ForeWord Reviews

SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Backyard Roots: Lessons on Living Local from 35 Urban Farmers
Lori Eanes
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Offering deeply useful advice and fascinating portraits of urban farmers, Backyard Roots *is a rich collection of stories about people who boost community by growing food and raising animals in the heart of a city.*

Author Lori Eanes, a food and portrait photographer who is also an urban farmer and journalist, offers snapshots—both literal and figurative—of thirty-five advocates of hyperlocal food.

The breadth of projects and personalities encompasses a nice range of efforts. Focusing on urban farmers in Northern California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia, Eanes covers farmers like Lindsay Dault, who set up beehives in her backyard and on the roof of the recycling center managed by her husband. Dault offers insight into why "urban bees" make sense: "Cities often offer more varieties of flowers, available in more seasons, with fewer pesticides," writes Eanes. "City bees are said to work harder than country bees, because cities tend to be warmer and, with all the artificial lighting, the bees can work late."

Other farmers offer tips on growing in very small areas, goat keeping, chicken tending, and other pursuits. Eanes provides a wealth of website links, sidebars, and advice that give resources for learning more about each type of urban farming.

Advocacy for better environmental strategies is also a dominant theme, so it makes sense that Eanes kicks off her collection with Laura Allen, an Oakland resident leading the charge to change California's water policy. After modifying her own habits to collect more water from sinks, showers, and her washing machine, Allen launched Greywater Action, a group that works for sustainable water usage.

Complementing the compelling stories are stunning photographs, from close-up shots of mushrooms, goats, beets, chickens, and other aspects of farm life to portraits of the farmers proudly showing off their greenhouses or vegetable-laden backyards. The photos are drenched in warm colors and vibrant detail, and several show the space limitations of each urban farm.

Many photographs are also highly useful to those who might be contemplating a similar

path. For example, in relaying the story of Lee Kindell, who set up an aquaponics growing system in his Seattle hostel, Eanes includes details about how he relies on self-wicking planter buckets, and a short photo series captures the system's details.

Blending how-to details, quick biography, and advocacy, *Backyard Roots* is an artful blend of all three, issuing a call to action to other urban dwellers to start connecting with their food system, even if that means just a planter filled with tomatoes on the fire escape. By including such down-to-earth, inspiring personalities in her collection, Eanes demonstrates that when it comes to building community, sometimes all you need is a good pair of work gloves and a desire for change.

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