

GROW IN THE CITY

THIS FFA CHAPTER PROVES URBAN GARDENS CAN PRODUCE PLENTY OF PRODUCE.

You don't need to have acres of tillable land to grow a bumper crop of vegetables. FFA members at Green Street Academy in Baltimore, Md., produce food on a campus surrounded by row houses, convenience stores and busy intersections. Agriscience teacher and FFA advisor Cole Bishop offers four tips for growing a successful urban garden.

1 PICK THE RIGHT SITE. In the absence of a farm field, build raised beds in vacant lots or parking lots. Rooftops are also ideal urban sites, but Bishop warns, "You'll need to pick plants that love sun or put up a shade cloth because it gets hot up there."

2 GO VERTICAL. Green Street Academy grows tomatoes, lettuce and herbs in hanging baskets to maximize

every square foot of its urban garden.

3 THINK BIG. It might be tempting to stick with small crops like tomatoes and peppers, but with good soil and sunlight, even corn will grow in urban areas. "Not every plant is going to work in every environment, but don't be afraid to try," Bishop says.

4 SPREAD THE WORD. Urban agriculture is getting more popular, but Bishop believes it's important to share information about garden projects on social media. "The more food growing in cities, the better, and you could help inspire others to start urban gardens," he explains.

— By Jodi Helmer

An urban garden can also make for a great supervised agricultural experience (SAE). Find SAE inspiration at FFA.org/SAEVideos.

Questions On WATER QUALITY

Water is one of the most important natural resources upon which agriculture depends. Farmers use water and nutrients judiciously. Even so, some runoff happens. Environmental, government, university and business representatives are collaborating with farmers for results. Here, Diane Herndon, senior manager of sustainability at Nestlé Purina, discusses the company's efforts to partner toward shared goals on water conservation and quality.

Q: CAN YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF HOW PURINA HAS BECOME INVOLVED IN IMPROVING WATER QUALITY?

A: Nestlé Purina is supporting work across the United States where our ingredients are grown. In Indiana, we work with The Nature Conservancy, farmers and others on the Wabash River to create wetlands and woodlands that can remove up to 40 percent of the soil and nitrogen before the water flows downstream.

Q: WHY DO YOU ENGAGE THIS WAY?

A: We source healthy ingredients for our pet food recipes from America's farms. The programs to which we contribute help to ensure that farmland stays fertile and the environment stays healthy so that we have abundant ingredients available well into the future.

Q: OUT WEST, A LACK OF WATER IS OFTEN THE ISSUE, CORRECT?

A: Nestlé Purina and Cargill are working with The Nature Conservancy and farmers in Nebraska to collect water data through sensors and download it to farmers' smartphones. From there, they can control their irrigation pivots through an app, saving time, water and money. The project is expected to save 2.4 billion gallons of water from the Ogallala Aquifer over the project's three-year course.

— By Des Keller