

# PHOTOS: New Urban Farm in Brownsville to Host Harvest Festival This Weekend



By [Rachel Holliday Smith](#) | October 14, 2015 2:31pm  
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Radishes grow at the Project EATS Brownsville Farm.

DNAinfo/Rachel Holliday Smith

**BROWNSVILLE** — For months, a new urban farm has been taking root at the corner of Chester and Dumont streets in Brownsville.

Since May, volunteers from the neighborhood, a bevy of paid student apprentices and farming staff have cleared and leveled the formerly vacant half-acre lot, built more than a dozen raised beds there, planted kale, beans, eggplant, radishes and lettuce, then watched it grow.

Now, those who run the farm — built for the residents of the Marcus Garvey Village apartment complex next door — are ready to formally introduce it to the neighborhood with the first-ever Brownsville Harvest Festival, taking place at the green space this Saturday.

“There will be games. There will be ... scavenger hunts, prizes. There will be workshops and demonstrations,” said Linda Goode Bryant, director of [Project EATS](#), the farming non-profit that partnered with the owners of the Marcus Garvey complex to build the farm.



*The new farm in Brownsville is set on half an acre of land at the corner of Chester and Dumont streets next to the Marcus Garvey Village apartments. (Photo credit: DNAinfo/Rachel Holliday Smith)*

“[It’s] an opportunity to make the community aware of the fact that this resource is here and let them know the other things we do besides farm,” she said.

The idea to create the Project EATS Brownsville Farm came, originally, from a survey of the people who live at Marcus Garvey, said Raquiba LaBrie, director of community investment for L+M Development Partners, the company that bought the Mitchell-Lama affordable housing complex [for \\$98.6 million last year](#).

“We reached out to residents to get a sense of what their priorities were — interest in services and activities — and one of the number one priorities, interestingly enough, was healthy living and good nutrition,” she said.

In response, L+M contacted Project EATS to get the farm off the ground.

But that initial interest in eating well doesn’t mean all the farm’s neighbors are clamoring for raw carrots, Goode Bryant said, and getting residents interested in the harvest has been “a hard shift,” even with a weekly farmstand at the site where produce is sold at 20 percent below market prices.

“It’s very typical for a mother to come by with children and say ‘I want my children to eat this, but I don’t eat this.’ So you’ve got to go through that dialogue, that transition, more than once and say, ‘Well, why don’t you try this,’” she said.





*Eggplants are one of several crops growing on the farm plot, including tomatoes, string beans, collard greens, lettuce, carrots and radishes.*

With that in mind, the Project EATS team will include tastings, planting demonstrations and cooking workshops at Saturday's event, as well as lessons on how to dry plants, herbs and seeds for tea, cold remedies and storing ingredients like hot peppers for the winter months.

"We're trying to meet people where they're at and find very simple things that you can do to start changing behavior," said Eushavia Bogan, the community project coordinator at Project EATS.

In the longer term, the group hopes to train students and interested adults to farm, using the new space as a classroom. Over the summer, the group hired four students from local high schools to work on the plot, with plans to bring

on more this fall in an after-school program and separate entrepreneurial program to teach people how to make their own all-natural health and body products, Bogan said.



*Farm manager Manuel Poy plants the farm's last round of crops in raised beds, which are used at all Project EATS locations in Brooklyn because of the toxicity of the ground at the vacant lots used by the group, he said.*

“Eventually, that farm’s going to be in operation entirely through community members,” said Manuel Poy, Project EATS regional farm manager for Brooklyn. But in the short term the group hopes, at the very least, to create “work opportunities,” he said.

One Marcus Garvey resident, Johnnie Vickers, has taken full advantage of those opportunities. Vickers, who has lived in an apartment across the street



from the formerly vacant lot for a decade, began volunteering at the site as soon as he saw it being built this spring from his window.

Now, he's paid to work there 12 hours a week doing "whatever there is to do," he said.

"This was a dump at first. And to turn a dump into something of beauty, I couldn't believe it," he said of the new green space.



*Farm worker Johnnie Vickers hauls a sapling off the farm plot to make room for more raised beds.*

And what comes out of the planters he helped build has been a pleasant surprise, too.

"Believe it or not, there's food here that I've never seen before," he said, speaking of rainbow kale and a certain sweet melon.

“I really never did pick something off the plant and eat it. It’s got a taste ... when you cook it, it doesn’t taste like that. But when you eat it raw, it’s like, ‘Wow.’”

*The Project EATS Brownsville Farm is located at the corner of Chester and Dumont streets in Brooklyn. The Brownsville Harvest Festival will take place between 12 and 4 p.m. on Saturday, October 17. For more information visit [projecteats.org](http://projecteats.org).*