

Sherri Harvel
Kansas City, MO



Sherri Harvel is an urban farmer in Kansas City, Missouri. Her passion for working outdoors and her dedication to the land has helped transform her neighborhood and inspire others around her to grow.

Growing up, Sherri Harvel did not want to be a farmer; she really didn't know anything about farming at all. One day someone knocked on her door at her apartment complex asking if she wanted a space in the community garden. "I just said yes, I don't think I thought about it too much," says Sherri. And just like that, she began growing food for herself and her family.

A few years later, Sherri moved from her apartment but didn't want to give up her newly found passion. She contacted Kansas City Community Gardens to see if they had any community garden plots available. They did, and while Sherri grew tomatoes, peppers, sweet potatoes, cabbage, green beans and other vegetables there for ten years, she dreamed of having her own farm one day.

Then Sherri got involved with [Cultivate Kansas City](#) (previously the Kansas City Center for Urban Agriculture), an organization that promotes and grows urban agriculture as a catalyst for growth and change. Soon she was inspired to buy her own land, a quarter acre lot five miles from her home that had been vacant for about 30 years. The plot is in a residential area in Kansas City, MO, just one block from the major highway I-70.

After reflecting on the soil and how the roots are the anchors for plants, Sherri named her farm [Root Deep Urban Farm](#). She has grown organically since 2001 and has run a CSA (Community Support Agriculture) program for three years, providing weekly shares of her harvest to six local households. In addition, every Wednesday night Sherri brings her produce to a farmer's market that runs from May to



October. Sherri puts in more than 40 hours a week on her farm, and she works a part-time job to supplement her farm income. CSA members, friends and volunteers help out every now and then, but otherwise Root Deep Urban Farm is a one-woman farm, managed with pride and passion by Sherri.

At Root Deep, Sherri grows sugar snap peas, potatoes, broccoli, cabbage, beans, cucumbers, peppers, onions, garlic and a variety of other vegetables. She has experimented with cover crops, a no-till system and composting to build up the health of her soil. When purchasing the plot, Sherri put in a hydrant that is tapped into the city's main line, for which she pays a water bill. She someday hopes to install a system that can catch rainwater to make her farm more environmentally and economically sustainable.

Sherri's passion for working outside rather than in an office is what first drew her into farming. "When you are out there growing just kind of takes over you," Sherri says. "It's something you feel inside."

Sherri explains the benefits of her farm to the neighborhood this way: "It turned a blighted area into a nice surprise. It has helped inspire other people in the neighborhood to grow food. It feeds my family and my CSA members and has definitely given me an appreciation for the people that grow our food." Sherri has also made many friends at her weekly farmer's markets. As she puts it, "I get hugs almost every market." One of Sherri's proudest accomplishments is inspiring other people to grow themselves.



The farm is quite a spectacle and drivers from her block seem to take a very long time driving past, she says. "They just stop and do a slow crawl down the street just to look. Maybe they are surprised to see it here." Although her plot is a special sight for many, the number of urban farms in Kansas City has grown. Sherri says there are now about 37 farmers markets in the city; just years ago there was less than half that many.

Sherri's advice to people looking to start their own urban farm is to take their time, have goals in mind and plan it out. One of the most important things is to understand the ups and downs of growing. "At times it can frustrate you because it's unpredictable. You can't control the weather for sure and that's a huge factor in how things grow." Sherri also advises folks to ask questions and listen and learn as much as you can.

Even with all the challenges of farming and her extremely hectic schedule, Sherri loves being an urban farmer. When giving tours to visitors and children, she is reminded of where her passion comes from. "It's kind of like when the kids see how things grow... how amazed they are. I think I still have a little of that in me. I really love it, even with all the challenges, I still want to be out there farming."