

https://www.hvpilot.com/living/dirty-gaia-makes-all-of-rhinebeck-a-community-garden-edible-gardens-tour-this-saturday/article_e5bdce54-24f7-11ee-bc62-cb149c845ec7.html

Dirty Gaia Makes All of Rhinebeck a Community Garden – Edible Gardens Tour This Saturday

by Eric Steinman
Jul 17, 2023



Photo of Rudy McEntire's garden in 2021, courtesy of Dirty Gaia

In ancient Greek cosmology, Gaia is the goddess of the earth and the mother of all creation. In Rhinebeck, we have something called Dirty Gaia, an environmental organization whose mission is to

promote environmental stewardship and bring people together for a more up-close and personal relationship with the local ecosystem.

Founder Sue Sie says that Dirty Gaia was inspired by her experience at a program several years ago at Omega in Rhinebeck – the Ecological Literacy Immersion Program, a month-long project to bring a stronger educational component to the act of gardening. It was there that she teamed up with Kaitlin Doherty, an environmental educator, to help Sie form Dirty Gaia in 2019. They started working on garden education and gave demonstrations on how to successfully construct and maintain raised garden beds.

While Sie doesn't do these sorts of demonstrations much anymore, she still wants to encourage small, simple and sustainable ways of gardening, and if someone were to contact her with such a request, she wouldn't turn them away. Sie said Dirty Gaia is an attempt to address, at least in part, the issue of food insecurity and "give anyone with an interest in growing their own food the tools and techniques to do so."

Saturday's Tour – Traditional, Elegant and Wacky

One of the more social and educational Dirty Gaia programs happens this weekend: it's the 2023 Edible Gardens Tour of local residents' gardens in Rhinebeck and Rhinecliff on Saturday, July 22nd.

This is the third year of the event, and Sie has seen it grow in popularity each year. This Saturday it features nine garden hosts and a maximum of 100 tour participants. Margot Dougherty, a local gardener who has been involved with Dirty Gaia for several years, has seen the event grow every year. "It's a fun event for the visitors, whether they're gardeners or not, and it's also a lot of fun for the hosts to share their gardens and techniques—an eco-conscious mix of traditional, elegant, and exuberantly wacky," said Dougherty.

One stop on the tour is the Rhinecliff home of Rudy McEntire. Sie says his approach is both "vertical and whimsical." McEntire has a very unorthodox, experimental and playful approach – not something you would be likely to see in *Fine Gardening* magazine.

McEntire said that just a few years ago he didn't know the first thing about gardening, but he has developed a "mad scientist" approach to both output and pest control. He plants his tomatoes in straw bales, nearly doubling the output. And to keep away rodents and insects, he combines cayenne pepper and fur from his dog and mixes it into the bales and deposits these spicy fur clumps throughout his garden. However, McEntire's main obsession is growing gourds, which he says are a plant that has

its “own personality” and are so prolific that you “could actually watch them grow over the course of a day.”

Germination

In addition to the Edible Gardens event, Sie co-founded the Seed Library at Morton Library in Rhinecliff with library Director Sandy Bartlett and six other women to try to address the issue of seed sovereignty. She explained that most commercial seeds are owned by a few corporations, and by learning how to save your own seeds, you can grow independently and resiliently without having to purchase seeds each year. And the outreach extends even further, as Sie and Dirty Gaia have recently partnered with Creative Circle Collective, a crafts nonprofit based in Ulster County, on a project to create basket weaving out of invasive grasses and flora. “It is a great way to make lemonade out of lemons,” Sie joked.

“I think Dirty Gaia is hitting its stride these days, in part because we’ve been working with some great partners—Winnakee Land Trust, Upstate Films, Pollinator Patrol Club, Morton Memorial Library, and a host of experts in various fields,” Dougherty said. “We’re really looking forward to an upcoming vermicompost workshop—microscopes, worms, and mud!”

The Edible Gardens Tour happens this Saturday, July 22nd, in Rhinecliff and Rhinebeck. You can register [here](#) and receive a map of the gardens on the tour.