

# Self-Guided Tour

of Earthworks Urban Farm



Capuchin Soup Kitchen



## Earthworks Urban Farm

1264 Meldrum Street  
Detroit MI 48207  
313-579-2100  
[CSKDetroit.org/earthworks](http://CSKDetroit.org/earthworks)

### Programs:

- Meldrum Fresh Market (seasonal)
- Bicycle repair workshop (hiatus)

### Wendy Casey

Community Outreach Specialist  
313-579-2100 x2204  
[wcasey@cskdetroit.org](mailto:wcasey@cskdetroit.org)



Welcome to Earthworks Urban Farm. In walking this path together, we invite you to delve into the relationships between people, land, food, and power. If this is your first time to the neighborhood or Detroit, what preconceptions that might be keeping you from seeing what is really here? If you know the neighborhood well, how might you see, smell, touch, or listen in ways that allow you to imagine new possibilities? At the end of the path we are on, we envision a Detroit where all people have access to healthy, culturally relevant foods; a place where our communities make up the leadership of the local food system and where neighbors depend on one another. We're on the path; we hope you'll walk with us.

**1**

You are standing at the doors to one site of the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, which serves approximately 400 meals daily. Here, all are welcome to come eat breakfast and lunch Monday through Friday. We believe all people deserve access to healthy food, which is why most of the produce from our gardens goes straight into meals here at the soup kitchen. For communities of color in Detroit, it is far easier to access low-quality, highly-processed foods like chips, soda, or fast food than to access nutritious food like fresh fruits and vegetables and good sources of protein. Earthworks is one piece of a larger movement working to reclaim community leadership and racial equity in our local food system

**2**

You're standing in front of what was formerly a community garden called Garden of Unity. It was a collection of garden plots stewarded by trainees of the Earthworks Agricultural Training (EAT) Program. EAT was a 9-month training program for adults interested in cultivating agricultural and leadership skills that Earthworks sponsored for 10 years. Sadly, the program came to an end in 2020.

The community garden has since been replaced with a strawberry patch. Because the food that is available to us has everything to do with control over land and resources, the Garden of Unity and the EAT Program worked towards creating a food system in which communities determine what food was grown and how it was distributed. Food is so much more than an intake of calories--it is deeply tied to our cultural identities. Can you think of a food that you grew up eating? What story does that food tell about where you come from?





This structure is a greenhouse, built in 2004. Why do we have such a big greenhouse? We want to be able to provide local gardeners with healthy vegetable and fruit seedlings to grow in their own gardens with. Since this greenhouse was built, volunteers and staff have started and distributed over 350,000 seedlings. Those little lettuce, cabbage, kale, tomato plants have grown up to produce tons and tons of food in Detroit, Highland Park and Hamtramck. The growing and distribution of the seedlings is a part of Keep Growing Detroit's Garden Resource Program, which Earthworks supports.

This is the site of the original garden of the Earthworks program. A Capuchin Friar, Brother Rick Samyn, initiated the Earthworks program in 1998 after hearing from young people in the neighborhood about going to the gas station to buy groceries. Brother Rick grew up working at his family's small grocery store on the eastside, and felt compelled to provide the youth of the neighborhood with an opportunity to deepen their relationship with food and the natural world. Capuchins are men who, following in the tradition of St. Francis of Assisi, have dedicated their lives to God and the service of all creation. The garden was created to connect people to each other, the land, and their food. This first site has been paved over but the work continues to grow.

This site was formerly a small grocery store, one of three small stores that used to be on this block. Now there are none, as food retail has become concentrated in chain supermarkets, which drive independent stores out of business and funnel profits to corporations rather than communities. These profit-driven chains have located themselves in surrounding affluent suburbs rather than in Detroit, where consumers have less purchasing power. This and the unreliability of Detroit's public transportation system makes it challenging for folks without car access to get to places where fresh produce is sold. How might growing a garden allow Detroiters to overcome some of the impacts of these systemic barriers?

We often get asked the question, how do you grow in the winter time? This structure in front of you, our hoop house, provides one method of season extension, allowing us to grow crops over the winter. It helps keep crops protected from frosts and winds in an environment that can be up to 50 degrees warmer than outside temperatures. Surrounding the hoop house, you may see several different varieties of berry bushes. We grow currants, red raspberries, and elderberries in our gardens. Food preservation through jam making, fermentation, dehydration, canning, freezing, and more is a great way to enjoy a wide variety of locally-grown foods year round!





**7** As you walk down Meldrum towards Kercheval, you will pass on your left a series of brick buildings. These buildings are home to the Capuchin Monastery, the Solanus Casey Center, and various offices. Mt. Elliott was the former city limit, and by locating themselves just outside the city limit, the Capuchins were able to keep livestock and grow plenty of their own food. The history of agriculture in this region by no means began with the Capuchins; the Anishinaabe-Ojibwe and other indigenous communities stewarded this land for thousands of years before the arrival of white settlers, and have engaged in agricultural practices on this land for at least 1,000 years. For the Ojibwe people in particular, the place now called Detroit played an important role in the history of their ancestors' westward migration, a response to a the Seven Fires Prophecy which warned against the arrival of white settlers.

**8** Welcome to our largest garden site. This site is the property of our great partner, Gleaners Community Food Bank, which is located in the large building behind the garden. At all of our garden sites, we practice regenerative agricultural practices-this means that we work to give more life and health to the soil than we take out of it. As a certified organic farm, instead of using chemical fertilizers in our gardens, we make and use our own compost to help maintain and improve the fertility of our soil.

**9** As a certified organic farm, instead of using chemical fertilizers in our gardens, we make and use our own compost to help maintain and improve the fertility of our soil. We collect nitrogen sources, such as fruit and vegetable scraps and coffee grinds from the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and local businesses. We layer these with carbon sources, such as leaves. Then we add a small amount of finished compost. This last step sparks the growth of millions of tiny microbes, which turns the pile into super nutritious fertilizer

**10** As you walk back to the Earthworks garage where your tour began, you will pass on your left midway down the block a lot that was home to our Youth Farm Stand garden, formerly maintained by teenagers who participated throughout the year in farming, marketing, cooking, personal development and learning about our food system through weekly educational sessions and garden workdays.





**11** Nearing the end of your tour, take a moment to reflect on what you have seen, smelled, touched or heard today. What made you feel surprised, uncomfortable or curious? Similarly to how the milkweed plant is called a weed but in fact plays an essential role in sustaining the monarch butterfly on its migratory journey, we encourage you to look upon this community with respect for its history, abundance and resilience. What did you see growing in “vacant” places? How might the work you see happening here relate to the place where you live? How will you tell the story of what you learned today? We hope that you will share your reflections with us..







## MAP LEGEND

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Capuchin Soup Kitchen              | 6. hoophouse                               |
| 2. former site of community garden    | 7. Capuchin Monastery                      |
| 3. Greenhouse                         | 8. Gleaners Lot                            |
| 4. original site of Earthworks        | 9. compost area                            |
| 5. former site of small grocery store | 10. former site of youth farm stand garden |

