

on the ground



City corn

# THIS is a FARM

the future of Yesler Terrace starts on the ground

BY HEIDI BROADHEAD  
PHOTOS BY DELLA CHEN

**O**n May 8, 2010 a group of eight teenagers and several adult volunteers assembled at the Yesler Terrace Community Center, and after hanging out near a small office around the back with a hand-painted sign, “GroundUp,” they headed down past rows of white, two-story resident houses and yards, through a gate and down a dirt road. The goal for the day: to lay the ground, 12 or so rows of compost and dirt, for a new 2 1/2 acre urban farm on the southwest corner of the Seattle Housing Authority’s oldest community, Yesler Terrace.

The Yesler Terrace Urban Demonstration Farm, at 825 Yesler Way, is a program of Creatives4Community, the organization behind GroundUp, a revolutionary green jobs training program that teaches food awareness, soil management, waste water, and compost training to high school-aged residents of Yesler Terrace.

Overlooking I-5 and the stadiums, the space where the farm now sits has long been an overgrown lot and, according to GroundUp founder Eddie Hill, a haven for drug dealers and loiterers.

“Healthy food is great, but if you don’t have a whole system onsite and you don’t have the money, where are you going to get it?” says Hill as he shovels compost-rich soil into one of the rows. “What we’re doing here

is creating an active demonstration of a healthy, sustainable community.”

In mid 2009, Hill, who had experience with small-scale farming from his own farms in Olympia and Duvall, proposed starting an urban farm program modeled after Will Allen’s Growing Power (featured on Oprah and in *Time* magazine), which has been highly successful at integrating food and farming initiatives in Milwaukee and Chicago.

Partnering with Seattle Tilth, Hill and his staff developed a curriculum to train Yesler Terrace youth to be Master Composter/Soil Builders using a modified version of the Tilth certification program, which requires 30 hours of class time and substantial opportunity for hands-on learning. The students were hired as interns and paid a stipend to go through training and to work the farm. The program also has a strong community service aspect: the students help Yesler Terrace residents with plant starts (which they grow on heated trays in their office space in the Yesler Terrace Community Center), composting their yard and food waste, and keeping up their garden plots.

Hill saw the GroundUp program as an opportunity to incorporate food justice and jobs training within an ongoing, large-scale SHA

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project that aims to redevelop the aging Yesler Terrace facilities and infrastructure and to make it more economically vibrant and green.

Built in 1939, Yesler Terrace has approximately 1,200 residents representing a wide diversity of cultures. (According to the SHA, 10 languages are spoken at Yesler Terrace.) After a failed attempt at revitalization in the early 1970s, the SHA, Seattle Public Utilities and other stakeholders started a planning phase and formed a Citizen Review Committee in 2006, as part of a larger plan to address the urgent maintenance, health, and safety issues of the resident buildings.

Urban agriculture is already an integrated part of life at Yesler Terrace. Walking through the neighborhood in midsummer you see corn, lettuce, herbs, tomatoes, chard and other greens in individual yards and onsite community garden plots.

Throughout the redevelopment planning process, residents have expressed a desire to be able to continue growing their own food. After the SHA presented their concepts for redevelopment in spring 2010, some residents expressed concerns about losing their garden and yard spaces. But, according to Hill, the current system, as lush as it looks, is not sustainable. “We are helping them increase their yield,” says Hill of the residents. “They’ve been overcropping, not spending money on compost, not getting yield or rotating crops.”

GroundUp’s kids are working with them now to raise awareness of sustainable practices, while learning from the residents about the foods that are part of their cultures, so they can carry on the community traditions.

“I was looking for something to do, had some time on my hands. I wanted to do something green and community-based,” says Jeremiah Horton, one of GroundUp’s first student interns. Late last year, he heard about the new program starting up at Yesler Terrace.

“Everything in the environmental movement is locally based, and I thought, where am I located? I’ve lived in Yesler Terrace all my life. Somebody told me there’s this dude—Eddie Hill—and he’s hiring for green jobs.”



Residents looking over the young vegetable beds.

Rows of tomatoes at Yesler Terrace.



He applied and got an internship, joining the first GroundUp class in December 2009.

“It was hardest in the beginning,” says Horton. “This lot was never flat, plus it had wood chips and dirt, and all kinds of animals living here—raccoons, rats, cats. I didn’t have confidence that this would work, then after we cleared it all, I could see.”

The first GroundUp class graduated in June, with a few interns staying on through the summer. On July 10, the GroundUp staff harvested their first crop—50 pounds of fresh chard, lettuce, beets, and radishes—which they handed out for free to the residents of Yesler Terrace Garden Homes out of the back of a truck. Every Saturday, adult and youth staff members pick whatever food is ready and take it to the same spot. Donating produce is a first step in a vision that Hill described on the day they laid the sod. A potential goal is to provide food for an onsite farmer’s market, but they are still determining if that will be a feasible option.

“The program will be going through an economic analysis this fall,” says Joel Banslaben, Sr. Sustainable Strategies Specialist with Seattle Public Utilities, which gave the program \$40,000 in 2009 for start-up costs. “They want to figure out what it costs to grow a tomato at Yesler Terrace and see how that compares to how much it costs in an area where the rates for certain resources, such as water, are much lower.”

Banslaben attended some of the first GroundUp classes last December, and has been impressed with the progress. “It was phenomenal,” he says, “By the fourth or fifth class they were talking about composting and sustainability and they were thinking about it every time they threw something in the trash. That’s the core mission: to ingrain that into their thought process. Then they can be leaders in the community.”

The composting and wastewater recycling systems that GroundUp has built at the Urban Demonstration Farm are providing city planners with valuable information about the future viability of large-scale urban agriculture systems, not just at Yesler Terrace, but citywide. “We’re learning a lot about what it really takes to run a composting program at a certain scale,” says Banslaben.

The SHA plans to finish up a final environmental impact study in February 2011, which will outline the impact of the four potential density plans, and recommend a preferred alternative for further development. Preliminary concepts range from 3,000 to 5,000 residential units, 400,000 to 1.2 million square feet of office space, 40,000 to 88,000 square feet of retail space, and 5 to 8 acres of parks and open space.

“The question is how to add density and retain the urban agriculture and small-scale residential feel,” says Banslaben. “It will be challenging to keep large areas of open space.” Plans for redevelopment are likely to include alternatives for building integrated agriculture, which can



range from small and large container farming to fully integrated rooftop gardens.

“We’ve been talking about the concept of Yesler Terrace as the urban ag center of Seattle,” he says.

“This is realistic considering their history and the interest from FHA.”

On August 17, Banslaben and other community stakeholders attended a potluck party for the last day of the summer program, which ran from July 12 to August 17 and incorporated youth from other communities, something that Hill hopes to continue in the fall.

“Circle up, people,” says Hill, congratulating the summer program students on their accomplishments and inviting everyone to try the greens, picked fresh from the garden that morning. Students walked

Heidi Broadhead and Della Chen will be following developments in urban agriculture at Yesler Terrace throughout 2011.

Creatives4Community is in the midst of their formal fundraising, and has an ongoing need for volunteers at many locations. [www.creatives4community.org](http://www.creatives4community.org)

Seattle Housing Authority provides ongoing updates about the redevelopment of the Yesler Terrace neighborhood. [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org).

the visitors (mostly representatives from the city and community groups), through the property, pointing out recently planted boxes of sage, basil, golden raspberries, blueberries. They continued to the lower site—the spot where students and volunteers had laid the sod just three months earlier—to show fresh basil, chard, and other greens, nearly ripened tomatoes, and a few rows of burgeoning late summer crops of corn, zucchini and squash.

“It might not seem like a lot,” says Horton, “but I look at this and think, man, I grew this. You don’t have to go to the supermarket. You just have to have the will to do the work. You can plant seeds in the ground and grow food, organically. It’s like my grandfather. He grew vegetables in his back yard.”

After the tours, Hill circles the group up again. He introduces the students who have earned their Master Composter credentials and hands them the certificates. One of these students is Horton, who is attending Cascadia Community College this fall, so he can study green building practices.

Horton sounds proud. “My friends say, ‘You’re doing good work.’ My grandma says, ‘You’re helping your community.’ I learned that I can do something in my community and other people can watch me do it. After all this work, this is a garden. This is a farm.” *eS*

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Heidi Broadhead is a freelance writer based in Seattle.

# edible SEATTLE DINING GUIDE

*Restaurants are chosen for this dining guide because of their emphasis on using local, seasonal ingredients in their menus, creating a distinctly Pacific Northwest dining experience.*

## BALLARD

### A Caprice Kitchen

1418 NW 70th St.  
(206) 371-2886 • capricekitchen.com

A small neighborhood bistro located on North Ballard's 70th Street serving dinner and brunch using only locally sourced ingredients. Dinner Wed-Sun 5:30 p.m.-Close, Brunch Sat-Sun 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

### Le Gourmand

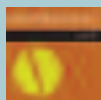
425 NW Market St.  
(206) 784-3463  
legourmandrestaurant.com



Enjoy classic French cooking as art in an intimate space without ostentation. Using only locally and organically raised ingredients, owners Bruce and Sara Naftaly have spent years building ties to local foragers, farmers and fishers to bring the best of the Northwest to your table. Dinner Wed-Sun 5:30-10 p.m.

### Portage Bay Café

2821 NW Market St.  
(206) 783-1547  
portagebaycafe.com



Portage Bay Café is Seattle's premier café for local, organic and sustainable food. Since 2000 we have been a leader in the city working directly with all types of food producers including bakers, farmers, ranchers and fishermen. Breakfast and Lunch Daily, 7:30 a.m.- 2:30 p.m.

### Portalis Wine Shop + Wine Bar

5205 Ballard Ave. NW  
(206) 783-2007 • portaliswines.com



Portalis is a cozy little wine bar built around its 450-bottle wine shop, offering a wide selection from the Pacific Northwest. With an ever-changing seasonal menu, Portalis is a wonderful tasting room for the best of our local wines. Bar open Tue-Fri 4-11 p.m., Sat-Sun noon-11 p.m., closed Mon.

### Ray's Boathouse

6049 Seaview Ave. NW  
(206) 789-3770 • rays.com



A Seattle icon since 1973, Ray's Boathouse is internationally renowned for its unparalleled Northwest seafood and breathtaking waterfront view of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains. Savor sustainable seafood, artisan cheeses, local produce, organic meats, house-made desserts and Northwest wines. Daily 5-9 p.m.

### Staple & Fancy Mercantile

4739 Ballard Ave, NW  
(206) 789-1200 • ethanstowellrestaurants.com

The latest venture of celebrated chef Ethan Stowell, this intimate restaurant showcases a simple Italian inspired cooking style. The popular "Chefs Choice" menu offers guests a one-of-a-kind dining experience with dishes created from unique sourced products, local seasonal ingredients, and house-made pastas. An a la carte menu is also available. 5-11 p.m. daily



### Pastazza

2945 Newmarket St., Bellingham  
(360) 714-1168 • pastazza.com



The offerings for every course are made fresh from local, organic ingredients whenever possible. The menu features Northwest fish and seafood with Washington poultry and vegan and vegetarian options as well. Quality food in a casual atmosphere. Mon-Thu 11 a.m.-9 p.m., Fri 11 a.m.-10 p.m., Sat 4-10 p.m., Sun 4-9 p.m.

### The Willows Inn

2579 W Shore Dr., Lummi Island  
(360) 758-2620 • willows-inn.com



The Willows Inn offers authentic farm-to-table dining. Our chef, Blaine Wetzel, finds inspiration from the ingredients found at our own Nettles Farm, foraged in our fields, caught in marine waters outside our door, and bought from local purveyors. Blaine has recently come to us from Noma, the world's best restaurant. Dinner, Thur-Sun, 6:30 p.m., one seating.

## BELLEVUE

### Monsoon East

10245 Main St., Bellevue  
(425) 635-1112 • monsoonrestaurants.com



Eat+Drink+Vietnam. Modern cuisine in a casual chic setting, complimented by full bar and a creative wine list. Monthly wine dinners and special events. Lunch Mon-Fri 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Brunch Sat-Sun 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Dinner Fri-Sat 5-11 p.m., Sun-Thurs 5-10 p.m.

## BELLINGHAM

### Nimbus Restaurant and Spirits

119 N Commercial St., 14th Fl, Bellingham  
(360) 676-1307 • nimbusrestaurant.com

Nimbus offers a creative dinner and cocktail menu of locally sourced, seasonal ingredients in a casual high-end environment with sweeping views of the San Juan Islands, Mt. Baker and downtown Bellingham. Come enjoy our happy-hour specials, chef's tasting menus and extensive wine list! Reservations appreciated. Mon-Sat 5 p.m.-midnight, Sun 5-10 p.m.



### Anchovies & Olives

1550 15th Ave, Seattle  
(206) 838-8080 • ethanstowellrestaurants.com

Named "Best New Restaurant" by Bon Appetit and GQ magazine, an Italian-inspired seafood and pasta joint built on unique flavors and the highest quality products available. A large butcher block provides guests with a front row seat to the action in the kitchen of this Ethan Stowell Restaurant. Sun-Thur 5-11 p.m., Fri-Sat 5 p.m.- midnight



### Cafe Flora

2901 E Madison St.  
(206) 325-9100 • cafe flora.com



An elegant vegetarian restaurant located in Madison Valley. Recently voted one of the top 5 restaurants in the nation by Vegetarian Times Magazine, we craft local, seasonal and fresh ingredients into beautiful and delicious dishes. Breakfast and Lunch Mon-Fri 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Dinner Sun-Thur 5-9 p.m., Fri-Sat 5-10 p.m., Happy Hour Mon-Fri 3-6 p.m., Sat and Sun Brunch 9 a.m.-2 p.m.. Reservations available for parties of 8 or more.