

It's no wonder we're gardening. And now more than ever, this DIY spirit, perhaps spurred on by the challenging economy, food scares, eye-opening movies like *King Corn* or books like Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma*, is making for an altogether greener scene. Gardening is quickly growing as an American pastime.

Michelle Obama is digging up the White House lawn and planting a kitchen garden. The Victory Garden resurgence—a throwback to World Wars I and II—is introducing people to gardens, many for the first time, or at least the first time since childhood. While our parents or grandparents may have gardened, many of us were sidetracked along the way, distanced from the means to the very thing we rely on every day: food.

Scratch a little bit into the horticulture world here in Oregon, and you discover it's filled with queers—professionals, hobbyists and those passionately pursuing the growth of beauty. "When you come out, you're basically saying to the world, that which I find beautiful is more important to me than my religious, family or educational affiliations, and I'm going to claim it," says Bart Church of men's wellness group Manifest.

"Queer folks, because they've had to face hatred and active attack about what is in their heart, have great sensitivity to beauty because they had to fight for it at the most fundamental." Church sees gardening as a way to connect to each other and to collaborate with the earth—so much so, his organization started a Men's Gardening Group (see *Resources*).

Rodney Bender, garden programs manager for Growing Gardens, a nonprofit providing gardening resources, tools and education, wonders which came first—the Portlander or the gardener, so intrinsic is it to our surroundings. "There's a mentality of gardeners in Portland," he says.

Why do queers like to garden? "Gardens are reminders," says Nicki Eybel of the Lesbian Garden Club via email. "We are a minority (celebrated or maligned) but there is solace in the soil for folks who might feel disenfranchised on some level."

"We garden in the front yard to be public, we garden in the backyard to be private. Gardening is a healthy, creative form of self-expression, a language that disarms enemies," Eybel says. "With people who might condemn me for how I live and love, I can offer a bouquet or a bag of arugula. And I do!"

For many of us, gardening weaves together our artistic endeavors, political beliefs and community values. "Sharing good food and having friends over really creates community," says Tom Winterrowd (left). Last year, he invited his conservative Portland friends down to his Canby farm. "We all sat at the table, and I explained where everything on the table came from. Not all food comes from the grocery store. It creates a new appreciation."

So what kind of gardener are you? I asked this question of a few queer "hort heads" and hobbyists, and discovered it's an enticing lead-in to some fascinating people. Are the gays gardening? You bet.



COURTESY CATHERINE FAILOR

**Catherine Failor //**  
MOLD DESIGNER

*"It feels like you're part of a community when you garden."*

An artist who creates stepping stone molds for gardens, Failor works professionally in the gardening world in addition to her personal projects. Her Southeast Portland garden reflects her creativity with tile mosaics and thoughtful plant pairings. "I'm a slave to beauty and I love being surrounded by beautiful things," she says.

Her advice to new gardeners: Prep the soil. Failor brought in over a hundred yards of mushroom and composted manure, building her beds before she planted a thing. Today, her garden thrives.

**Dan Yonker //** DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION, BASIC RIGHTS OREGON  
*"Gardening is my way to get closer to nature, being in a city environment."*



COURTESY DAN YONKER

Yonker (seated left) calls himself a shy gardener, but the lush shade garden at his North Portland home is anything but timid. Hydrangeas, Hostas and Epimediums are but a few of the plants he, along with his partner, Mike Druyd, grows in the backyard.

Yonker's favorite resource is the gay-owned Joy Creek Nursery (20300 NW Watson Road, Scappoose, OR, 503-543-7474). "I get so many ideas by walking through their gardens," he says. "It's a great place to get ideas and the location is beautiful."

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