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Permaculture In Practice: SFCC offers homegrown buffet of wisdom

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Posted: Saturday, August 3, 2013 10:12 pm

By Nate Downey
For The New Mexican

There is a patch of ground near the southern edge of town. Not long ago, this landscape was a desolate embarrassment. Today, it's exploding with food. What's even better is that you can be part of it in a wide variety of ways.

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Smack dab on the backside of the Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) campus, a challengingly shaped triangle next to the Culinary Arts Café seemed to be the neglected stepchild of the campus-planning team.

Now, in less than a year, a bountiful garden has produced 100 pounds of chard and kale, two crops of lettuce, and all sorts of edible alliums, greens, herbs, and root crops. One week last June, according to garden coordinator Erin O'Neill, they hauled out 30 pounds of beets.

Fortunately, for the haulers, their harvests have come from 16 raised beds provided by Ken Kuhne. One of the convenient aspects of Kuhne's Grow Y' Own system is that, like any raised bed, harvesting is relatively easy when you don't have to clamber around on your knees. Raised beds are also great in high-traffic areas because they keep people from trampling all over your hard-earned soil. O'Neill admitted that aphids were a challenge early on, but as soon as her group got the hang of keeping the covered beds properly ventilated, the aphids disappeared.

A wise and experienced high-mesa gardener, O'Neill will be teaching a class called Gardening in the Desert this fall as part of the SFCC's continuing education program. Culminating in a big harvest party at the end of October, the class will meet for six Saturday mornings from mid-September through October. (Don't worry, early birds can still hit the farmers' market!) But if you can't make the class, opportunities abound if you'd like to participate in this impressive volunteer-project. More at <http://sfccgarden.wordpress.com>.

But that's not all. This fall at the community college, you can also learn how to grow huge quantities of vegetables in closed-loop systems that are also connected to schools of delicious tilapia, trout, or bass. Yep, fish in the desert. John Eric Scholz, president of the Bioponics Institute, is teaching a relatively new technology in which hydroponics meets ichthyology and limnology — the studies

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of fish and ponds, respectively. (Don't be ashamed; I had to Google them, too!)

Bioponics claims to use 1/50th of the water that conventional farming uses, but it does take some knowhow: a 16-week college-credit course, to be exact. By December's end, Scholz says graduates will be able to build their own bioponic systems and start making money by selling food to humans or even fodder to cattle. Scholz was also quick to point out that a significant part of the class will focus on the business side of a real-world bioponics venture.

A newcomer to town, Scholz is a smart and enthusiastic proponent of bioponics, so he is also offering an introductory class Aug. 9-11 where you can get your feet, or maybe your appetite, wet. See www.bioponicsinstitute.com.

Nate Downey is the author of [Harvest the Rain](#) (Sunstone Press, 2010) and the president of Santa Fe Permaculture, Inc. You can contact him through his new company website, www.permadesign.com.

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