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Lauri Kranz

Edible Gardens LA

Hailed as the vegetable whisperer, singer-songwriter Lauri Kranz re-discovered her green thumb after volunteering to build gardens at her son's school. Seeing her passion and skill, other parents began asking Kranz for advice, and soon Edible Gardens LA was born. Self-taught, Kranz has planted gardens around Los Angeles for a variety of clients, including KCRW DJ Anne Litt, Chef Suzanne Goin, Joe's Jeans founder Joseph Dahan and the L.A. County Museum of Art. Kranz is passionate about sharing her knowledge of edible herbs, fruits and vegetables, and the many benefits of growing your own food. We spoke to her about eating locally, how to start an edible garden, and her own health and wellness philosophy.

Can you tell us what inspired you to start Edible Gardens LA?

When my oldest son, who is now 13, started school I had to volunteer for something, and when I looked down the list of possibilities, I thought, “Oh, there’s a garden, I could do that because I gardened as a child with my dad.” I had just moved from New York City, so I hadn’t been in a garden for a really long time. But I remember the feel of it and the smell of it, and it was a really happy time in my childhood, so I immediately signed up for the garden and I fell in love with it all over again.

So when my younger son, who is nine, started a preschool where they didn’t have any garden, I said, “Oh, I think we could have a garden program here,” and the director of that school, this extraordinary woman, Gloria Walther of the Walther School, said, “Yes we could.” I started the garden and parents would see that garden and ask if I could give them a hand at their own gardens and then other people would see the gardens that I built for them, and that’s how the whole thing started.

What has been your favorite garden to plant to date?

I don’t know if I have an answer. It’s like you’re asking me “which child do you like the best?” and I’m going to say to you “I love them each in their own way.” Each is so unique, not because of something I’ve created, but because of the natural elements. Everyone is situated in a completely different environment and has varying hours of sun. There are all different kinds of pleasures and challenges in each garden. So I can’t say that there’s one that I love the most.

You have such passion for growing your own produce. Can you tell us why you believe it is so important?

I think it’s really important to know where your food comes from, and I believe in eating locally. So whether that means going to a local farmers’ market, turning over a bit of soil or planting a pot of something, I think it’s really important both for the experience of watching something go from a seed to a piece of food and for the relationship you have with where

your food comes from—you hold it in a higher regard. I think most people who have grown lettuce from seed won’t throw it away or let a head of lettuce wilt in the refrigerator.

I think there is value in that, and, of course, for the environment. The greater picture is that if we are all growing some of our own food, we’re really off-setting a lot of damage to the environment from commercial farming, pesticides, fertilizers, and natural fuel sources being spent on shipping food from one part of the world to another.

For a first-time gardener, what would be the easiest things to try first? If you’ve got a pot or a garden bed, or even a windowsill, what would be your recommendations?

I think it’s finding a good balance. If you’re growing things out of a pot, I would say—and it depends on the season—leafy greens like kales, swiss chard and lettuce. All of these are really bountiful because they continually produce. So long as they are harvested correctly, you can have a bounty. You can get quite a bit from not a lot of space, whereas if you’re growing eggplant, you’re waiting and waiting. I love growing eggplant, I love eating eggplant, but you’re waiting for that eggplant for a really long time. The same goes for cauliflower, which I love growing, but it takes an enormous amount of room and you get the cauliflower head and then that’s it. With broccoli, you cut the main head and then there’s shoots going off everywhere.

If you have a couple of pots, say you have three good sized pots, I would grow broccoli in one, kale in another and with the third you can put a little trellis and grow some peas or just make an herb pot so you have your favorite, whether it’s parsley or basil or thyme—whatever it is that you like to have on hand to cook with. But I think it’s about balancing the things that are produced quickly and with abundance with the other vegetables that are going to require more time and care.

That way you’re getting some more immediate results which keeps you motivated. You want to get something. You don’t want it to be empty—like three leaves. You want to be able to grow enough to prepare what you want for dinner, instead of one piece of cauliflower and three peas, although peas, once they start producing, are really, really good producers.







What are your top tips for a successful garden?

Don’t take on too much to begin with. Start where you feel comfortable knowing that you can always add on. The most important two things I can say about starting a garden for the first time are sun and soil. So you want to find the area that gets the most hours of sun per day and then you want to make sure your soil is really rich, healthy and beautiful. Whether that means you are amending the soil below the ground or building raised beds or pots where you’re putting in organic soil. Sun and soil!

I have spent some time listening to music by your collective of LA musicians, Snow & Voices. How does your love of music infuse/cross over into your work in the garden?

I find music to be one of the most beautiful things in my life. I’ve loved music since I was a child. I grew up on all different kinds of music and I feel like both gardening and music are artistic endeavors. So, for me, they’re completely different mediums, but artistically, it’s still a great reward for me to do both.

We actually partnered with Anne Litt, who is an extraordinary DJ. She’s doing a series of playlists that are up on the site. Ann sends them to me and she says, “Tell me what you think” and I start listening to it and I always call her—“Oh, my gosh. I love this song.” And when I run into friends I haven’t seen in a while, they’ll say, “Oh, my gosh. I found this song that I can’t stop listening to on that compilation.” That makes me really happy, and so I just feel there is a great relationship between the music and the gardens and we are kind of running with that.

You have partnered with KCRW DJ Anne Litt on a series of concerts in gardens around Los Angeles. Can you tell us a little bit about these concerts?

Our first event is tomorrow night, with Moby, who’s doing a Music in the Garden, the kick-off concert. We’ll be having a series of Music in the Garden shows where we just want

to bring people together with the spirit of community—marrying the music and the gardens—so there will be live shows in private and public gardens around Los Angeles. The first is an evening event but we’re going to have some during the day where you can bring a picnic blanket and have a picnic and enjoy an afternoon musical experience.

The shows are not prohibitive—we ask that you either bring a bag of produce from your own garden or your local farmers’ market as the admission to the show. We then donate all of that to several of the food charities here. Or, if you don’t have access to bringing a bag of fresh produce, we just ask that you make a donation to one of the charities at the door. At this event we have three: Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, which is a charity that Moby’s very fond of, plus the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank and Project Angel Food.

Can you tell us a little bit about your health and wellness philosophy?

Well, isn’t it always different, the philosophy we have in general and then the one we are able to execute on a daily basis, with all the demands in our lives? But I would say, the work that I do is physically demanding so I feel very active in what I do in a physical way, but I try to also balance it by doing Pilates. I find that really restorative and strengthening for me. I’m sure it’s no surprise, but I also eat a lot of fresh vegetables.

I received a gift of a juicing machine and I have a fascination with wanting to mix kale with parsley and apple and ginger, and all of it goes in and I watch this beautiful juice come out. So that’s been kind of a fun, new endeavor for me. But I really believe in eating a garden-driven diet because then whatever you’re eating is in season and it’s very local. I get a lot of pleasure even just walking out and snipping all kinds of herbs and then throwing them into whatever I’m preparing. I mean, I just, I love the way that it makes the whole dish taste different, and I feel that that’s good for me. **N**