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Sustainable Lafayette's next film night highlights 'gangster gardeners'

By Pippa Fisher



Tomatoes are a staple for most urban community gardens, which is the focus of the next film being shown by Sustainable Lafayette on Oct. 5 at the Town Hall Theatre. Photo Pippa Fisher

Sustainable Lafayette's third movie night of this year's series is an inspirational story of the human spirit and how urban farming is transforming neighborhoods and lives.

To be shown at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 5 at Lafayette's Town Hall Theatre, the documentary "Can You Dig This" by Delila Vallot looks at the urban gardening movement that is taking hold in South Los Angeles, an area once better known for gangs, drugs, abandoned buildings and vacant lots.

Now, however, neighborhoods are being transformed as "gangster gardeners" call for people to put down their guns and pick up their shovels to create an oasis in one of the previously most dangerous places in America. The movie follows four unlikely gardeners and their personal journeys as their lives blossom along with their gardens.

Sustainable Lafayette board member Kim Overaa, herself a master gardener, coordinates the film series. She explained that for the past seven years the grassroots nonprofit has hosted a summer film series but says that this year they are spreading the films over the whole year. Previously this year they have shown "Before the Flood" about climate change and "A Plastic Ocean," which looks at the devastating effect of the huge amount of plastic that ends up in the oceans. Both screenings sold out.

Overaa points out the relevance of "Can You Dig This?" by saying, "This past year the Contra Costa Master Gardeners have really grown the Community Gardens Project Team. Currently they are working in 16 community gardens throughout Contra Costa County - clearly a need and interest."

Overaa says she has seen the movie three times. "Out of all the films I have seen this pulled on my heart the most. It breaks down the angst some folks may have about starting to grow their own food.

"It is really so simple, as the film demonstrates. The interactions and connections made while tending the soil and delighting in seeing your crops grow is priceless and again so deeply fulfilling on a soul level. You experience hope and anticipation and then joy and it doesn't matter what your socioeconomic status is or is not. It invites all ages and stages to work side by side."

Sustainable Lafayette board member Melinda Krigel emphasizes the community aspect of these movie events. "We hope to make our community aware of many of the issues depicted in these films and provide inspiration for our residents to take action locally and personally. For example, our screening in April - "A Plastic Ocean" - was about the staggering amount of plastics in the world's oceans and the great damage plastics are doing to sea creatures and other wildlife. Here in Lafayette we have been encouraging local businesses to find alternatives to single-use plastic straws and also suggesting that they might have customers 'opt-in' to use straws."

Krigel also points to the rain catcher that was created for the community garden and was decorated by kids at the Earth Day Festival with used plastic water bottles and straws. "It was a complementary way for us to bring attention to the issue with the film showing shortly after Earth Day."

Money from these screenings have enabled the Town Hall Theatre to go "deep green," using 100 percent renewable energy sources for its electricity needs over the next three years.

Following this movie, Sustainable Lafayette is planning on showing Anthony Bourdain's new food documentary "Wasted," although no date is set for that yet.

Tickets for "Can You Dig This?" are \$10 for adults and \$5 for youths and seniors. More information can be found at www.sustainablelafayette.org.

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