

A NOT-SO-SECRET GARDEN

THE WINE CELLAR & BISTRO
IN COLUMBIA, MISSOURI,
FINDS VIBRANT FLAVOR
THROUGH LOVE OF SOIL.

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Striding up to the 5,625-square-foot main garden, newcomers arrive expectant. But the energy near the beds is steady, unhurried, and no rushing is needed. Snippets of conversation carry over the clear Saturday morning air.

"Some of us are born with pads on our fingers that need to contact dirt," a gardener says as she sprinkles a palmful of seeds down a row.

"My German roots," another says and shrugs.

Others, men and women wearing comfortable shoes, notably as worn as my own, are watching the action or tossing straw over just-planted seeds.

"So, this is the beginning of spring," Sarah says, and the words feel like triumph.

People stand a little straighter and smile.

With 14 Saturday mornings devoted to the Garden Project from March through October this year, visitors have a chance to experience several shifts in season from the ground up. This is how it used to be for many in preprocessed America, and it's pivotal for the Cyrs.

"We started it to open up a dialogue, to show people how to grow organically and how we use farm-fresh ingredients at the restaurant," Craig says. "We look forward to seeing the same faces – and new faces – at every class, and the sense of community and connections we make with diners."

NO ORDINARY DIRT

It might be rare to truly connect with the seasons for some people, but Craig and Sarah find that relationship fundamental. In 2013, the Cyrs added the Garden Project to their restaurant, The Wine Cellar & Bistro, to supply fresh, local food to its kitchen. Now, guests arrive at the Cyrs' not-so-secret garden to share their love of good food and connection to the earth.



"This is what we want to do for our lives, for our kids," Sarah says. There is a conviction to her words and the sense of an evolving goal. Sarah, a sommelier, whose offerings at The Wine Cellar have been recognized by *Wine Spectator* every year since 2005, and a lawyer by training, now spends more and more of her time with the Garden Project.

"I'm always amazed that 13 rows of garden produced about 2,500 pounds of food [last year]," she says. "There's such a sense of satisfaction seeing it all get used!"

The Cyrs decided to start the Garden Project over a bottle of wine on the 10th anniversary of their restaurant. "Craig wanted to have more time in the garden, and he wanted to grow the things he wanted to cook, especially these heirloom varieties," Sarah says. Plus, perhaps stemming from her background in law, Sarah appreciates big ideas.

"We wanted to put more focus on people working to make good, clean, healthy food," she says. "We wanted to help drive that."

It's easy to see the draw once you taste the fruits of the land. After much attention to soil health, planting companion plants to deter pests, learning about compost tea to boost growth, and other changes to the land and their approach, the Cyrs' farm was certified organic in 2015. There is pleasure, Sarah says, in the flavor of food raised well and in having living, biodynamic soil that supports great-tasting plants.

"It's not your garden of the '60s or '70s," says Carrie Hargrove, director of urban farming for the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture (CCUA) and Garden Project guest lecturer. "We are starting to realize that reducing tillage can create a healthier ecosystem for soil microorganisms as



opposed to constantly tilling your garden. Soil looks like this in nature."

She's referring to the garden's intact crust of earth, not tilled wholesale, and the cover crops that shelter the rows not yet planted for the season.

The Cyrs now partner with the CCUA on the Garden Project classes, which take participants from the beginning to end of an entire growing season. Classes focus on hands-on gardening experience, gardening lectures by experts from the CCUA, organic and biodynamic discussions with Sarah, a farm-inspired lunch prepared by Craig and a seasonal organic wine pairing by Sarah.

"We've inspired a lot of people to open community gardens or gardens in town," Craig says. "It's definitely helped motivate people to grow their own food!"

There's an aroma at the Garden Project, too, a sweet compost-and-herb scent that touches at memory. Yes, some small kernel inside you says, this is what I knew.

The Cyrs' garden plot sits on a hill overlooking a lake. There is an asparagus bed, an elderberry row, and peach, apple and cherry trees branching out in various spots nearby. Sarah plants horseradish, nettles, wild onions, comfrey and borage under the fruit trees to draw away pests. The soil is deep and dark, and the plot looks robust even in early spring.

"The more diverse your garden," Hargrove says, "the more stable and self-sufficient it is. The basis of growing sustainably is respecting the soil!"

For the Cyrs, this means always looking ahead. "It's an act of patience," Sarah says. "There is immediate gratification but not as much as [you get] using a fast-acting fertilizer."

The Garden Project was one of eight Missouri farms certified as organic last year by Quality Certification Services (QCS), a national certification organization. In total, there are 372 farms or processing facilities certified as organic in the state.

"Some [applicants] stop for one of two reasons," says Ramkrishnan Balasubramanian, chief operating officer of QCS. "[The farmer] ends up applying a material that is prohibited because it's [his or her] first time going through the process. Or, they stop their certification because of economic reasons combined with paperwork."

While the Garden Project farm was going through its certification process, the Cyrs were not able to officially call anything from their farm organic, though the required practices were already in place. After three years, the farm's certification was official. This makes The Wine Cellar & Bistro the only Missouri restaurant with its own certified-organic farm, to the best of Balasubramanian's knowledge.

But it's the food that makes the Garden Project complete.

"It's really hard to ignore," Hargrove says. Rich, tantalizing aromas from the farm kitchen waft out over the Garden Project group as she speaks about compost.

FARM TO FORK

In town, the Cyrs’ restaurant creates yet another companionable atmosphere: cozy, relaxed and sophisticated without being formal. Barrel tops, emblazoned with winery names, adorn and warm the walls. Bottles are showcased throughout the space.

At this particular moment in the life of Craig’s kitchen, a large stone mortar and pestle sits on a stainless steel table at the ready. Craig is combining ingredients for a sauce, and it’s easy to be mesmerized by the thick roll of golden honey cascading off his ladle. It’s a deceptively slow pour. Like the activity here, there’s a sense of underlying drive.

“This is pretty calm,” he says. “I mean, it’s Tuesday.” Craig’s eyes are unruffled when he says this. He stops pouring, picks up a spatula and twirls it between his palms. I am reminded that in his younger days Craig played competitive tennis but now channels his energy into synchronizing the kitchen and dining experience.

He turns to finish pouring the beautiful northern Missouri honey into tomato paste, adds kombucha, leans over the concoction and flicks in ground cloves. “I’m messing around with different fermented foods for health benefits,” he says.

This particular day, there are fermented redbud flowers on the restaurant’s seared tuna dish, along with Garden Project chickweed made into salsa verde.

“Not even weeds are safe from my husband,” Sarah had mentioned at the farm.

The Wine Cellar doors swing open.

“OK guys, we have a four, four, a three, a three, a six, a three and two twos,” says a waiter listing off the tables of people now in the restaurant. “Welcome to Tuesday!”

Craig, still quiet and unhurried, turns to his sauce saying, “Who would have thought?”

BACK AT THE RANCH

Word has spread about The Wine Cellar & Bistro and its farm roots. The Cyrs are connecting as much to how Americans ate in the 1940s. Many crave those flavors again.

Sharmini Rogers, a longtime resident of Columbia, has come to the Garden Project’s bimonthly Saturday morning classes three or four times a year since they began in 2013 and started volunteering in the kitchen with Craig this year. “It’s very much a family affair sort of thing,” Rogers says. “So, if we come early for class, we help bring things out [to the tables].”

At a Saturday morning class, a few volunteers help in the garden while the kitchen begins to hum. “What is nice,” Rogers says, “is that parts of the meal – things like the vinaigrette – are things Craig has pickled and preserved from the garden last summer.”

The Cyrs’ two children, Mae, 6, and Boone, 5, help, as well.

“Boone and Mae helped pick mint leaves, and decorated the dessert,” says Rogers, reflecting on a March Saturday morning.

“At the Garden Project,” Craig says, “I come up with meals from what I can get immediately out of the garden.”

That simple truth is what connects the whole day. The rest of the atmosphere arises directly from the Cyrs.

“There’s nothing pretentious about Craig’s kitchen,” Rogers says. “It’s very striking to me that the things in his kitchen are what even cooks like me are familiar with.”

Craig, who grew up with grandparents who kept a huge garden and served family meals, lets that influence how he and Sarah live today. “They preserved and canned,” he says. “They were doing what that generation was doing, and I was around that growing up.”

“THERE’S NOTHING PRETENTIOUS ABOUT CRAIG’S KITCHEN. IT’S VERY STRIKING TO ME THAT THE THINGS IN HIS KITCHEN ARE WHAT EVEN COOKS LIKE ME ARE FAMILIAR WITH.”
-SHARMINI ROGERS
GARDEN PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Rogers plans to sign up for about six Saturdays this year. “I love, love, love it when they bring out the food for the tables and Sarah stands there with her wine [of choice] overlooking the lake,” Rogers says. “It’s just an experience. And the chickens are a nice touch, too.”

The lunch at the Garden Project on this day started with braised local pork shoulder stew with miso, carrots, parsnips, cabbage, Champagne and apples; roasted spaghetti squash; garlic and rosemary cremini; grilled local bread with smoked trout, redbud pickles and spinach; and kale salad with huckleberry vinaigrette. For dessert, a fresh and subtly sweet gooseberry-apple-rhubarb crumble was topped with banana *semifreddo*. The feast is complemented by Sarah’s chosen organic wine, a Sangiovese-Merlot blend.

The Missouri air mingling with the aroma of freshly cooked food; the tables set outside, weather permitting; the Cyrs’ farm dog, Xela, perhaps barking – it’s all sublime and savory and a scene that doesn’t have to be from the past any longer. **F**

The Wine Cellar & Bistro, 505 Cherry St., Columbia, Missouri, 573.442.7281, winecellarbistro.com



PICTURED TOP LEFT: Participants of The Wine Cellar Garden Project enjoy a meal at the farm.

PICTURED BOTTOM LEFT: Chef Craig Cyr prepares dinner.

PICTURED BELOW: Seared tuna with fermented redbud flowers by chef Craig Cyr.





SPRING CHICKWEED
SALSA VERDE

Yields | 3 cups |

- 2 cups **chickweed** (including stems)
- 1 cup **cilantro**
- ½ cup **mint**
- ½ cup **oregano**
- 2 cloves **garlic**
- ½ cup **lime juice**
- ¼ cup **apple cider vinegar**
- ½ cup **olive oil**
- ½ cup **canola**
- sea salt** and freshly ground **black pepper**

Preparation | In a food processor, blend all ingredients until smooth. Serve with fish, chicken or roasted sweet potatoes.

CHICKWEED PESTO

Yields | 4 cups |

- 2 cups **toasted almonds**
- 4 cups **chickweed**
- 4 cups stemmed and torn **kale**
- ½ cup **mint leaves**
- juice of 4 **lemons**
- ½ cup **olive oil**, plus more to taste
- sea salt** and freshly ground **black pepper**

Preparation | In a blender, process almonds. Add greens and continue processing until smooth. Add lemon juice and olive oil to achieve a medium-runny consistency. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

HEIRLOOM TOMATO
GAZPACHO WITH GINGER

Serves | 6 |

- 2 lbs **heirloom tomatoes** (cores removed, large dice) or whole **cherry tomatoes**
- 2 medium **cucumbers**, peeled, seeded and large dice
- 1 **summer squash**, seeded and large dice
- 1 **bell pepper**, stem, seeds and ribs removed, large dice
- 3 cloves **garlic**, minced
- ¼ **red onion**, large dice
- ½ lb **kale**, stems removed and roughly chopped
- ½ bunch **cilantro**, large stems removed and roughly chopped
- ½ cup minced **mint**
- 1 **jalapeño**, stem, seeds and ribs removed, small dice
- ½ cup peeled and minced **ginger root**
- ½ cup **balsamic vinegar**
- ¼ cup **extra virgin olive oil**
- sea salt** and freshly ground **black pepper**
- herb-baked croutons** (to serve)
- fresh mint** (to serve)

Preparation | In a large nonreactive mixing bowl, combine all ingredients, season with salt and pepper, and mix well. Pulse in food processor or blender to medium-chunky consistency and transfer to another bowl. Finish seasoning to taste. Garnish with herb-baked croutons and fresh mint. Serve chilled.

BRAISED PORK
SHOULDER WITH APPLES,
CABBAGE AND CARROTS

Serves | 6 |

- 1 **boneless pork shoulder**, cut into 2-inch cubes
- ¼ cup fresh **thyme**
- sea salt** and freshly ground **black pepper**
- 4 cups **sparkling wine**, divided
- canola oil** or **pork lard**, for searing
- 1 **yellow onion**, medium dice
- 6 **carrots**, medium dice
- 1 bunch **celery**, medium dice
- ½ cup sliced **garlic**
- 6 **apples**, medium dice
- 2 quarts **chicken** or **pork stock**
- ½ cup **apple cider vinegar**
- ¼ cup **miso paste**
- 2 **bay leaves**
- ½ head **cabbage**, 1-inch dice

Preparation | In a large bowl, combine pork with thyme, salt, pepper and 2 cups sparkling wine and marinate, covered, overnight or for at least 4 hours.

Preheat oven to 325°F. Drain pork from marinade. In a saucepan on high, add oil and sear pork until brown. Transfer to a large rectangular pan with 2-inch sides. Set aside.

In a frying pan on medium-high, add diced vegetables and brown slightly. Add garlic and diced apples and cook for 5 minutes. Deglaze pan with remaining sparkling wine, then add stock and apple cider vinegar. Continue to simmer until liquid reduces by half, then bring to a boil. Whisk in miso paste. Scoop out mixed vegetables and transfer to pan with pork, then add bay leaves. Add miso broth to just cover mixture. Cover with parchment as well as foil. Bake for 1½ hours. Add cabbage. Cover and return to oven until fork-tender, or another 1½ hours. Cool in liquid and discard bay leaves. Serve.

SAFFRON-BRAISED
TURNIPS AND RADISHES

Serves | 6 |

- ¼ lb **butter**
- 1 **red onion**, medium dice
- ¼ cup minced **garlic**
- 1 **bay leaf**
- ½ cup minced **thyme**
- 2 lbs **turnips**, peeled and large dice
- 1 lb **radishes**, quartered or halved depending on size (should be same size as turnips)
- 1 Tbsp **honey**
- 1 tsp **saffron threads**
- sea salt**
- 2 to 3 cups **vegetable stock**
- freshly ground **black pepper**

Preparation | In a large pot over medium heat, add first five ingredients and sauté until tender. Add next four ingredients, mix well and sauté for 5 to 10 minutes, making sure not to caramelize. Season liberally with salt. Add stock and cook until tender but not mushy. Juices will reduce almost to a glaze consistency. Add salt and pepper to taste; spread out on sheet pan to cool.

THE WINE CELLAR
GARDEN PROJECT

2016 CLASS
SCHEDULE

The Wine Cellar & Bistro partners with the Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture (CCUA) to grow a certified-organic garden for the restaurant at the Cyrs' farm. The classes take guests from the beginning to end of an entire growing season through hands-on gardening experience, a gardening lecture by CCUA, an organic and biodynamic discussion with sommelier Sarah Cyr, a garden-inspired lunch prepared by chef Craig Cyr and a seasonal organic wine pairing by Sarah. Classes run from 10AM to 1PM. To learn more, visit columbiaurbanag.org/the-wine-cellar-gardening-project.

JUNE 18. Gardening Structures, Staking, Cages, A-Frames and Others for Support and Shade
Learn how to put out tomato cages and stake them.

JULY 9. Insects and Integrated Pest Management; Creating an Ecosystem with Insects, Birds and Mammals; Pest Potions
Learn how to make and spray insecticidal soap.

JULY 23. Garden Upkeep, Weeding Benefits, Techniques and Tools, Feeding
Learn how to weed, prune tomato plants and feed plants.

AUG. 6. Planning and Planting Fall Gardens
Learn how to plant fall seeds.

AUG. 20. Harvesting Techniques and Food Safety; Seed Storage, Collection, Cataloging
Learn how to harvest vegetables and save and store heirloom seeds.

SEPT. 10. Growing and Harvesting Herbs, Preserving and Using Herbs
Learn how to properly harvest and preserve herbs, plus a demo on how to make vinegars and herb butters.

SEPT. 24. Winterizing Your Garden, Part One; Planting Seeds and Cover Crops for Winter, Hoop Gardening for Winter
Learn how to plant seeds for winter.

OCT. 1. Winterizing Your Garden, Part Two; Cleaning Up, Feeding and Amending Soil, Covering and Mulching Beds
Learn how to clean and mulch beds.

OCT. 9. Sunday, 4 to 8PM - Garden Project Party! Free for class attendees who have signed up for 11 or more classes; \$35 for guests. Includes a glass of organic wine and seasonal hors d'oeuvres.

PICTURED LEFT: Spring chickweed salsa verde.

PICTURED BELOW: Saffron-braised turnips and radishes.

