

# TheTimes

## Local business helps local people grow organic gardens locally

*Don't think you have the time, skills or space for an organic garden? Think again*

BY LEAH WEISSMAN

*The Times, Jan 22, 2009*

**TIGARD – “People like the idea of growing their own food. But most people don’t have a farm. Most people have a postage stamp-size yard or just a balcony.”**

Caroline Lewis admits that not having a lot of space can make it difficult to grow vegetables in a conventional garden. That’s why she and her husband Larry came up with the idea of Verdura Culinary Gardens – a how-to gardening service that provides urban dwellers with hand-built garden frames and containers, irrigation system, specialty organic vegetables, organic soil, custom gardening plan and year-round maintenance from planting to harvesting.

The business officially opens on Feb. 1 and will be run out of the Lewis’ home – though the couple will be spending a considerable amount of time at customers’ homes digging through dirt.

“For the 80 percent of people who want to garden but don’t know how or have the time or space, we do everything,” Caroline said.

And if some people like to garden but don’t have the space, Caroline and Larry will custom-build them a bed to fit any nook or cranny. If customers have the space but don’t know how to garden, Caroline and Larry will draw up a plan from what kind of vegetables to grow, when to plant them and when to pick them. And for those who want to grow their own vegetables and flowers but just don’t have the time for all of this, Caroline and Larry will maintain the entire garden year-round, and the customer can eat the benefits.

The couple came up with the idea for Verdura Culinary Gardens when they both left their high-tech jobs in marketing and engineering and took a year off to re-examine their lives.

“We realized we wanted to do something together that would maybe give back to the world,” Larry said.

Seems like a lot of work, and it is. But the two have been growing their own vegetables for years and feel an affinity with people who care about the quality of food they put into their bodies and knowing where it came from.

“We feel organic is important, and we’ve seen a significant trend in Portland to sustainability,” Caroline said. “I mean, buying asparagus from Peru in the off-season just doesn’t make sense.”



JONATHAN HOUSE / TIMES NEWSPAPER  
Owners Caroline and Larry Lewis of Verdura Gardens have started their own business to help promote the practice of growing small gardens in small areas around the house.

Sustainability to the Lewises means using local, organic vegetable and flower seeds, Douglas fir frames, homemade friable soil, an automatic water drip irrigation system and natural insect repellants such as foot-high frames to keep slugs away.

Each customer is different, so every garden bed will be geared to that person's needs and what they like to eat.

"Let's say it's just you living in an apartment and you like to cook Italian and grow things for your dishes. We'll make a small garden geared to that and help plant tomatoes, garlic, onions and eggplant," Caroline said.

For those who don't have yard space, Larry said a balcony is just as good as long as there's enough sun.

"A foot-wide container that runs the entire length of the balcony can still grow a ton of things," he said.

The cost for all the services starts at about \$600, Larry added.

"It sounds expensive, but this will all last for years and years and years," he said. "And people who shop organically already, \$600 is not an unreasonable investment to make."

"I don't want to sound elitist, but this isn't for the Wal-Mart shopper," Caroline said. "If they think eating a tomato in winter is a good idea, then this might not be for them. It's for those who love to cook and care what they put in their bodies. It's for those who are prepared to make an investment for the quality of their food."

Caroline and Larry said they've already test marketed a number of people to see if they would use the business' services.

"People seem to love the idea," Caroline said. "Especially with the economic downturn people like the idea of growing their own vegetables."

Future plans for the business include offering cooking classes and educational hands-on gardening courses for children.

For more information, go to their Web site at [www.verduragardens.com](http://www.verduragardens.com).