

As the popularity of urban farming spreads across the country, Delta College is planting its roots in this growing trend. For those interested in achieving a green thumb, Delta is inviting students and the public to sign up for a series of classes which will guide participants through the steps needed to grow their own food.

The series is a new addition to Delta's curriculum of non-credit lifelong learning classes. The six classes planned for this semester include:

- Soil Health and Amendments (2/9/15, 3/10/15, or 3/14/15)
- Starting Seeds and Companion Plants (2/11/15, 3/12/15, or 3/21/15)
- Growing in Small Spaces: Raised Beds, Cold Frames, Hoop Houses (2/16/15, 3/17/15, or 3/28/15)
- Backyard Poultry: Raising Chickens (2/18/15 or 3/19/15)
- Building Your Own Farm Equipment (2/23/15 or 3/24/15)
- Taking Your Goods to Market (2/25/15, 3/26/15, or 3/28/15)

To host the classes, Delta has partnered with the Wildroot Food Collective, a group devoted to urban and organic farming in Michigan and the Tri-City area. This semester's courses will be held on Delta's main campus, with a focus on applied learning and hands-on lessons.

Linda Petee, Delta's sustainability coordinator, is responsible for Delta hosting the series and will be an instructor for several of the classes. Petee got the idea after contacting several local farmers and organizations to see if they were interested in working with Delta's compost program.

"These classes will offer help people who don't have a backyard or room for a garden," said Linda Petee. "We want people to partner up with their community, work with others to make space available, and grow food for other people."

Petee says there are plans to continue beyond this semester and when the weather clears up students will have plenty of opportunities to get their hands dirty. "We have plans underway to have students volunteer on the farms and set up internships with Wildroot."

The college has invited three presenters from Wildroot Food Collective, to host the classes alongside Petee. Each presenter has experience with local, urban and organic farming and works with local community-supported agriculture groups, food banks and restaurants to distribute their product.

Fred Monroe graduated from Michigan State with a degree in Horticulture and has spent several years in northern Ohio as a farm manager. After Monroe had his first son, he felt inspired to return to his hometown of Alma and started up Monroe Family Organics.

Jordan Goss runs a small-scale farm in Kawkawlin with his fiancé Kayli Maslin. Goss Farms is dedicated to entirely natural growing; the farm uses only non-GMO crops and abstains from synthetic fertilizer or pesticides.

Laura Stockwell grows and sells high quality herbs, baked products and garden goods out of her small farm in Bay City. The sole proprietor of the Dancing Rabbit LLC, Stockwell sells her products through the Wildroot Collective, and takes delivery orders on her website, theDancingrabbitllc.com.

“Our farming is about helping people get high quality food to people as efficiently as possible,” said Monroe. “There aren’t a lot of farms like ours in the area, and I hope to spread more knowledge to people who are interested in growing for themselves.”

Monroe says the program will work to fill the gaps in student knowledge, and will cater lessons to the needs of the class. Lessons will focus on pragmatic and useful techniques that students can use in their own gardens, with a focus toward hands-on learning.

“We hope to see a high level of interest in these classes,” said Monroe. “We’ve talked about exploring different subjects and opportunities in the future, as long as we get support from the community.”

The series begins Feb. 9 with each class meeting twice a week. Classes cost \$29 each, or the whole series can be purchased for a discounted \$149. Registration is ongoing and available until each classes starting date; registration is open for everybody and available through the LifeLong Learning Center on Delta’s website

By Gregory Horner