnuson

Chris's food bank plot, adjacent to his own bed, is currently filled with a verdant clover cover crop. It's almost time for the greenhouse at Nathan Hale High School to be put to use by Jessica Torvik-Lee's science students, who start seeds for the giving gardeners at Magnuson.

When the weather warms up, beans, tomatoes and greens will fill Chris's food bank bed. Though the volunteers choose what goes into their plots, most try to select vegetables that produce prolifically

with limited space. Twice a week, giving gardeners harvest their plots. The next day, a different volunteer weighs, packs and delivers the produce. Vegetables go to a transitional housing unit located at Sand Point and the food bank in Lake City.

Lettuce Link mobilizes and supports giving gardeners throughout Seattle. We are so appreciative of these gardeners' dedication, and wish them a fun and productive growing season in 2009!

LETTUCE LINK STAFF

Program Manager

Michelle Bates-Benetua
michelleb@solid-ground.org
206.694.6754

Marra Farm Coordinator

Sue McGann
suem@solid-ground.org
206.694.6746 x1

Program Development and Outreach

Robin DeCook
robind@solid-ground.org
206.694.6706

Lettuce Link is a program of Solid Ground

1501 North 45th St.
Seattle, WA

[http://www.solid-ground.org/
Programs/Nutrition/Lettuce](http://www.solid-ground.org/Programs/Nutrition/Lettuce)



Kale Chips and Roasted Beet Salad

Do you know how to prepare beets, kale, leeks, or green tomatoes? When presented with these items at the grocery store or farmers' market, do you reach for them or go with the trusty lettuce and cucumbers? Though there are adventurous eaters among us (and we applaud you!), many of us opt for what is familiar.

But what if you don't have the option of buying the vegetables that are familiar to you? Providence Regina House, the food bank in South Park, received over 14,000 pounds of food from our garden at Marra Farm this past year. This sometimes includes items (such as the ones listed above) that clients are less familiar with preparing and cooking. Thus, a team of Lettuce Link volunteers led by Robin DeCook gathers each month at Providence Regina House to prepare a tasty recipe using a fresh vegetable that the food bank is distributing that week. The group cooks and passes out samples and recipes to food bank clients.

As Paige Collins, the manager at Providence Regina House notes, "Even if a couple of our clients tried [the sample], it's something new you showed them...they definitely benefit." We've made spaghetti with green tomato sauce, kale chips, roasted beet salad, and more. If you're interested in volunteering on a Saturday morning at the cooking demo, contact Robin at robind@solid-ground.org. We are especially looking for Spanish speakers and/or people with a background in nutrition.

Fruit Trees - It's Time to Prune!

In late winter and early spring, while we watch the chilly wind blow outside our windows, waiting impatiently for the ground to thaw enough to plant seeds, there is work to be done a few feet up off the ground. Pruning your apple, pear or plum tree will reward you with larger, healthier fruit at harvest time and help you continue to reach the fruit without a 10 foot ladder.



An apple tree at Amy Yee Park, in need of pruning. Apples need light and space to develop, which the dense canopy currently prohibits.

Lettuce Link will not offer fruit tree pruning workshops this year, but we encourage you to be bold and venture out into pruning your own trees. Anyone can learn the basics. Ask your neighbors and friends for assistance, visit a local nursery for advice, check the Seattle Fruit News section of the Piper Orchard website for upcoming learning opportunities (piperorchard.org/category/seattle-fruit-news/) or contact Plant Amnesty (plantamnesty.org) for assistance.

If you don't have a fruit tree yourself, but know about pruning look around your neighborhood. Apple, pear and plum trees dot both private and public space in this city. Offer to help a neighbor with pruning and encourage them to donate a portion of their harvest to a food bank or meal program in the community.

Reviving the Amy Yee Orchard

Last summer, we began a partnership with the YMCA Center for Young Adults to restore the neglected apple orchard at Amy Yee Park and Tennis Center. Located in the Rainier Valley at the intersection of MLK and Walker, the park contains a number of old apple trees, most overgrown and buried beneath blackberry bushes and ivy. With our help and the guidance of community volunteers, the youth participating in the Center's job readiness and service learning programs removed the thicket that had grown around four of the trees, pruned, used organic methods of pest control (such as placing nylon 'foot socks' around the apples), and harvested 118 lbs of apples, which were donated to the Rainier Valley Food Bank.

After research and preparation this winter, we assisted the youth to approach the Lowe's Hardware on Rainier Avenue for a donation. As a result, they received pruning tools. This will allow the program to continue to grow, with a goal of taking care of 10 trees in 2009 and doubling the harvest!

The YMCA Center for Young Adults is located two blocks from Amy Yee Park and serves youth ages 17-25 who have experienced foster care and/or homelessness.



YMCA Center for Young Adults participant harvesting apples at Amy Yee Park last fall

You are needed!

During this era of a “free-falling economy,” nothing is more reassuring than the ground we walk upon and the soil we till. Stay involved with Lettuce Link:

- Become a Friend of Lettuce Link –join our advisory committee and help us increase visibility and develop core funding.
- Co-teach elementary school children about gardening and eating well at Marra Farm.
- Share your gardening knowledge and gardening resources with food bank clients this spring.
- Help get the word out about a just and fair food system by tabling at events spring and summer.
- Plant, haul, weed, harvest, shovel, and help us grow food for our community members in need at our Giving Garden at Marra Farm.

Get involved! Contact Michelle at 206-694-6754 or michelleb@solid-ground.org if you are interested in the opportunities listed above.



spring

Digging and clearing away the winter debris, I found the bright green shoot of new chives and crocus pushing their way up through the mulched fall leaves. The smell of my snow damaged rosemary bush and the new witch hazel flowers in the air. It was a day of cutting back, clearing out and then soaking my sore and tired muscles.

It is the comforting arrival of another planting season and the time for Lettuce Link to move into high gear. Soon, we will be turning beds at the farm, meeting with giving gardeners from around the city, planning this year’s fruit tree harvest, working with kids in the garden and visiting food banks with gardening information and supplies.

With all our plans for the season, we are thrilled to have Robin DeCook, AmeriCorps Outreach and Program Development Assistant with us this year. She is helping us expand and deepen our reach and services. From bringing more children to Marra Farm to electronic organizing, Robin is enhancing the program in many ways. Please welcome her when you meet her. She is a great addition to our team!

I am looking forward to seeing many of you again at the farm, in the gardens and at the upcoming gardener gatherings.

~Michelle Bates-Benetua