



Old L.A. News

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LOCAL BACKYARD “FARMER” PRACTICES PERMACULTURE

Julie Balaa sells unique “edible ornamentals” at weekly Highland Park farmers market



Photo by Christopher Nyerges

Christopher Nyerges is the author of “Self-Sufficient Home,” “Extreme Simplicity,” and other books. He can be reached at www.SchoolofSelf-Reliance.com.

“Permaculture” is a word coined by Australian Bill Mollison, which means “permanent agriculture.” It’s an ancient concept really, and it defines how ancient cultures were able to sustainably produce food for generations upon given plots of land.

These days, more and more city-dwellers are looking for ways to practice sustainable food production, even in little backyards.

Julie Balaa is a local backyard farmer at the Old L.A. Farmers Market in Highland Park, and every week she teaches her customers how to create sustainable gardens in their own yards. Balaa typically sells less-common foods, and instructs people how to grow their own.

Her booth had bowls of New Zealand spinach, lamb’s quarter, California pepper seeds, cactus pads, as well as a variety of potted foods, such as purple tree collard, sapote, and ficus trees. “All

of these plants,” said Balaa, pointing to the plants around her booth, “can be used create a sustainable garden in your own back yard.”

One customer was purchasing a bag of lamb’s quarter greens, which is a type of wild spinach that is closely related to quinoa. Balaa explained, “Lambs quarter greens are one of the most nutritious plants in the world, based on the data from the USDA. Eating lambs quarter in your salad, or your soup, is like taking a natural mineral tablet,” said Balaa, showing a chart from the USDA which delineated the nutritional analysis. “I can’t believe that I’ve been pulling this weed out of my yard and throwing it in the trash,” the customer animatedly told Balaa.

Though the lamb’s quarter plant is an annual – which means it lives for only one season – Balaa explained how she is able to extend its harvesting season by a few months by carefully pinching off bags of the leaves every week. “I never uproot the plant,” she explains, “but I carefully pinch off all the outer new growth. That’s what you see here,” she said, pointing to the bags of greens for sale.

She does the same sort of sustainable harvesting with New Zealand spinach,



Photo by Christopher Nyerges

which is a plant native to the west coast of South America. After listening to Balaa for a few minutes, you realize that the only spinach you should ever grow is New Zealand spinach, which is a sprawling perennial – and “perennial” means that you only plant it once and you never need to replant it. It just grows and grows, and tender leaves can be pinched off regularly for salads and soups.

One of her popular foods is the prickly pear cactus pad, or nopales, which have been used in Mexican cuisine for centuries. She sells the pads ready to



Security

1st Quarter 2022

Patrol calls for service	45
Patrol BID contacts	1,290
Public contacts	785
Vehicle patrol hours	928
Bike patrol hours	0



Maintenance

1st Quarter 2022

Trash Bags (removed)	2,480
Trash weight lbs	57,040
Graffiti tags removed:	325
Bulky items:	328
Pressure Washing hrs	24

**Annual Meeting
November 16, 2022
Zoom info to follow**

be cleaned and eaten, as well as the potted pads which can be grown as a border plant. "The prickly pear cactus has been demonstrated to be effective for treating high cholesterol and type 2 diabetes, as documented in such books as Prickly Pear Cactus Medicine by Ran Knishinsky," says Balaa while she demonstrates how to clean one of the cactus pads.

One of Balaa's most unique food items is purple tree collard, which is a perennial, unlike most annual collards which must be planted every year. In a



Photo by Christopher Nyerges

recent poll, the purple tree collard was voted one of the most desirable plants to grow in "permaculture gardens." As the plant grows taller, it can be cut back to keep it shorter. Furthermore, as Balaa tells her customers, sections of the purple collard stems – about four inches in length – can be cut and rooted to produce new plants.

At her table at the Farmers Market, Balaa had a list of all the plants that anyone could grow in their yards to create a perennial, sustainable garden for the least amount of work. The list included trees, of course, like olives, citrus, and figs, and grape vines, asparagus, onions, Jerusalem artichoke, potatoes, tree collards, and, of course, prickly pear cactus.

As part of the permaculture philosophy, Balaa and her family also recycle all of their kitchen and yard scraps by composting them into soil, rather than just tossing it all into the trash can. "It's very rewarding to do these techniques," said Balaa, "because I



Photo by Christopher Nyerges

feel it's what we should all be doing. Sometimes it's hard, but it makes you feel good for doing it."

Balaa is also the president of a local non-profit corporation, whose mission is to teach practical survival skills – such as producing your own food – to city-dwellers. Balaa can be reached at juliebalaa@gmail.com.

The Highland Park Farmers Market occurs every Tuesday from 3 to 7 p.m., on Avenue 58 where it meets Figueroa

NFA Goals

- Provide Educational, Cultural, Artistic, Charitable, Social Service and public improvements.
- Increase economic well being for property owners, employees and businesses.
- Provide improvements and activities to assist in economic and commercial revitalization.
- Provide clean, safe and beautification programs to improve economic prosperity for property owners, businesses and the community.
- Bring about investment of public and private capital within the Business Improvement District and surrounding area for public benefit and charitable purposes.

Mission Statement

North Figueroa Association is the management organization for the Highland Park Business Improvement District and is an advocate for the North Figueroa Property owners by empowering and aiding in the stimulation of growth, development, revitalization and maintaining the historic value of the North Figueroa Corridor.

The North Figueroa Assoc. will support an environment in which stakeholders can conduct commerce, live and play.

North Figueroa Assn. Board of Directors

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Misty Iwatsu, Executive Director

Contact: 323-255-5030

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Annual Budget 2021

Public Right of Way	\$376,854.64	(65%)
Corporate Identity & Organization	\$110,000.00	(35%)
Total Annual Budget	\$486,854.64	(100%)

How You Can Help

You can help keep the district clean, safe and pedestrian friendly by:

- Making sure your businesses do not place their trash in the sidewalk receptacles. These receptacles are for pedestrians only.
- Keep windows & awnings clean
- Take down any old, torn or faded signs or banners.
- Sweep your store front. While the crews sweep the streets, they do not sweep private property
- Post store hours in windows.
- Call security with concerns. The number is: 800-350-1944. Report to LAPD, as well.