

**Backyard Gardeners Network, Recirculating Farms Coalition Host Community Day In Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward  
*Guerrilla Garden to become first in city with solar-powered hydroponic, living shade structure***

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**New Orleans, LA.** – Lower 9<sup>th</sup> Ward community members, farmers, and volunteers from across the city came together at The Backyard Gardener’s Network’s Guerrilla Garden this weekend for weed pulling, planting, farmer training, and the construction of the first-ever solar-powered living shade structure in the city. Since 2009, The Backyard Gardener’s Network, a nonprofit founded by Lower 9th Ward native Jenga Mwendo, grows not just plants, but also pride and a sense of community in the neighborhood by building on gardening traditions. The area, which was devastated by Hurricane Katrina, continues to face recovery issues, including blight and a critical lack of access to local, fresh foods.

The Guerrilla Garden is a lot that was once seeded by a neighbor who enjoyed watching the community pick what he planted. The Backyard Gardener’s Network acquired the lot after Hurricane Katrina, and continued that tradition, growing edible plants like figs and citrus. Today, the Guerrilla Garden is a hub where gardeners come together and share experiences and expertise.

“Our vision for the Guerrilla Garden is for it to be a vibrant green space where our community can come together and share and learn from one another. It’s about community building, community ownership, eliminating blight and improving food access by leaning on our own cultural traditions.” Said Jenga Mwendo, Director and Founder of the Backyard Gardener’s Network.

Last year, the garden added a storage shed, and rain is collected from its roof to water plants. Volunteers often huddle in small amount of shade it provides to escape the hot sun when taking a break from garden work. This weekend, the Recirculating Farms Coalition, partnered with Backyard Gardeners Network to create a special structure to expand how and what the garden grows and provide a shaded rest and recreation space there.

Recirculating Farms Coalition Executive Director, Marianne Cufone said, “We are so excited about creating this unique feature at the Guerrilla Garden. Recirculating farming, using constantly recycled water without soil as the basis for growing, is becoming very popular across the U.S and especially here in New Orleans, because you can grow fresh food and other plants almost anywhere, on rocky or paved lots, even rooftops; this will be a real asset to the neighborhood.”

The Coalition is using recirculating hydroponics – growing plants in nutrient rich water that is periodically pumped over the plants’ roots by a timer - to grow grape and luffa vines over the piece they built. This will make a living shade structure.

“Eventually we’ll have grapes to eat and make sponges from the luffa – and we have a shady place to relax now too.” Mwendo said.

The hydroponic system is very eco-friendly, using collected rainwater and minimizing the total amount of water used, because water is recycled rather than running off into the ground. And the water pump will run on solar energy, as the garden is “off the grid” – there is no electricity there.

Cufone said “We love to show what can be done using sustainable, affordable and innovative growing methods!”

The groups are also working together to cover costs for the project through a [Kickstarter](#) campaign. Learn more about [the shade structure](#), [the Guerrilla Garden](#), and how to get involved with the [recirculating farming community](#) in New Orleans and beyond!