



## When the Growing Gets Tough: Take a Workshop with Silver Lake Farms' Tara Kolla

By Tami Fertig  
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Tara Kolla knows gardening can be daunting. Take her case: She works her half-acre backyard and business, Silver Lake Farms, almost entirely by herself. For the past three years, she's been showing beginners the ropes with semi-weekly workshops in her neighborhood. (The next one is Thu., July 30.) At this past Saturday's 90-minute session, she taught a small group how to keep a vegetable garden in Los Angeles. Key word: keep.

"Anyone could just chuck seeds in and go for it," says Kolla. "But then you need to know about good soil." There are potting mix ratios to remember and crop rotations to be planned. Did you know that carrots love tomatoes? Kolla walks her students through the basics, like why monocropping is so problematic or where to get the best local horse manure, and supervises while they transplant beans, thin (and eat!) radish seedlings and sow two take-home containers full with seeds, selected from Kolla's personal stash of heirlooms.



It's an impressive collection, considering she took up full-time gardening, after being a PR agent, only seven years ago. When she and her husband bought their Silver Lake house in 2001, "it was a field of weeds, lots of junk," she says. "I remember standing there after we had just got it cleared. It was a completely blank canvas. I could have put an Olympic-size swimming pool in there, but I wanted the challenge of growing something. I wanted the land to work for itself."



Until recently, she primarily grew organic flowers such as sweet peas and zinnias, and sold them at local farmers markets, but city licensing troubles caused her to shut that operation down. Now, she focuses on fruits and veggies, including okra and heirloom beans, which will be available in \$20-a-week CSA boxes in September.

Broke? You can pick up tips just by helping out on a local farm or community garden.

*Workshops on composting, soil preparation and keeping a vegetable garden in Los Angeles run through Sun., Aug. 16, various dates, times and locations, \$48.*

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