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Growing greener

The Miami Herald Editorial
HeraldEd@MiamiHerald.com

There's a garden growing in the middle of downtown Miami's concrete canyons — and it's organic, no less. Aside from the stunning array of herbs and vegetables growing there, something else is taking root — a sense of community.

The garden, at Northeast Sixth Street and First Avenue, belongs to Miami Dade College's new culinary school a couple blocks away. But as everyone — from MDC President Eduardo Padron to the school's director, chef John Richards, to Gabriele Marewski and Diane Sugimoto of Natural Greenscape, which designed, installed and maintains the edible landscape — points out, the garden belongs to us all.

MDC's garden is a solution to many needs. It is providing not only the produce, but also the learning space for future chefs and food professionals; it has converted a longtime vacant lot, strewn with rocks, rusting cars and who knows what else, into a lush and fertile place of calm. MDC will hold dinners, gardening classes and other public events there, and a farmer's market is in the works.

The garden's creation has been an inclusive endeavor. It's near Camillus House, and homeless men and women took a protective interest in the project.

The visionaries at MDC were not the only ones to see the lot's potential. One man who lives nearby staked a claim long ago, growing pigeon peas there and sharing them with his neighbors. And even though the organic garden now has taken over, amid the peppers and eggplants, the squash and amaranth, the basil, the dragon fruit and the pineapple beds, still grow those pigeon peas — the local resident's bounty to harvest anytime he wants.

As Ms. Marewski said at the unveiling, the garden is part pantry, part medicine chest, part meditation center and, of course, part classroom. Indeed, a lot of good is growing downtown.

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