

Client: Ivan Kane's Café Wa s

Publication: *LA.com*

Date: May 1, 2009

Visitors Per Month: N/A



Restaurant Gardens: Bringing a Whole New Meaning to Fresh Food

LA Eateries Are Going Garden-to-Table

BY ERIC ROSEN

Posted: 05/01/2009 10:18:16 AM PDT



The First Family has planted a veggie garden on the front lawn of the White House. It'll produce several types of lettuce, cilantro, tomatillos, peppers, spinach, chard, kale, berries and herbs. And arugula. (White House)

Spring is finally here in full force, and that means that restaurants all over Los Angeles will soon be serving up a veritable cornucopia of fresh veggies and fruits on their farm-to-table menus.

What you might not know, though, is that many restaurants have brought the local food movement one step closer to home, so to speak, by starting their very own on-site food gardens.

Now more than ever, the average diner is increasingly separated from the food chain that provides his meal, and yet the costs of supplying the ingredients - financially, environmentally, time-wise - are all rising. The restaurant gardens that are springing up all over Los Angeles, however, are creating a higher level of consumer consciousness in the heart of our city, and bringing fresher produce to our tables.

The trend is not just in Los Angeles, though. Even the First Family is planting a new food garden at the **White House**. That's right: the Obamas have set aside an 1100

square-foot plot on the lawn for a garden that is tended by the family as well as an elementary school class.

According to our sources, they will not be growing beets because the President doesn't like them, but there will definitely be arugula - campaign legacy be damned! They will also have several types of lettuce, cilantro, tomatillos, peppers, spinach, chard, kale, berries and herbs, as well as two bee hives to help with pollination and to produce honey for the White House kitchen.



One of the veggie boxes at blue on blue. (Eric Rosen)

Back in Los Angeles, the **trend** is catching on not only at restaurants, but in backyards, balconies and rooftops throughout the city. We took a stroll down the metaphorical garden path to find out what is going on at some of these restaurant gardens and just what they might be producing that will make its way to your plate this spring.

Perhaps the most established of them is the garden on the rooftop of the **Avalon Beverly Hills Hotel**, which supplies some of the seasoning for Chef Scott Garrett's menu at blue on blue, as well as for mixologist Ian Porter's fancy potables.

blue on blue's restaurant manager, Ryan Hoffman, was instrumental in setting up the garden, and is involved in every step of setting it up, expanding it, and finding ways to grow the ingredients that interest Garrett and Porter, whether it be the butter beans and lemon balm oil for Garrett's lamb loin, or Thai basil to garnish Porter's V.T.C. cocktail with Veev liqueur and cucumber.

In this, their second year, they have started growing two types of strawberries, heirloom tomatoes, and they plan to expand their garden with a few types of peppers, and a rare tomato varietal called the "chocolate Amazon." We kid you not.

The other special thing about blue on blue's little garden is that it is very environmentally friendly since it uses self-watering plant containers called EarthBoxes. [Check](#) out the video we made of our visit to the garden here.



Chef Sal Marino with the tomatoes he grows at home. He has installed a garden at Il Grano as well. (Eric Rosen)

In keeping with the hotel's environmental and community policies, the Avalon also plays host to occasional classes given by Darren Butler of EcoWorkshops on how to start your own small-space food garden. Though most attendees pay for the series of classes, there are also a number of free seats allotted for low-income families.

Over at the [Palomar Hotel's BLVD 16](#) restaurant in Westwood, Chef Simon Dolinky is trying his hand at a hydroponic garden. So far, he and his staff have successfully grown several kinds of herbs, including micro greens, basil, rosemary for the "BLVD 16 Roof-Top Herb Fries," and some extremely leafy and pungent mint for the bar's mojitos. This summer, Dolinky is going to try incorporating a few new crops like tomatoes and carrots into his new hydroponic beds.

Dolinky is no casual gardener, though. A Midwest native, he used to have a garden as a child, and has been tending his own garden at home for years with admittedly limited success, he tells us.

Chef Alex Reznik at Ivan Kane's Café W as in Hollywood is getting ready for the first harvest of his newly installed herb boxes that he says, "will provide a more French environment for diners enjoying the patio."

The herbs, which will include purple basil, mint, marjoram, thyme and lemon verbena will make their way into cocktails like their Signature Sazerac and the Mint Julep.

Meanwhile, Chef Sal Marino has been growing over three dozen rare tomato varieties in his home garden, which he then uses for the special annual Sagra del Pomodoro tomato menu every Wednesday in summer at **Il Grano**, his West L.A. restaurant.

Downtown Los Angeles might not seem like a garden-lover's paradise, but our plentiful sun, and a little ingenious space management, make it an ideal place for some urban planting.

At Blue Velvet in Bunker Hill, for instance, Executive Chef Jonathan McDowell has a small garden that provides the fodder for his tasting menus and some special events at the restaurant.

All this individual attention from the chefs means that they can use ingredients that the average cook and diner don't have access to with conventional vendors, or even at farmers' markets. Combined with the freshness factor of just-picked produce, the ingredients make dishes more distinctive and appealing.

So next time you're out at a restaurant and you see some herb boxes, or a little garden, take a good hard look, because some of those ingredients will probably make their way into your meal. And who knows, you might just be inspired to start your very own garden.