

100 Gardens
by: Ellen Gurley



Often times when people name their company, it's difficult to ascertain what they do. With 100 Gardens, their mission statement is right there in the title. This operation hopes to have one hundred gardens. What have they done to get started? Quite a lot. Ron Morgan, the proprietor, got the idea for this business when he was an urban planner. He was offered an opportunity to develop a new village in Haiti and due to a lack of funding, he never got to follow through. With a lot of inspiration from an innovative, late, homeless man (yes, homeless ... a George Powell) coupled with his architectural knowledge and romance with this region, he finally followed through on this. With the help of co-director, Sam Fleming (whom Morgan met happening into former Be Well / Queen City Hydroponics), Haiti now has a fully operating (almost sustainable) aquaponics system filling a void in this plant-thirsty community.

Having also fallen in love with helping Haiti, Sam gives me a little lesson, "In the 1600's, the French owned what we now know as Haiti. They basically killed off the entire Native population and they imported about 500,000 African slaves during the same time we (Americans) were doing the same. Haiti was the most profitable slave plantation in the entire world. Most of the sugar cane and coffee for the whole world was grown here. In the late 1700's, some voodoo ceremonies and highly organized secret societies planned a slave revolt and a general" jumped on board "and brought his military power". As a result, "Haiti won their independence and started a democracy. We (Americans) were so scared that our slaves would do the same thing that we put a trade embargo on Haiti" just as did many other countries to halt the spreading of this message. "Haiti went into a state of poverty with this disconnect from the world and over the course of the next two hundred years, they have such little land on which to farm and all of the deforestation" (they cut down trees for fuel) "created erosion making the soil slide off the mountains and into the water. Their coasts are ruined due to all of this sediment and there are 10 million people living on this island with little to go by." Therein lies their collective interest in this region. Lots of compassion and vision.

Now I know what you're thinking? Haiti? Aquaponics? How does any of this affect me and what the heck are aquaponics. You all know what hydroponics are. Sam explains that while "hydroponics is the growing of plants using no soil and added jugs of mineral based nutrients, aquaponics substitute the jugs of nutrients with the presence of fish". So while both use water, there is tilapia poop water literally feeding the plants. No sh*t. This is brilliant. And to address the 'how does this affect me' part of the equation, learning how to set up and operate this type of system in other places, means that they have returned to do some of the same things in our very community while still maintaining their love affair with Haiti.

100 Gardens has set up aquaponic and traditional gardens in Stonewall Jackson Youth Development Center. Some of the food produced there is used in their own kitchens and most are donated to places like Meals on Wheels (to foster an interest in philanthropy / giving back to the community). The participants get to rehabilitate themselves while gaining plant therapy and skills that 100 Gardens promises to employ upon their exit, as Sam says, "in the new emerging, local, food economy".

Garringer High School has used 100 Gardens to come in and set up operations there so that the students can take over. This brought on the system at Myers Park High School (ground broke in June). And, like the name states, they seek to have 100 Gardens, so with your help and interest, there can be one in every area school.

Currently, 100 Gardens operates out of Seeds (at 200 East 36th Street) and hopes to expand into neighbouring greenhouses and into your school, church or community center. Get to know Ron Morgan and Sam Fleming today. They will have a full on garden center by 2016. Good people. Good things.

Fun facts:

There are all male fish used in the aquaponic process.

100 Gardens brews their own fertilizers on site at Stonewall Jackson.

Sam is also the guitarist for local band, the Dirty South Revolutionaries.

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(Photographed here: Ben Smith & Sam Fleming of 100 Gardens)