Hired Gardens and the question of transgression: lawns, food gardens and the business of ‘alternative’ food practice

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Hired Gardens and the question of transgression: lawns, food gardens and the business of ‘alternative’ food practice

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Abstract:
As increased awareness of the industrial-capitalist food system draws consumers into ‘alternative’ food networks, a variety of approaches are being taken to access fresh, local foods. A growing trend within alternative food practice is the increasing number of people who are ripping out their lawns and creating sites of food production in neighborhood spaces. This challenge to the iconic lawn landscape has been viewed by some as both an alternative to the conventional marketplace and an act of transgression against neighborhood norms. This article explores a new strategy that has been used to access food, what I have termed the hired garden, to examine the contradictory implications of yard food production done for hire. Using the space of the yard as a vehicle for exploring transgression and resistance, this paper considers the claim that accessing food through ‘alternative’ means is necessarily transgressive. I argue that such practices are not inherently transgressive or resistant and instead, invite scholars to ask critical questions about transgression, resistance and landscapes of power. At the same time, this article suggests that the recent establishment of businesses that can be hired to install, maintain and harvest vegetables from their clients’ yards is a fundamental cultural contradiction, whereby consumers have competing desires to have easy access to fresh, local foods and to produce their own food. Finally, this analytical look at the hired garden addresses: who are the recipients of such services, and who has access to this type of food, drawing on critiques of the ‘alternative food movement,’ which characterize it as a white, middle-class phenomenon.

Keywords:
gardens, lawns, alternative food movement, transgression, organic food, personal food production, alternative food practice, resistance, race
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On March 20, 2009, Michelle Obama broke ground on the White House vegetable garden and in the words of a Boston Globe columnist, she was able to “drive a shovel right into the heart of that American icon: the lawn.”¹ This act prompted the columnist to ask, “Is it possible that along with local, organic food, the First Garden can promote the thoroughly subversive idea that this symbol has seen its day?”² This question itself begs another, why is the act of removing part of the lawn viewed as such a challenge and how does it reflect other phenomena gaining momentum across the United States, as more people claim a desire for local and sustainable foods? This public removal of grass and subsequent planting of vegetables has provoked controversy and media attention and has sparked a growing movement around the personal production of food. Furthermore, a more recent trend of lawn removal for personal food production has been driven by consumer groups and individuals alike creating a new niche market that has spurred the creation of businesses to provide customers with what I have termed, hired gardens. Through actions such as these, local food movements and alternative food resources become increasingly fetishized, commodified and exclusionary, and questions regarding the discourse of local food, issues of food access, and acceptable use of space have become significant issues of debate.

This article examines the hired garden as a space of transgression and resistance linked to broader movements against industrial-capitalist agriculture and food production, and asks if such gardens can be seen as resistant or transgressive. More specifically, this paper focuses on the phenomenon of small businesses on the West Coast that establish, maintain and harvest vegetables on clients’ personal residential property. It is important to note that such businesses call themselves “farmers” and their clients’ gardens “farms.” However, I have termed the
farms/gardens of these businesses “hired gardens” highlighting that this type of ‘personal’ food production is done by a service for hire. In this case, the issue of paid labor in alternative food production must be addressed as claims that such practices are transgressing against established norms hinge upon, not only cultivating resistance to the conventional marketplace, but also challenging landscapes of power. In this article, I examine the lawn as a space of consumption and question whether the hired garden is an example of transgression in this space, yet at the same time, I argue that the hired garden maintains status quo labor relations and perpetuates socio-economic relationships critiqued in the literature on ‘alternative’ food movements.

Expanding on these theoretical considerations, the main question driving the empirical work in this study was: Does the practice of hired gardening reflect resistance and/or transgression? Secondary questions included: Who is participating in hired gardens and who has access to this service? Why have people elected to have food gardens and their own gardener? Do hired gardens address pressing food issues, such as access to fresh foods? In addressing the practice of resistance and transgression, I use the hired garden to examine theorizations of what Tim Cresswell has described as “intentioned acts” (resistance), positioned to overcome power or mobilize change and the visible “results” of an action (transgression), which, as Mitch Rose has described, have yet to be “conceptualized in terms of conscious ideological struggle.”

Conceptually, transgression assists in the consideration of what is deemed appropriate on the landscape through examining the intention embedded in crossing boundaries or otherwise deviating from what has been established as an acceptable use of space. Cresswell, has observed that “transgression, and the reaction to it, underlines those values that are considered correct and appropriate” thus, providing a space for examination of potential sites or acts of resistance. As such, I examine whether the hired garden is viewed by the business owners and their clients as
resistant to conventional neighborhood landscapes and methods of accessing food. Yet rather than accepting these gardens as necessarily transgressive/resistant, this paper examines the practice and meaning of hired gardening, with an emphasis on visibility and intentionality within landscapes of power, highlighting the need to question how we, as scholars, construct the practice of transgression and resistance. This paper will situate empirical findings from interviews with hired-garden businesses and their clients through a discussion of ‘personal’ food production and an assessment of the consumptive space of the lawn, the productive space of yard vegetable gardens and ‘alternative’ food movements.

Of lawns

After a warning, a ticket and now a misdemeanor charge, an Oak Park, Mich., woman faces up to 93 days in jail for refusing to remove a vegetable crop from her front lawn...city code states that “all unpaved portions of the site shall be planted with grass or ground cover or shrubbery or other suitable live plant material.” Posing the question: Are cabbages, peppers...cucumbers “suitable” for the front lawn?

“That’s not what we want to see in a front yard. If you look at the definition of what suitable is in Webster’s dictionary, it will say common. So, if you look around and you look in any other community, what’s common to a front yard is a nice, grass yard with beautiful trees and bushes and flowers,” Oak Park City Planner Kevin Rulkowski.

This example demonstrates that the lawn has important place in the neighborhood imaginary and helps to illustrate why a change to this landscape is met with opposition. An alternate way of viewing this is through recognizing that the industrial-capitalist food system has created competition between different ideas of what the landscape of personal private property should look like. These ideas are situated in the notion that residential property is a consumptive space with a lawn landscape; residents purchase goods, including food, outside the neighborhood and consume them at home. The hired garden—which has the potential to disrupt this normalized landscape—provides an entry point to examine the meaning of a practice that falls outside this production/consumption divide. Thus, when assessing the consumptive spaces of
residential private property the lawn landscape must be considered. In his work on lawns in the United States, Paul Robbins has noted that:

…the lawn was as much a vehicle for the creation and maintenance of social systems as it was a product of those systems... In the process it became normalized into a predictable kind of aesthetic, one that is inherently cultural in that it came to be normal, expected and desirable.9

This political ecology of the lawn is important to understanding the context for the hired garden as social norms shape how this space is viewed, maintained and consumed.

The private property of the neighborhood is a space of consumption bound up in a lawn landscape. The evolution, as well as the cultural and political ecology of the lawn has been captured in a number of scholarly texts and will not be replicated here;9 however, it is important to tease out key elements to situate the tension between the consumptive space of lawns and the productive space of food gardens.10 The lawn landscape of the English estate was replicated in the U.S., at its earliest, in Jefferson’s Monticello (1806),11 where even the staunchest supporter of agriculture hid his garden out of sight; food production was pragmatic, the lawn an area of leisure; the lawn was (and remains) the centerpiece of the estate.12 In the mid-1800s developers began to re-imagine the U.S. as a garden, with the lawn stretching across open space. Through this re-visioning, the front-lawn aesthetic transitioned from the estates of the wealthy to middle-class, white, American farming communities, where each personal lot was designed to have a frontispiece of grass.13 Eventually, the lawn became the normalized landscape of the typical U.S. neighborhood, firmly cementing the binary between landscapes of production and those of consumption.

Associated with community and a well-kept landscape, the modern lawn has become synonymous with residential private property; yet, despite this characterization, homeowners are judged on the quality and care of their front lawn, which has become an intensely public space.14
Even as neighborhood design has shifted from front-porch communities to private backyards, lawns are maintained; as Fritz Haeg has noted, the front lawn has become “the default surface for any defensible private space,”\textsuperscript{15} whereby, private-property owners are compelled to maintain the neighborhood norm. Rather than a place of privacy, the front yard has become a landscape of public consumption. Even in an increasingly estranged urban culture, the individual is still a part of what is noted by Robbins as “conspicuous consumption,”\textsuperscript{16} whereby the aesthetic of a managed lawn landscape is embedded in white, middle-class, neighborhood culture. There is a socially acceptable look to the front yard that has been carved out by the majority, specifying undesirable characteristics (e.g. weeds) on the landscape. This aesthetic has been narrowly defined and codified, allowing for regulations that penalize homeowners for effecting change on the landscape that defies these codes.\textsuperscript{17} The case presented at the outset of this section and others, such as the couple in Orange County who were sued in 2010 for removing their front lawn to reduce their water usage serves to illustrate this point.\textsuperscript{18} Regulations hold the front yard to strict standards, making alternatives elusive;\textsuperscript{19} yet even without codified standards, the social pressure of having a pristine lawn is overwhelming.\textsuperscript{20} The front lawn has become a cultural norm, produced by political, social and economic forces that are mediated by the larger ideologies of citizenship, community and private property.\textsuperscript{21} Through this normalization of the lawn landscape, people have become “responsible lawn managers;”\textsuperscript{22} indeed, I would argue, that the lawn represents the way that people are meant to live in an industrial-capitalist food system. For as food production moved into the hands of industry and capital, the lawn took over as the most acceptable use of the homeowner’s land. Increased technological innovation and appropriation of food-production activities by capital restructured the way that people lived, produced and consumed.\textsuperscript{23} The neighborhood yard became a lawn landscape, a site of consumption.
This transition is bound up with a much richer and complicated history of the process that David Goodman and Michael Redclift have observed as one in which “…a rural society that largely consisted of rural food producers became one largely made up of food consumers.”

Goodman and Redclift as well as others such as Melanie Dupuis and William Cronon have pointed to industrialization (including improvements in farm machinery and transportation) and urban migration in the 19th and early 20th centuries as the catalyst for the commodification of food and labor which fundamentally changed landscapes of consumption and production.

These changes came about through several interconnected processes, which actively transformed patterns of consumption and production (including land use), the networks used to provision food and the function of daily life.

From the late 1800s on (beginning in the Northeastern U.S.) people relied less on residential spaces for supplemental food production. Changes in transportation and competing ideals regarding the city, nature and residential private property during this period are noted by Kenneth Jackson as consistent with the adoption of new expectations for the neighborhood. In writing about late 19th century suburbanization in New England, he stated that middle-class Americans “no longer needed vegetables from gardens, and, thanks to the mowing machine, a smooth lawn replaced the rough meadow…”. Where many personal yards had once produced vegetables for household consumption, the lawn now dominates. This is not to say that all personal food production ceased during this period, however, highlighting the drivers behind the changing landscape provides a glimpse of how the industrialization of food and the cultivation of a lawn landscape influenced the cultural construction of residential private property.

Of gardens
The lawn has a privileged and iconic place in history, yet simultaneously, gardens too have played an important role. Despite a widespread transition to lawn landscapes and industrialized food, the last century witnessed support for garden programs in the U.S. during periods of economic or social crisis.\footnote{33} From the late 1800s to present there have been a variety of programs, which have promoted personal food production in community gardens, schools and other urban sites. Building on the work of geographer Thomas Basset,\footnote{34} Laura Lawson tracked urban garden programs from the 1890s into the 2000s, arguing that community gardening has been a favorable response to social and economic crises.\footnote{35} Mary Beth Pudup has drawn together these chronicles of crises, arguing that community garden projects have served as “an innovative form of work relief”\footnote{36} and emergency provisioning in times of need. Economic depressions from the 1890s and leading up to World War I led community groups and city governments (notably Detroit, and later New York and Philadelphia) to establish small-scale gardening programs for the unemployed.\footnote{37} Certainly these programs can be associated with economic crises, yet, as Pudup noted, they are also associated with narratives of social crises, where gardens became sites of moral and ethical education for working class and immigrant families.\footnote{38} However, during the food shortages of World War I, there was an appeal to local communities to support communal food production; vacant lots, railroad lands and city parks were given over to the cause.\footnote{39} These efforts, strongly focused on increasing national food supply saw yard gardens as patriotic spaces of food production, while communal spaces were viewed as better suited to community food security.\footnote{40} This particular notion held through the Great Depression, where the emphasis was again on collective gardening directed at community relief efforts. A temporary solution to economic crisis, many of these gardens were later plowed under in the name of economic development.\footnote{41}
Urban-garden food provisioning efforts up until World War II focused largely at the community scale, however, during World War II, the U.S. Government, in an unprecedented campaign, urged homeowners to plant victory gardens alongside their lawns, shifting the focus beyond community gardens to the household level.\(^42\) During this period where commercially produced food was rationed, the government made the victory garden into a site of sacrifice, a way to show patriotism. The home garden became the first line of defense for the country—if people could produce food at home, then more food could be shipped to the soldiers overseas.\(^43\) However, despite this powerful rhetoric, the homeowner’s yard did not morph from lawn to vegetables. The USDA assured victory gardeners that there was “no thought of asking homeowners to spade up their front lawns…to grow vegetables,”\(^44\) the front lawn had to be kept up for troop and community morale alike; thus, the public aspect of the front yard became a way to show national pride.\(^45\) As the lawn became the culturally defined landscape of ‘home’ for the American soldier, the middle-class homeowner’s victory garden was relegated to a corner.\(^46\) Again, this period of personal food production was carved out as a temporary fix. In spite of the productivity of yard vegetable gardening, in mid-1944, government food rationing was cancelled and the quantity of produce from the victory gardens fell in tandem.\(^47\) Gardens were symbolized as spaces of sacrifice and thus, the yard returned to a place of leisure. By the end of the war, home vegetable gardens were largely abandoned. The victory garden did not stand in opposition to the industrialization of the food system, but was rather an endorsement of it: household access to industrial food was rationed and, through victory gardens, was sacrificed for those who needed it most, the troops.\(^48\) When rations were no longer needed and access to the industrial food system was fully reinstated in the post-war period, home food production decreased.
The post-war applications of industry allowed for innovation in the means of production, which further aided the expansion of the industrial-capitalist food system. Fresh food was increasingly replaced with industrial food products, the number of farms in the U.S. decreased (while acreage per farm increased)\(^{49}\) and food production thrived as a capitalist enterprise provisioning goods to the American consumer. As a result of this, in the 1970s, in conjunction with heightened environmental awareness, there was a renewed interest in community gardening. Programs such as Gardens for All (Burlington), Picardo Truck, now P-Patch (Seattle) and Green Guerrillas (New York) promoted this interest.\(^{50}\) Attributed to countering environmental crises, these gardens came to represent a new form of stewardship in the city that still exists today.\(^{51}\)

Two important points should be taken from this discussion: first, gardens have played an important role in U.S. history and second, widespread promotion of vegetable gardens has been largely confined to periods of crisis.\(^{52}\) By prescribing gardens as a response to crisis, support is garnered for designating spaces on the landscape for vegetable gardening, indicating that there are some places—and times—where gardens are acceptable on the landscape and others where they are less so. Community gardens are established where the government or other supportive groups deem them appropriate and removed from that space when they are viewed as no longer socially necessary or as an impediment to economic development; in the same vein, personal food gardens were established out of sight, in the backyard. Sarah Moore has argued that the focus on a crisis-mode of food provisioning, has excluded gardens from the urban imaginary, a portrayal suggesting that personal food production is “incommensurable with urban space…”\(^{53}\) Similarly, the prevalence of the lawn and “lawn subjects”\(^{54}\) demonstrates that they are also ‘incommensurable’ with the front yard. Thus, disrupting the visible, consumptive lawn landscape for vegetable production has been viewed as transgressive, as in the case of the White House
Moreover, the example of the homeowner in Oak Park, who was cited with a misdemeanor for growing a vegetable garden in their front yard, serves to reinforce this point. However, the visibility of personal food production and the negotiation of labor relations are key elements of this perspective. Whether these gardens are in the front yard or backyard and who is performing the productive practices speaks to their potential for transgression, points I shall return to in the following section.

**The ‘Alternative’ Food Movement**

As a result of the globalization and “capitalistization” of the food system (which is articulated by Branden Born and Mark Purcell as “the capitalist logics of industrialization,” that is global in nature), the population now cultivates lawns and “confronts food.” As capital increasingly changed the nature of agricultural inputs via the industrial appropriation of rural activities and substitutionism in food manufacturing the connection between producer and consumer as well as production/consumption was severed. The loss of this connection has not gone unnoticed and producers and consumers alike have expressed concern over the quality of food that is produced by the industrial-capitalist agricultural system. After three generations of U.S. citizens have moved away from a tradition of farming, a renewed attention to food production has emerged. This is demonstrated in the upsurge of participants in alternative food practices as well as in the interest in personal food production. There have been multiple producer and consumer responses to the industrial-capitalist food system that are now discussed under the banner of an ‘alternative’ food movement. These responses are varied, as some operate under the existing food network—retail organic, for example—and others rely on direct markets, similar to community supported agriculture (CSA). The hired garden is just one example of the
myriad of alternatives and the establishment of these services cannot be understood without first thinking about critical discussions of the ‘alternative’ food movement.

It has been argued that the ‘alternative’ food movement is characterized in academic circles as a rejection of the global-scale, industrial, environmentally destructive, conventional food system. However, as Jeffrey Follet has suggested, this argument stems from what alternatives are not, making any rejection of the conventional food system a potential alternative. Furthermore, discussions regarding alternatives tend to lump what are actually distinct movements together, homogenizing a set of diverse responses to the conventional industrial-capitalist food system. Certainly, there are common themes in these responses; however, each is embraced in different ways and at different scales, and not all constitute alternatives to the industrial-capitalist system. If this characterization, which articulates the global, the industrial and the unsustainable, is inverted, a more narrowed definition of alternatives is made apparent. For example, it could be argued that an ‘alternative’ food movement is: embodied in production that is ascribed to a foodshed (small-scale, bio-regional, endogenous, and embedded in place), cultivated without extensive use of petrochemicals, environmentally friendly/sustainable, and directly purchased from the producer by the consumer. Although this inversion of the definition is still imperfect, differences between alternatives become immediately apparent, as some embrace organic (environmentally friendly) production, but do not sell directly to consumers, while others utilize industrial farming practices but sell at the county farmers market. The scale and remunerative qualities of these responses vary as well, as some may be personal food production on rooftops (self-exploited labor) and others may be commercial operations that provide hundreds of CSA subscriptions each week (paid labor). The
purpose in teasing this out is to recognize a multiplicity of alternative movements rather than a homogenous ‘alternative’ food system.

Additionally, in identifying varied responses there emerges another equally important critique regarding inequalities and injustices embedded within these networks. In recent academic work, scholars have examined the phenomenon of food deserts, describing urban landscapes that have little to no fresh or whole foods for sale, bringing to the forefront issues of access, affordability and racialized landscapes. Although many responses to the industrial-capitalist food system have been hailed for their achievements in their attempts to address such issues, a critical examination of ‘alternative’ food movements has been advanced by multiple authors, and points to inconsistencies in access to alternative food systems as well as demand for those alternatives. For consumers, resisting the industrial-capitalist food system, it is argued, is a luxury. The work of Alison Alkon, Julie Guthman and Rachel Slocum narrows this critical examination, focusing on the racialized geographies of alternative food practices. In particular, Guthman has shown the racial assumptions that influence community projects centered on alternative foods, adding Slocum’s component of “bringing good food to others,” or put differently, embedding prescribed food literacy within the movement. The emphasis that such projects place on education, Guthman has noted, invokes a “missionary zeal” that is prevalent in white cultural histories and colonial projects which “seek to improve the other while eliding the historical developments that produced these material and cultural distinctions in the first place.” This is important to the discussion here, because although many times the problems that are identified when devising alternatives stem from structural issues of poverty or racism, the target audiences for alternative food and/or food education, in many cases, are not the recipients.
Beyond these concerns, as more alternatives are devised to counter conventional methods of producing and accessing food there are other critiques that must be considered. The mainstreaming of alternatives has made it increasingly difficult to identify what alternative, transgressive or resistant food practices are, or could be. Furthermore, DuPuis and Goodman have noted that the question of who should define what is local and sustainable presents a further challenge; Born and Purcell have cautioned academics to be wary of the panacea of the local or the “local trap” as “there is nothing inherently good about any scale” and Guthman has advised us that the organic label can be misleading as well. The hired garden clearly bears a relationship to burgeoning ‘alternative’ food movements and it too can be critiqued for reproducing inequalities that play out in similar responses. Yet, from the perspective of the proprietors, the hired garden is a response to the industrial-capitalist food system that is small-scale, local, and environmentally sustainable. The purpose of the hired garden is to replace the lawn with an organic vegetable garden, making the yard a site of production and consumption. Yet this plays out very differently on the normalized landscape of the neighborhood as these businesses are hired, not to substitute vegetables for grass, but to allow a particular clientele (in this case middle to upper-class homeowners) to tap into new ways of accessing food and using their private property.

It could be argued that in creating a yard food garden, private-property owners are recreating their neighborhood space and confronting the normalized landscape of the American lawn. Returning to a discussion of the outpouring of opinion surrounding the most public of lawns in the U.S., it is easy to see that a challenge to this landscape does not go unnoticed. In reporting on the White House vegetable garden, the New York Times author noted that the question of a garden became “more than a matter of landscaping… [it] had taken on political and
environmental symbolism.” Indeed, digging up the South Lawn to plant a vegetable garden became a symbolic act. Roger Dioron who spearheaded the ‘Eat the View’ Campaign (which promoted the First Garden) argued that the White House garden “became the most visible and emblematic landscape in the country, demonstrating that gardens could happen anywhere.” Michelle Obama’s vegetable garden, in theory, represents a challenge to the global food system and the lawn landscape. In practice, beyond the political message they portray, the vegetables grown at the South Lawn site are just another ‘hired garden’ being worked by producers on behalf of consumers.

Nonetheless, through this rhetoric, replacing the lawn with a vegetable garden has come to represent a challenge to the globalized, ecologically destructive, industrial-capitalist food system; challenging the dominant discourse of food production and consumption, and transgressing against the binaries private/public, ordered/messy. Producing food instead of a lawn is seen as ‘out of place’ and viewed as a transgressive act. The deployment of this rhetoric signals that home food production is necessarily resistant. As Raymond Bryant and Michael Goodman have noted, consumption has become a new form of activism, in a reversal of popular forms of resistance (e.g. boycotts) consumers are now actively resisting through their purchasing choices and productive practices. Yet, as Justin Spinney has pointed out, the “meanings and uses of space” cannot be wholly reliant on what is deemed as their appropriate use; he argued instead that “the normalizing effects of spatial practice must be interrogated in order to avoid conceptualizing practices which appear to be transgressive as inherently resistant.” As discussed above, the front lawn, despite being private property is an intensely visible public space; historically, the vegetable garden has been appropriate in that space only if it is socially mandated (such as, as Moore has indicated, in times of crisis). The less visible
backyard is viewed as a more appropriate space; it is socially acceptable to have a vegetable garden in the backyard. Vegetable gardens have had a very specific role to play through history and within that role a specific space. Front yard vegetable production signals a threat to the cultural significance of the lawn landscape of the neighborhood, while a backyard garden conforms. Therefore, attempting to understand the meanings of ripping out the lawn to grow food is complicated, as the question of visibility of production looms large. Furthermore, such acts cannot be understood as inherently resistant when the labor relations of food production remain unchanged.

**Hired Gardens**

In 2007, a reporter for the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* postulated that “there’s a growing interest in turning lawns and landscapes into pesticide-free, food-yielding gardens. More urban residents are seeing the potential for growing their own fruit and vegetables, but many don’t know how to dig in.” In their work on edible backyards Robin Kortwright and Sarah Wakefield have noted that “residential food gardening has the potential to shift both perceptions and practices in our relationship with food and the urban environment. Food gardening is immediate and personal...” The ideology that shapes the desire to grow your own food goes beyond subscription to the varied movements against the global food system. It is not enough that food comes from the local farmers market or a CSA, food must come from *your* personal property, *you* must learn how to grow your own food and *you* must reestablish a respectful relationship with the land. Yet, what is the political nature of such an act when a company is hired to install and maintain a vegetable garden for you? The hired garden is a cultural and economic contradiction where the white, middle to upper-class consumers who have embraced ‘alternative foods’ have competing desires for “getting back to the land” and having a convenient source of
local, fresh, organic food. Through hiring a business to cultivate food on residential personal property, the separation between producer and consumer remains, yet the site of production is closer to home. The existence of such services raises questions that complicate notions of transgression and resistance with regard to personal food production as, in practice, the ‘personal’ relates, not to the laborer, but to the space of production (personal private property). Moreover, hired-garden businesses are popularized and subsumed under trendy and commodified mechanisms for ‘going locavore,’ which deemphasizes the transgressive elements of non-commodity production.

In 2008, the New York Times ran an article that profiled a business called MyFarm: the author wrote of the San Francisco-based business as an example of the “highest form of luxury,” a business that “will build an organic garden in your backyard, weed it weekly and even harvest the bounty, gently placing a box of vegetables on the back porch.” The people using this business were pronounced “lazy locavores,” who are described as part of the American contingent that look for convenient solutions to problems, in this case, those folks who want to be part of the local-food movement but have little desire to “get their hands dirty.” On the West Coast of the U.S., the business model used by MyFarm has been replicated and several businesses have recently cropped up to accommodate this new niche market. Curious to determine who these “lazy locavores” were, I identified two businesses on the West Coast to interview about this new way to access ‘local’ food.

Methods

In their recent article on backyard gardens, Kortwright and Wakefield identified a gap in the research on food production, arguing that little work to date has discussed household food gardens. My study interrogates questions specifically related to food production by businesses
on clients’ residential private property, looking at the residential yard as the site of both production and consumption. To address the questions introduced in this article, the aims and practices of the businesses as well as their clients were examined under the auspices of resistance and transgression against neighborhood norms and the industrial-capitalist food system. For the purposes of protecting the privacy of the business owners and employees interviewed for this article, pseudonyms have been assigned to the businesses. I conducted multiple personal interviews with the business owners and employees at the “Backyard CSA Company” and the “Neighborhood Farmer” and with select clients of the Neighborhood Farmer over a five-month period in 2009-2010. I also analyzed popular media, from both local and national sources, pertaining to hired-garden businesses on the West Coast more generally to identify how these services were being portrayed and who the target audience was. To evaluate my research questions, this section of the paper will discuss the hired-garden phenomenon from three perspectives; first, through popular media accounts, second, via the owners of the Backyard CSA Company and Neighborhood Farmer and finally, through the clients of the Neighborhood Farmer.

*Popular Media*

Not unexpectedly, the news media makes wide-ranging social claims about hired gardens. Some accounts argue that such services “fit into the urban agriculture movement, in which cities, residents, nonprofit organizations and activists are reclaiming urban spaces for food production,” while creating more food-secure spaces. Other media sources extol the ecological benefits of the hired-garden business plan, encouraging people to “join the pioneering cousin of community supported agriculture and dial a significant share of your household’s food miles down to zero,” claiming that such services allow people to eat fresh and local foods while
reducing their environmental footprint. Despite some latent critiques of the businesses and their clients as being elitist, the overall tone is one of praise, whether it is for being able to relax while someone else does the weeding, or for reducing the distance food travels from thousands of miles to several feet. The two main themes emerging from media accounts are the creation of the lazy locavore and the virtues of the businesses that serve them.88

The hired-garden businesses are generally profiled in the leisure section alongside ‘staycations’—where city dwellers can pay to vacation on a working farm and wake early to complete farmyard chores—urban homesteading, mobile organic grocery stores and boutique meat.89 This squarely places these businesses as services for an elite minority, falling cleanly into critiques of alternative food practices, which cater to a relatively wealthy and white population and within this particular context, to residential property owners.90 The hired gardens, from the perspective of the media, exist to provide a service that takes the ‘hard work’ out of having a vegetable garden.92 Depicted as practical magic, media accounts explain that new services can help people become the “ultimate locavore” by providing an “instant backyard vegetable farm.”93 Beyond the sales pitch for the lazy locavore, articles written about hired-garden services make broad claims about the development of new urban ecologies and reestablishment of human-environment relationships. Sunset Magazine profiled a newer Seattle-based hired-garden service, focusing attention on “the mission” of a “celebrity farmer” to create organic gardens for the whole of the greater Seattle population.94 The author emphasized the growing vegetable vocabulary of the clients, the closeness of the garden food and the intimate relationship of the farmer and the clients to their vegetables and land.95 This language and framing allows the hired-garden services to be proclaimed as an important change in neighborhoods and for the urban
population, and a clear alternative to conventional food systems through reaching out and getting people to connect with their food and their environment.

_Hired-Garden Services_

As nascent businesses, the owners of the hired-garden services that I interviewed have relied on the media to help advertise their trade. To this end, they have been profiled in local and national newspapers, internet blogs, social media sites and national magazines. This media attention has been a bargain, which has benefitted their businesses but also complicated their aims. The primary goals of each of these businesses, while still tied to the demands of the marketplace—they need to stay in business—are rooted in much deeper concerns about the environmental ills of the industrial food system, urban food security and the connection between people and their food.\(^6\)

The proprietor of the Neighborhood Farmer detailed the benefits of the hired garden against the backdrop of environmental problems of the industrial food system. Indeed, the common environmental complaints surrounding industrial agriculture, from reduction of biodiversity to excessive oil utilization, are challenged by hired gardens. Synthetic fertilizers, pesticides and genetically modified seeds are not used by the businesses. Instead, organic gardens are built with seasonal change, regionally appropriate plants and biodiversity in mind. Composting systems are established to collect garden waste and finished compost is used to encourage plant growth and minimize weeds. Drip irrigation and timers are put in place to water plants directly and efficiently. The cost of transportation is limited to maintenance by the businesses (for the Backyard CSA Company, this was done by bicycle whenever possible). Furthermore, the removal of grass takes mowed clippings, synthetic fertilizers and other chemicals out of the waste stream while reducing the water consumption of the household.
significantly. Replacing the lawn with a garden effectively changes the landscape from being ecologically consumptive to ecologically productive. Beyond environmental concerns, which are confronted by the businesses and are embodied in the construction of organic vegetable gardens, it is pressing urban food issues, including access to fresh foods, food literacy and food security, that drive the work of the business owners; the target recipients of these services being identified as those with minimal access to fresh and local foods. In an interview with the proprietor of the Backyard CSA Company, they imagined urban neighborhoods as a community of food growers where each city block had the ability to sustain itself, an issue the owner felt was important for mitigating potential future urban food shortages. For the owner, urban self-sufficiency and food security were the motivation for the business.

While these visions point to potential new futures in neighborhood landscapes, the owners are each working toward this future in their own way. The Neighborhood Farmer, in their desire to make communities more self-sufficient, have begun installing gardens on downtown rooftops and now hold community classes on canning and preserving, raising chickens as well as fruit, herb and vegetable cultivation. To strengthen and lead their vision, the owner of the Backyard CSA Company established a CSA as part of their service; their goal was to grow more food than was needed in each hired garden and to create an experience of neighborhood grown food for those without gardens or real private property. People were attracted to this aesthetic and some clients even donated the entire contents of their garden to the CSA to have the Backyard CSA Company’s maintenance service free of charge.

However, the target recipients, who are characterized as being food insecure or living in food deserts, in most cases are not the people who adopt these services. Neighborhood Farmer rooftop gardens (to date) produce greens for local restaurants and are limited to those buildings
that were constructed to withstand the substantial weight of the garden beds. Trendy downtown
restaurants, which seemingly cater to the media’s lazy locavore, rarely enter into discussions of
community food security. For the Backyard CSA Company, the market for hired-garden
vegetables itself was uncooperative, as demand for the CSA spread over their city of operation,
rather than remaining, as they had hoped, within neighborhoods. The Backyard CSA Company’s
vision of secure urban neighborhoods through community supported agriculture was predicated
on a neighborhood scale, not city scale. The costs of transportation between neighborhoods and
the inability to compete with other CSA services in the area, coupled with inconsistent demand
caused the Backyard CSA Company to disband in the fall of 2009 to rethink their business
model. Where the Neighborhood Farmer was able to harness a growing interest in local foods,
led by consumers that can pay, the Backyard CSA Company became a victim of disjointed
demand.

In each case, the neighborhood has been viewed by the business owners as an area of
intense demand and spatial waste; too much land laying fallow, too much dedicated to the lawn.
To put their visions into action, each company had a similar yet different strategy. Each business,
at its inception, began with a small work crew (generally the owners), and as orders for new
garden installations and maintenance increased, hired seasonal labor. The Backyard CSA
Company, when in operation, fell more into the high maintenance category. Employees would
install, harvest and maintain gardens as well as transport baskets of food between neighborhoods
and directly to the doorstep of those participating in the CSA. The owner of the Backyard CSA
Company noted that despite lack of involvement in planting and picking, the clients were
interested in what was happening in their gardens; they began to recognize what vegetables were
growing there and when they were ready to be picked. For the owner, that represented a far better connection between the clients and their food than before.

The Neighborhood Farmer maintains a different approach, having set up their service so that people may choose their level of involvement. The Neighborhood Farmer begins with a consultation, works out a budget with clients and gives them an idea of what is appropriate given the space they have. For some clients, the Neighborhood Farmer’s involvement ends here; they take the advice (pay a consultation fee) and create their own garden. The next step is the removal of the grass and the garden installation. Again, there are some clients who take over at this point, the stress of planning and installing completed for a fee. The installation entails the planting of perennials, annuals and (if so desired) fruit trees or bushes as well as an irrigation system. All of the vegetable plants are seedlings that have been propagated from seed in the Neighborhood Farmer’s greenhouse. If clients so choose, they can pay to be a part of the maintenance schedule of the business. There is a fee structure that allows for different levels of maintenance, from near-complete maintenance including the weekly harvest of ripe vegetables and fruits to basic weeding, pruning and, when necessary, gentle reminders for the clients to harvest their ripe produce. The owner of the Neighborhood Farmer believes that no matter the level of involvement, clients become enthusiastic about the changes wrought in their yards. To a certain extent, the Neighborhood Farmer tries to minimize their involvement in the process, allowing their clients to, at some level, be connected to their garden and their produce. The owner argues that if “you make it too easy for them they won’t have an interest and it defies the connection.” The owner reiterates that the goal is to be an educator, to start a project, which will cultivate an interest and educate people; they remain tightly focused on getting people to connect to their food.
The owners of both the Backyard CSA Company and the Neighborhood Farmer agree that the lazy locavore, if such a person exists, is not the sole intended recipient of these services. As noted above, the Neighborhood Farmer owner has a strong desire to be an educator through the service. The owner has expressed a desire for people to want to learn about their gardens, about the vegetables that grow in the region, for them to not be intimidated by dirt. The owner feels that the label of lazy locavore is misplaced; arguing that the clients are not elitists, but are average people who want to be connected to their food source, who want to learn, but simply do not have the time to either start a garden or wade through the plethora of organic gardening information that now floods the marketplace. They have strict budgets with their clients and they try to make their service available to everyone. Education is at the forefront of the work of the Neighborhood Farmer, which the owner admits, might not be the best business plan overall. While the overarching desire of these businesses is to incorporate food literacy in food consumption, their reach extends to their clientele alone.

Clients of the Neighborhood Farmer

When the clients of these services began to think through their desire for a personal food garden some also raised questions about the industrial food system. In interviews with the clients of the Neighborhood Farmer the main forces driving yard food production appear to be environmental consequences of industrial food production, food miles and the disconnect from the sources of food production. Clients of the Neighborhood Farmer have a desire to have a food garden and have found that hiring a company to render this service is the best method to accomplish this. To discuss this in further depth, drawing on interviews with clients and examples of hired gardens, the three levels of maintenance that are provided by the Neighborhood Farmer will be evaluated below. It is particularly telling when, dividing by level
of maintenance, how each hired garden fits into broader ‘alternative’ food movements and
prescribed notions of space. In my interviews I learned that the clients who were further removed
from the maintenance of the hired garden, were also the most distanced from the so-called
alternatives, while those who maintained their own gardens had a greater knowledge and critical
view of the industrial-capitalist food system.

There are very few gardens that are wholly maintained by the Neighborhood Farmer;
however, the consistent maintenance creates a level of involvement, which produces a different
type of client. This client is more likely to fit the profile that the media describes, though rather
than lazy, this client is more of a ‘detached’ locavore. Focusing in on one particular client, the
hired garden, in this case, is a space where a relatively wealthy family with grown children has
opted to change their yard aesthetic; to landscape with vegetables rather than grass. The grass has
been completely removed from the side yard of the house and beds have been artfully drawn into
the landscape. The side yard can be observed by an immediate neighbor and the landscape can be
viewed by passersby from the street. It is intended to be a visually pleasing space. In some ways
it actually maintains subscription to the cultural norm of an ordered yard. The client has become
aware through consultation that there are some vegetables that will grow in their climate and
others that will not. Beyond this they are only vaguely aware of what is growing in their garden,
what each plant is actually producing and how much it produces. When asked about their
commitment to organic and local production they are ambivalent. One client explained that they
“do it because it’s fun and an interesting use of our land. I don’t have any sense of the local food
movement aside from supporting farmers’ markets.” Building from this response, I found that
these clients, in general are relatively unaware of ‘alternative’ food movements more broadly,
but understand the basics of the existence of the farmers market and why it represents a different
option from the grocery store down the street. These clients already had secure access to fresh vegetables and in their estimation, use the grocery store as much as they did prior to establishing a garden service, although their purchases changed as the garden production changed. For example, one client noted that the heightened production of lettuce and other greens in their garden during the summer allowed them to focus their purchases on other goods at the grocery store.

Despite this initial detachment, as the garden grew, so too did their interest in the vegetables growing there and in the care of the space. Upon spending more time in the garden, a client remarked that they discovered that their garden had “a bunch of cabbage and we have a lot of stuff I don’t even really know what it is, so I emailed and sort of asked what they planted… I’m not a farmer…and I’d like more guidance as to how to do the part of it that I am doing, how to grow things better and what to look for with pests or problems with the plants and most importantly when to harvest.” The educational aims of the Neighborhood Farmer, while perhaps not playing out the exact way that they had envisioned, have even made an impact at this level of involvement. The client perspective has shifted; yet, the hired garden for them is not intended to change the way they access food or to disrupt the landscape. For these clients, paying a company to provide labor in a garden in the backyard of their home is not markedly different than paying a farmer to grow vegetables on a farm outside their neighborhood. Their relation with the marketplace has not fundamentally changed. They have, however, created a change to their yard space, in some cases, such as the client quoted here, a visible one, which may suggest transgression against the neighborhood norm of an ordered lawn landscape. Indeed, perhaps at first glance this use of space seems ‘out of place,’ however, careful maintenance by the business preserves the manicured landscape of the neighborhood, bringing it back ‘in place.’
Turning now to a less intense maintenance schedule, I found that the desire to actively participate in alternative food sourcing and landscapes increases. In this case, the day-to-day gardening (harvesting, minor weeding, watering) is done by the client. One particular client in this category had an emotional attachment to their garden having grown up on a farm. This garden had been originally installed in the backyard by the client, where they slowly “chipped away” at the grass, getting rid of more each year despite complaints from the surrounding neighbors about “the mess.” This garden was visible to a few neighbors, being bordered by other residences, yet was not visible from the street; the front lawn remains. After a few years, increased demands on time and inability to physically handle the labor the garden required, they hired the Neighborhood Farmer. Again, in this case the ability to access fresh and local foods without a yard garden is easily done; in fact, this client remarked that the “temptation of going to the grocery store” was very great. But that it was more rewarding to gather vegetables from their own garden. In fact, they found that they go to the grocery store far less during the summer, the garden meeting their basic vegetable needs. When discussing whether the garden was a way to resist the industrial food system, this client noted that they did not like the changes that had happened during their lifetime, the increased use of pesticides, food miles and lack of freshness for example. This client remarked that “strawberries shouldn’t crunch!” They found that keeping the garden was important to having food that was unadulterated and truly fresh. What they liked best about the service was that they could do as much or as little in the garden as they wanted: “for somebody like me just even going out to pick the vegetables gets you outside to breathe and feel and away from the confines of artificialness, so that’s an emotional thing as well as a practical thing and a physical thing.” For this client it was about the ability to choose what they were growing and the capacity to be a part of it.
This particular client had an informed awareness of the food system. The garden has offered an opportunity to remain a step removed from it. The excitement in showing grandchildren how corn and potatoes grow, teaching that strawberries when picked ripe do not crunch, were delights fostered by the interaction with the garden. This household spends as much time in the garden as possible and while they do not claim membership in a particular movement per se, they believe they are making a choice with their garden to not purchase industrially produced food. Although the removal of the grass was met with criticism from neighbors nearby, defying the lawn landscape was a practical element, not the driving force behind the creation of a garden and they felt comfortable with a vegetable garden in their semi-private backyard. This example demonstrates that positioning transgression and resistance is complicated when assessing alternative food practice. The clients in this case have no desire to transgress against neighborhood norms, yet choose to maintain a degree of autonomy from the industrial-capitalist marketplace.

Finally, shifting to an example of a ‘no maintenance garden,’ there are those clients who set out to actively resist the marketplace through planting a garden. The Neighborhood Farmer has many gardens that they have either prepared the yard or installed the garden itself and then the clients do their own maintenance and harvesting. In an interview with a client who had a backyard installation and now does all their own maintenance, I found that the people who spend the most time in their garden are those who feel the most profound connection to ‘alternative’ food movements and to cultivating resistance to the industrial food system. They have challenged the way that food is accessed and have found it very rewarding. For another client, the motivation for hiring the Neighborhood Farmer was “all about eating and shopping locally and this is hyper-local, we’re trying to move more parts of our lives to be more sustainable and
to keep the kids eating healthy.” Already feeling as though they were actively resisting the industrial-capitalist food system, through participation in a CSA and buying food from the farmers market whenever possible, these clients had a desire to grow their own food. However, they felt that they lacked the time and the knowledge to start their own backyard garden and hired the Neighborhood Farmer to help them begin. The success that came from growing their own food spilled into wanting to learn more about preserving it and for the first time, in addition to their CSA and other market purchases, these clients are savoring their homegrown food year round. For this group, ripping out the grass was of little importance. For these clients it was intentioned resistance to the industrial food system; it was about growing their own food instead of buying ‘food from nowhere.’ The change to the landscape allowed them to feel like more active participants in the movement. At the same time, however, neighborhood norms are retained and transgression is therefore muted.

**Conclusions**

While the *New York Times* article placed the clients of these businesses as pure faddists, and previous accounts of changes to the neighborhood landscape have posited such practices as transgressive; a closer examination of the practice of hired gardening suggests a more nuanced conclusion. The hired-garden business owners have observed that their clients are “average people” who are rethinking either the way that they interact with the marketplace, with their yard, or both. In this case it would be easy to conclude that yard vegetable production is—as it is conceived by the hired-garden businesses—resistant, due to the disruption of the hegemonic norm that is embodied in a lawn landscape and an industrial-capitalist food system. However, as Spinney has argued, examinations of resistance must take care to look at the more subtle embodiment of practices, extending analysis beyond “essentialized hegemonies.” The
practice of hired gardening complicates such ideas, as the placement of gardens in the backyard rather than transgressing actually conforms to the neighborhood norm. Furthermore, by being open only to residential private-property owners, and in essence, by landscaping with vegetables, the hired garden may actually serve to reinforce the power of the ordered neighborhood landscape and the commodification of alternatives.

As such, two key elements can be teased out from this study: first, the business owners seek to reduce land dedicated to the lawn in their communities, yet the practice of hired gardening has been largely contained to the backyard and is advertised as a backyard service by the businesses. Second, the business owners see the hired garden as an alternative to the industrial-capitalist food system, one which allows clients to regain their connection to their food source. However, the businesses (for the most part) provide the labor and their clients are already able to access alternative food networks and, in all cases, do not rely on the hired garden as their main source of food. These findings suggest that the businesses, in their desire to teach, seek out particular subjects who are constructed as resisting the norms that have been established through the evolution of the industrial-capitalist food system and the ways it has transformed the neighborhood landscape. Complicating this notion is that the garden space, and the labor that created and/or maintains it is hidden in the backyard, while the food that comes from the garden is immediately visible as the property of the homeowner—‘these vegetables are mine, they came from my backyard.’ However, the owners of the vegetables are detached, rather than actively practicing resistance. Indeed, my research suggests that if personal food production on residential private property is viewed as inherently resistant then hired garden clients are paying businesses to practice (or perform) this resistance on their behalf. In this case, the lack of intention on the part of the clients—their unwillingness to take out the front lawn, provide a substantial portion of
the labor, or be reliant on the hired garden as a food source—suggests that although yard food production may be considered ‘out of place,’ hired-garden practices are not. While these gardens do contribute to food awareness (for clients) and represent a new method of food access within growing alternatives to the conventional marketplace, they also serve as a reminder that actions, practices, and performances positioned as alternatives, or as transgressive/resistant should be carefully examined.¹⁰⁵

Neighborhood landscapes cultivate both community and individual identity and enforce particular behaviors and social norms, shaping what an acceptable use of space is and who can participate or benefit from it.¹⁰⁶ Despite the possibility of resisting neighborhood norms through ripping out the front lawn, hired-garden clients have remained “lawn managers,” passively accepting the normalized landscape.¹⁰⁷ The hiring of a business to cultivate vegetables in the backyard is a consumptive practice, bound up in existing landscape, market and labor relations; the hired labor ensures that these backyard gardens are not weedy, messy or otherwise ‘out of place,’ instead creating landscapes of vegetables that are carefully maintained. Thus, rather than incorporating personal vegetable production as part of an ‘intentioned ideological struggle’¹⁰⁸ that crosses boundaries and disrupts the established landscape, the hired garden creates subjects that accept yard vegetable production as a commercial activity suggesting its normalization as a commodified practice.

Additionally, trying to address pressing food issues through different methods of supply, while targeting food literacy and property ownership, does not circumvent Guthman’s critique of ‘bringing good food to others’ nor does it challenge the problems associated with structural racism and persistent poverty which underpin them. The option to transgress, in this case, is limited to those people who already have the opportunity to participate in alternative food
markets and to some extent have already begun to move towards autonomy from the industrial-capitalist food system. However, hired-garden businesses, while trying to increase knowledge, have made their services available to people who have an interest in ‘alternatives’ rather than embarking on a crusade to educate everyone. Although the business owners have strongly argued that hired gardens are an integral part of ‘alternative’ food movements, in recognizing the more nuanced issues of class and property ownership, it must be noted that access to these services is limited to those who want it and can afford it, creating hired-garden subjects. That the clients have made the decision to hire a business to grow on their property the same produce that they could purchase at the farmers market or otherwise, to some extent, reveals their detachment. However, the example of the no-maintenance clients demonstrates a greater commitment to ‘alternatives’ and indicates that hired gardens have transgressive potential, as the more involved the clients are in the cultivation and harvesting of the produce from their gardens, the more they are making an active choice to limit their interaction with the industrial-capitalist food system.

The clear ambitions of the businesses stand in contrast to the more detached motivations of their clients. Yet, despite representing varied ideas of what constitutes resistance—from active to unintentional—no matter how it is positioned, the hired garden is not transgressive. Ultimately, I would argue that because of this, the hired garden demonstrates a tension that is written into the landscape, which allows scholars to use theorizations of the transgression of socio-spatial boundaries to ask questions about resistance and power. Examining the practice of hired gardening assists in thinking through relations with landscapes of power such as the front lawn and the industrial-capitalist food system. Situating the hired garden within this complicates thinking on resistance, which helps to identify how varied actors are ‘caught up in different forms of power,’109 whether it is through examining everyday acts, terrains of contestation, or
participation in movements. The existence of hired-garden services shows that there is a multiplicity of responses to the conventional food system, some of which articulate a different landscape and others that conform. Additionally, such an examination offers an opportunity to rethink how normative landscapes could be disrupted through transgression and/or resistance.

2 ibid.
3 In trying to understand personal food production through the hired garden, the question of paid labor in the yard garden is raised, significantly challenging potential claims that this type of ‘alternative’ food practice is resistant or transgressive. Although this is characterized as “personal food production,” the use of paid labor is an intriguing entry point (which will not be explored at length in this piece) for future theorizing of how these gardens may or may not be resistant. For example, what does it mean to hire someone to do your resistance for you? And, drawing from the work of Don Mitchell, how does this landscape expose or obscure the labor relations that produce it? Don Mitchell, The lie of the land: migrant workers and the California landscape (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
5 Cresswell, In place/out of place, p. 21.
8 Paul Robbins, Lawn people: how grasses, weeds, and chemicals make us who we are (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2007), p. 32.
10 Robbins notes that despite the fact that grass is an agricultural good, “urban lawn owners are consumers of lawns, rather than producers of agricultural goods… [it] is not cultivated for sale as crop, but is consumed indirectly as aesthetic, personal and property values.” Robbins, Lawn people, p. 373.
11 It is generally accepted that the U.S. lawn, in its current incarnation evolved from the English estate. In the early eighteenth century, the manor houses of the English elite underwent a tremendous shift in land use, whereby sites of food production were increasingly displaced by grass. Bormann, Redesigning; Haeg and Balmori, Edible Estates; Jenkins, The lawn, p. 16.
12 Bormann, Redesigning; Haeg and Balmori, Edible Estates; Jenkins, The lawn.
13 Haeg and Balmori, Edible Estates; Jenkins, The lawn; Robbins, Lawn people.
14 Paul Robbins, Lawn people.
15 Haeg and Balmori, Edible Estates, p. 20.
17 Paul Robbins, *Lawn people*.
20 Jenkins, *The lawn*.
21 Robbins, *Lawn people*.
22 ibid., p. 130.
27 Goodman and Redclift, *Refashioning nature*.
28 Grain sales in Chicago are an early example of this. Cronon, *Nature’s metropolis*.
29 Goodman and Redclift, *Refashioning nature*.
31 ibid. p.54.
32 Jenkins, *The lawn*.
35 Lawson, *City bountiful*.
36 Pudup, ‘It takes a garden’, p.1229.
37 This period also saw the introduction of school garden programs and vacant lot cultivation. Lawson, *City bountiful*.
38 Pudup, ‘It takes a garden’, p.1230.
39 Lawson, *City bountiful*.
40 War garden educational materials focused on helping new gardeners find pleasure in home gardens, yet stressed that the home vegetable garden should not replace an ornamental one. ibid. p.139.
41 ibid., p.114.
42 By 1920, almost half of the U.S. population was urban, while simultaneously, a suburban lifestyle was increasingly accessible; suburban development, which connected commuters to cities by rail, concentrated on converting land from agriculture to housing; each house with its own patch of grass. Furthermore, the increasing use of cars coupled with the introduction of the Federal Housing Authority (1934) led to tremendous growth in the suburban housing market, making home ownership and lawns available to more people (a trend that continued in the post WWII period). Robbins, *Lawn people*, p. 30.
43 This is not to say that there were no community garden efforts, indeed, the USDA emphasized suburban home gardens and urban community gardens as feasible victory garden sites. Yet in the post-war period many community victory gardens were abandoned as the middle-class increasingly acquired homes and private yards. Lawson, *City bountiful*, p.193, 202.
46 ibid, p. 95.
Furthermore, the victory garden was posited as a way to unify communities during a time of conflict, yet this was largely the unification of homogenous communities, as historian Amy Bentley notes that “such endeavors were open only to whites or were segregated.” Bentley, *Eating for victory*, p.140

ibid., p.138.
47 ibid.
50 Lawson, *City bountiful*.
51 Lawson, *City bountiful*; Pudup, ‘It takes a garden’.
53 Moore, ‘Forgotten Roots’, p. 175, pp.188-189.
54 Robbins, *Lawn people*.
55 The city claimed that the vegetables violated an ordinance that stated that only “suitable” plant material could be planted in the front yard. The charges were eventually dropped. Steven Hoffer, ‘Oak Park’.
57 Haeg and Balmori, *Edible estates*.
59 ibid.
60 Very generally, community supported agriculture (CSA) is a direct purchasing program between the farmer and the consumer where the consumer agrees to pay the farmer for a share of the harvest at the start of the season and receives a ‘box’ of seasonal vegetables weekly throughout the season.
62 ibid.
68 ibid., p. 436.
69 ibid.
70 DuPuis and Goodman, ‘Should we go home’; Born and Purcell, ‘Avoiding the local’ p. 195; Guthman, ‘Fast food, organic food’. 


Notwithstanding this, the labor practices in the White House garden and the hired garden vary as some work (maintenance, harvesting) is done by the inhabitants.

Cresswell, *In place/out of place*.

The removal of the lawn meets with opposition, as neighbors decry the change, citing fears of rodents, reduced home values, untamed nature, unsightly rotting vegetables and seasonal variation. Haeg and Balmori. *Edible estates*.


A point for future study is that this may also change the division of labor in the yard. Academics focused on the lawn concur that the lawn is the domain of men, while bringing food to the table is one of the many roles within the household that women perform. By ripping out the grass, the male space of the yard is reconfigured; it becomes a dynamic space where there are no defined gender roles.


Moore, ‘Forgotten Roots’.


ibid.


Kortright and Sarah Wakefield, ‘Edible backyards’


Alkon, ‘Value to values’; Guthman, ‘Bringing good food’.

Indeed, the owner of a Portland-based service in an interview with *The Independent* envisioned new housing developments reserving an acre of land for a neighborhood farm. Doyle, ‘Going organic’.


Thomson, ‘Organic gardens’.

ibid.

All interviews for this study were conducted between September of 2009 and May of 2010.
At both businesses the owners would provide their own labor and in the spring and summer months hire additional hourly laborers on a seasonal basis for installation and maintenance of clients’ gardens. At the Neighborhood Farmer, all winter season vegetable starts and greenhouse activities were undertaken by the owners on the business property.

It is important to note here, that not all clients have their entire grassy area replaced. Some clients preferred to maintain a patch of grass, either for familiarity or as an area of play for their children and/or pets. Furthermore, for the businesses, the decision to remove the front or back lawn was *purely practical*, depending on which area received the most sunlight.

To borrow from José Bové, François Dufour, and Gilles Luneau, *The world is not for sale: farmers against junk food*, (New York, Verso, 2001).

Severson, ‘A locally grown diet’.


Even the White House South Lawn is considered the ‘backyard,’ as the vegetable garden, the First Lady’s South Lawn Series and the long-standing Easter Egg Roll invite the public to share the First Family’s *backyard* and encourage people to see that they can replicate such activities in their own backyards. Melissa Blaustein, ‘Mrs. Obama Kicks Off the South Lawn Series’. The White House Blog (25 May 2010)


This too would fall into the trap that Loretta Lees has identified (following from Cresswell) of making resistance meaningless when it is seen everywhere. Loretta Lees, ‘Towards a Critical Geography of Architecture: The Case of an Ersatz Colosseum,’ *Ecumene* 8, no. 1 (2001): 51–86.


Robbins, *Lawn people*; Spinney, ‘Performing resistance?’.

To borrow from Rose, ‘The seductions of resistance’.