

## What is a Backyard Farm?

A backyard farm is the entirety of your food production efforts plant, animal, and otherwise. Whereas traditional commercial farming grows 1 crop in straight rows over thousands of acres, backyard farming is infinitely smarter.

By mixing and matching the foods that you grow in “guilds”, you can grow more types of food, and more of each type!

Put simply, the backyard farm is a resource-efficient combination of guerrilla food production zones, that are each optimized for their highest and best uses. Have a piece of property that is naturally more shady and has acidic soil? Put blueberries there. Have a south-facing wall that gets full sun and is tough to irrigate? Plant sunflowers up against it. Live in a climate that gets late season freezes? Save your fruit by planting tree varieties that bloom late. Have a pest problem? Get a few chickens to devour em.



By Kayla Mclean

### In the backyard of a suburban home in Etobicoke, a full-fledged operation is growing

Farmer Jessey Njau and business partner/co-founder Misha Shodjaee call it Zawadi Farms. Rows of sweet peppers, batches of lettuce and leafy beans, tomatoes, eggplants and swiss chard, to name a few veggies, grow on the roomy 2,500 square feet of land that make up Njau’s backyard. A salad medley of crops, flourishing in the big city — all part of a growing trend of urban farms popping up in the GTA, according to

Ryerson University instructor and co-coordinator of Toronto Urban Growers James Kuhns. “A lot of people, especially in their 20s and 30s, want to do something that is environmentally positive,” said Kuhns. “People are turning to urban farming as one way to do this. “People have a distrust of where their food comes from — they want to produce without insecticides and chemicals. I think that’s one of the big draws.”

Njau was drawn to urban farming three years ago while working in a field that had little to do with agriculture. “I was in the IT business. My job was a business developer,” Njau said. “But there was something missing.” The epiphany came for Njau after a friend introduced the 43-year-old father of two to a podcast on urban agriculture featuring American - Canadian author and sustainable agriculture advocate Michael Ableman. Njau said he quickly realized that he had found what he was looking for.

“Farming in the city, finding people that don’t have access to food and giving them the possibility of jobs and food, nutrients, and putting them on the front lines of selling the food - I was like, ‘This is it,’” Njau said. Three years and a combined three plots of land and a greenhouse later, Njau and Shodjaee have taken on the urban agriculture world market by farmer’s market. On a weekly basis, insecticide-free produce from the farm is hand-harvested,



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hand-washed, boxed up and shipped off to bi-weekly subscribers. Nothing gets wasted, either: Anything left over goes to community markets run by Toronto Community Housing and programs like FoodShare Toronto, who sell the produce at marked-down prices. Even bruised veggies, Njau will tell you, have their day on his farm. “We partnered with a friend of mine who runs a company called Bruised Co.,” said Njau. “And they make juices and sauces from bruised crop.” Urban farming isn’t just profitable. A recent report put out by the UN found that consuming less meat and

more plants could mitigate the effects of climate change with 23 per cent of green house gas emissions coming from agriculture, forestry and other types of land use. That, Kuhns said, makes urban farms an effective tool. “Urban farming supports the fight against climate change,” said Kuhns. “Food is obviously produced locally - that means there is less greenhouse gas emissions that are hapening, and also water is used in a more efficient manner as well.” Njau is taking on the climate challenge by sharing his knowledge of urban farming. “Our goal is to find and grow farmers and to equip people to learn how to do this.

Area of Major Fruit Crops in Ontario (hectares)		
	2011	2016
Grapes	7,439	7,575
Apples	6,406	6,432
Peaches	2,612	2,117
Strawberries	1,329	1,180
Sour cherries	948	858
Pears	560	510
Plum	435	396
Raspberries	365	275
Sweet cherries	233	176