

# Patchwork Urban Farms

## Cultivating crops in the city



Sunil Patel, photo by Sarah Jones Decker

the south side of Asheville, who shared his vision. “I had been preparing my property’s soil (on Choctaw Avenue) for many years with the intent of farming,” she says. “By the time I met Sunil, it was a real moment of synchronicity.” Choctaw became one of the first sites for Patchwork.

“The Choctaw Avenue site is distinct,” says Patel, “because it’s in an area often labeled a food desert, meaning people do not have easy access to fresh food.” Smith added a permanent farm stand where CSA shares can be picked up onsite.

Patchwork has support from Bountiful Cities, a well established nonprofit whose mission is to teach sustainable agricultural skills to urban communities. Bountiful Cities is hosting Patchwork Urban Farms at its Pearson Garden site, so Patchwork has a model garden to illustrate what can be done at the urban level. “Pearson

by Frances Nevill

While interest in urban farming across the country grows, Sunil Patel of Asheville’s Patchwork Urban Farms aims to show how it can work right in the city’s own backyard—literally! Now in its third growing season, Patchwork’s network of community supported agriculture (CSA) farms consists of 12 separate plots in and around Asheville.

“Amongst our 12 plots we have produced all kinds of fruits, vegetables and small animal products like eggs,” says Patel. “We hope to include honey, meat and mushrooms.”

A student of cultural anthropology, Patel apprenticed for ten years on farms in California, West Virginia, New Jersey, Oregon and Pennsylvania. He moved to Asheville and connected with the local food community. He taught permaculture and market gardening classes at the Asheville Urban Institute and helped start what would become the Urban Farm School. Believing that urban farming was ultimately the path to food security in low-income areas, he took a risk and posted a call online for land partners to launch Patchwork. Through land agreements, landowners exchange the use of their property for shares of Patchwork’s harvest.

Patel eventually met Michelle Smith, a homeowner on

began as a community garden and is now an incubation site and accounts for a large portion of our annual harvests,” says Patel.

What kind of property works for urban farming? It might be an unused lot wedged between two buildings, or perhaps a neighborhood yard that a homeowner would like to see put to good use. Having access to a water source is key and if the soil is rich for farming, that is a plus.

Landowners are encouraged to contact Patchwork if they have property they’d like to be considered for farming. Patchwork hopes to grow in the coming years by having seven more roadside stands and aims for two or three of those to be in food deserts.

“This has been a great experience,” says Smith of her partnership with Patchwork. “This is an innovative model for collaboration across private, public, nonprofit sectors and residents. It helps us become more food secure and it brings our community together.”

Visit [patchworkurbanfarms.com](http://patchworkurbanfarms.com) to learn more or sign up for a CSA membership. 

*Frances Nevill has worked in public relations, conservation, legislative affairs and publishing, and she is a Master Food and Nutrition volunteer through the University of Florida’s Institute of Food and Agricultural Services.*