

FARMERS MARKET

In L.A.'s restaurant gardens, freshness is grown to order

Eateries including downtown's Blue Velvet and Beverly Hills' Blue on Blue make innovative use of their sunny spaces.

By Betty Hallock

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A growing concern

Just ask gardeners Jimmy and Logan Williams of Hayground Organic Gardening (which has plant stalls at the Hollywood and Santa Monica farmers markets).

The father-son team is planting gardens for Santa Monica restaurant Rustic Canyon in the back parking lot, as well as for the just-opened Silver Lake wine bar Barbrix at its entrance.

The Williamses also installed a small but incredibly varied garden out behind three-month-old Huckleberry bakery, where a few parking spaces come face to face with a raised bed filled with chives, blueberries, violets, lavender, red Swiss chard, doughboy and pineapple tomatillos, strawberries, red bell peppers, African eggplants, high country and sweet 100 tomatoes, and something called magenta spreen greens (a relative of spinach). A few strawberries recently dangled over a custom-made planter, lined with cocoa mulch, not far from the bumper of a Volkswagen GTI.

Huckleberry co-owner and pastry chef Zoe Nathan uses the violets for her tarts and has made good use of the lettuces when the kitchen runs out. "It's nowhere near enough to support the restaurant, but we use what we have," co-owner Josh Loeb says. Tending to the vegetables "really makes you honor your farmer. My God they work hard."

So maybe Huckleberry's vegetable patch or the rooftop garden at Blue Velvet (architecturally impressive as it is) isn't quite Blue Hill at Stone Barns, the Pocantico Hills, N.Y., restaurant set on an 80-acre working farm. But Los Angeles chefs and restaurateurs are making use of what they have.

"You'd be surprised what you can get out of an odd space," says Jimmy Williams. "You can grow just about anywhere."