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Meet the Urban Farmer Determined to Teach Others About Edible Landscapes

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Bridget Shirvell

Matthew Geldin wants to help you turn your lawn into a bountiful garden.



Matt Geldin creates farms for communities such as agrihoods, a type of planned community that

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As the head farmer of Farmscape, a company that designs, installs and maintains both residential and commercial gardens throughout California, Matthew Geldin has planted a lot of edible plants. He's helped turn lawns, roofs and parks into productive food spaces, helping people connect with their food and nature at large.

"I think a lot of people either don't have the time, the knowledge or the capacity to manage a garden themselves, but they really want to have that direct relationship with their food and where their food comes from," says Geldin. "We can bridge those gaps for folks."

Geldin started working with Farmscape, now the largest urban farming company in California, while studying landscape architecture at Cal Poly Pomona. After school, he honed his expertise working as a gardener at places such as the Los Angeles County Arboretum before returning to Farmscape, becoming the head farmer in 2014. Now, he oversees the weekly maintenance of hundreds of projects—everything from backyard gardens to neighborhood farms.

Each garden Geldin creates is wholly inspired by the people or the community it serves. For homeowners, Farmscape starts with a site

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visit. The consultation includes an analysis of growing conditions in the patch of land, including sun exposure, the location of trees and hedges and what the irrigation access is like. They have conversations with the owners about how large the household is and how much food, if any, they want to produce. The company also installs pollinator gardens, native plant gardens and summer dry gardens.

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After the homeowner accepts the terms of the project, Farmscape does all the landscape installation work. Then the company works with the client each growing season to help select what they want to grow and will either harvest any food directly for the client or teach the homeowner how to manage it, all depending on their interests.

“In our backyard gardens, residents are encouraged to join their farmer when able to learn about what’s happening in their garden,” says Geldin. “We share information and demonstrations on what’s being planted, how to tend to the plants according to the arc of the season and how to harvest for optimal

enjoyment of the produce and production of the crops. “

Having a garden expert at your disposal sounds dreamy, especially for those of us that are green thumb challenged. But it’s also something that enables Farmscape to provide farmers with a host of professional benefits including health insurance and 401Ks—an anomaly in the field.

“Something that is really common in residential gardening, in community gardening and urban farming is there’s a lot of volunteer opportunities or a lot of nonprofit work,” says Geldin. “Farmscape was one of the first companies that I became familiar with that actually tried to professionalize the work and create a sustaining company and career opportunities in being an urban farmer.” Geldin has now trained dozens of gardeners, many of whom have become farm managers, landscape architects or travel the world while farming.

Besides the backyard gardens, Geldin and Farmscape create farms for communities such as agrihoods, a type of planned community that integrates agriculture into a residential neighborhood. Much like backyard gardens, these farms are custom tailored to the community they will serve, but these agrihoods can take years from the initial conception stage to reach the harvest stage.

“Commercial farms are not a space where typically people are coming to visit, but the spaces we create are really made so people can engage with them within their community,” says Geldin. Farmscape does that by providing educational and engagement opportunities where people are participating in the farming, learning the process and seeing the crops from the planting stage all the way through the harvest stage. Many agrihood projects run on a work-to-harvest format, in which residents take home produce at the end of every farming shift they work. The remaining produce is then sold to the community through farm stands, CSA-style boxes, U-picks and bumper-crop flash sales or donated to local food banks that accept fresh produce.

In this model, Geldin sees hope for the future. “It’s really exciting to take a lawn and turn it into a productive food space,” says Geldin. “Let’s keep doing more of that.”

