



## **Vegetable Passions of the Next President**

By Susan Clotfelter, Interview with Roger Doiron, Mentions Rose Hayden-Smith

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If you saw the front page of The Denver Post yesterday, you know that Coloradans — and most Americans — have gone mad, totally bonkers, for food gardening. Sales of fruit trees and vegetable seeds, subscriptions to CSAs and community gardens, calls to extension agents for gardening information — all have gone through the greenhouse roof this spring. (**To read more**, click [here](#).)

Well, thought Roger Doiron, why shouldn't the next Eater in Chief have access to the same local, fresh, organically grown produce his citizens are lining up to grow? Doiron, founder of Kitchen Gardeners International, called his campaign "Eat the View" and is signing up folks [here](#) to urge the next president — whoever it is — to set an example of sustainability and honor White House tradition by planting a food garden. Doiron's not some green, counterculture, anti-political uber-left fringie; he's a married father of three. Here he is, walking his talk on the front lawn of his own white house in Maine:

**DI:** How did you come up with the idea for Eat the View?

**Doiron:** It's something I've sort of fantasized about while working on sustainability issues for years. And I have the privilege to work with Rose Hayden-Smith, a garden historian, and she got me thinking about the Victory gardens during the early half of the last century. One of the first things John Quincy Adams, when he moved into the White House in 1800, was plant a vegetable garden. And we're looking at a changed economy, with and \$4-a-gallon gas. Suddenly, this idea, which might have been discarded at another time in our history, doesn't sound as weird or wacko as it might have before. This made sense in the past, and suddenly it makes sense again.

**DI:** How do you see this happening?

**Doiron:** Only if a lot of different people embrace it. We're talking about this as a producing garden on the White House lawn, with some of the produce going into the White House Kitchen. But there should also be some kind of outreach into the Washington, D.C. community, with, say, half of the produce going to a local food bank. We're facing a trend toward incredible urbanization, and we need to think about how we're going to live with that. Urban agriculture is going to play a larger role in the future than it ever has before.

**DI:** And this would be an organic garden?



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**Doiron:** Why not set that as our objective? We have to set the bar high. I have yet to meet someone who's all charged up about gardening and wants to use a lot of fossil fuels and chemicals to do it. I can't imagine the Obama or the McCain family saying, "Let's do this using chemicals." This harkens back to what groundbreaking chef Alice Waters called "The delicious revolution." Well, it's all well and good for the Alice Waters of this world to be eating this way — fresh and organic and local — but we need to be thinking about how to bring the delicious revolution to a broader population.

**DI:** You see this as a nonpartisan thing.

**Doiron:** What I think is important about the idea is that it really grabs people. It has the potential to do what all candidates say they want to do, which is appeal across boundaries. And I know that it's possible, because I happen to live in my own little white house. We're managing to meet half of our vegetable needs on a third of an acre in Maine, which doesn't have an ideal climate. With eight full-time gardeners on 18 acres, imagine what the White House could do.

**DI:** What's next for your website, Kitchen Gardeners International?

**Doiron:** It started with a single web page in 2003. It's evolved into a network of 6,000 gardeners from 100 countries. We're now finding ore ways to bring people in, and we've added a social networking aspect to bring more voices in. That's what I'm trying for in my life, is connecting the dots. We've had a video about making strawberry jam, then a book review, we've got instructional info, and food for thought. We want to inspire people to be involved in the process of food. To have you be able to say, "I can do some of this myself." This lifts some of the pessimism about the food supply. It shifts the conversation. We're not talking about suddenly doing without; that's what scares people. We're not talking about scarcity; we're talking about abundance. I'm seeing abundance now, in little potato plants in my garden.

To read more about what kitchen gardeners are up to worldwide, check the top of the blogroll to go to the KGI website. To read a blog post by garden historian **Rose Hayden-Smith**, click [here](#); to read more about her, try this [link](#).