Growing Gardeners: What You Missed at Rooting DC
By Sarah Eppley

Gardening in DC? It’s actually far more common than one might think. This was made especially clear this past Saturday at the eighth annual Rooting DC forum. Hosted at Woodrow Wilson High School by DC Greens, the free event brought together organizations and individuals from all around the district, all united by a common passion for gardening and healthy eating.

The all-day forum boasted an info fair featuring 60-plus nonprofits and a treasure trove’s worth of free seed packets, as well as 4 one-hour educational workshop sessions. Presentations covered a wide variety of growing and nutrition topics.

Between the morning and afternoon sessions, a cohort of unique “foodie”-friendly food trucks were available to satisfy everyone’s cravings, offering a tasty variety from vegan to Indian and Vietnamese to grilled cheese. A hands-on children’s program was also held all day to engage kids while their parents attended the workshops.

Attending the forum, it was actually very hard to decide which sessions to attend. Everything sounded so interesting! Workshops with names like Bioregional Herbalism: 5 Herbs from Seed to Medicine Cabinet, Sex in the Garden, and The Dirt on Dirt, made choosing only 4 all the more difficult. In the end, I opted for a cooking class led by a high school group called Brainfood, a lecture by an herbalist, and two sessions on inner-city farming and food equity.

The cooking class, Healthy Cooking on a Budget, introduced me to a delicious and simple Spicy Thai Basil Lettuce Wrap recipe. The high school students, dubbed “Community MVPs,” presented both a meat version made with ground chicken or turkey and a vegan version with tofu. They also recounted with plenty of authenticity and humor some of their fondest cooking experiences during their time at Brainfood.

The 5 Herbs from Seed to Medicine Cabinet lecture focused on bioregional herbalism, highlighting the medicinal properties of local plants in five categories: native, naturalized, invasive, Chinese and Ayurvedic, and common garden plants. As I found out, many could be made into teas, tinctures, or poultices to treat various ailments. For instance, burdock leaves are antimicrobial while its roots promote healthy liver. Mimosa can be used to lift the spirits and alleviate insomnia and stress. Astragalus roots can help patients with weak immune systems or allergies. This workshop was taught by Holly Poole-Kavana, Herbalist with Little Red Bird Botanicals.

Deeply Rooted: Using History and Anthropology to Create a Sustainable Food Justice program, a presentation on food justice by American University doctoral candidate Ashante Reese, analyzed the anthropological and historical angle of inequities in the food system in a small, predominantly African-American community of northeast
DC. Reese communicated her field research, which consisted of interviews with members of the community and investigation into the history of food production and distribution there. She then encouraged her audience to apply her techniques, namely asking and listening, in their own work toward extending food equity.

Finally, *Bringing the Neighbor back to the Hood through Agriculture* looked at community gardens and urban farms through a fresh lens. A workshop taught by two young urban growers, Xavier Brown and Myesha Taylor. Xavier Brown is the Director of Urban Agriculture with The Green Scheme, a non-profit organization that specializes in utilizing agriculture as a way to rebuild communities. Myesha Taylor is the Perlman Place Farm Manager with Real Food Farm based in Baltimore City. Connecting the benefits and healing properties of such agricultural endeavors to the seven principles of Kwanzaa, the presenters shared their experiences from garden projects in DC, Baltimore, and North Carolina.

All in all, Rooting DC was a roaring success. The size of the crowds in attendance throughout the day was impressive. The workshops were full, varied, and fascinating. Everyone came away with new food knowledge and, likely, a half-dozen seed packets in their pocket. For more information and presentations, be sure to visit rootingdc.org.