

Profile

TENDING THE LAND

Joe Jenkins is not only helping to heal his wife — he is becoming a prized food source

Most chefs have to venture deep into the country to find a good source for their produce. At Julep's, all it takes is a trip to the bar.

Officially, Joe Jenkins is the Southern-themed restaurant's bartender. Unofficially, he is, in the words of chef Cory Chaney, the "in-house farmer."

He's also something of an accidental farmer. As a kid, helping out at his uncle's Alabama farmstead on weekends, he routinely complained, "It was too much work."

He and his uncle both laugh about that, now that Jenkins operates his own farm.

Bowtide Farms was born in 2014, when his wife was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, and Jenkins sought good clean fiber to help manage the disease.

Recalling those sweltering Alabama summers, Jenkins planted raised beds of leafy greens and tomatoes around the deck and garage of his Brook Road home. He soon discovered that 15 pounds of San Marzanos a week was more than the couple could eat. So, he gave some to coworkers.

His chef was smitten. Chaney appreciated how Jenkins' greens — run through a bubbler, a Jacuzzi motor with a water tank that gently removes dirt — stayed fresher longer than what he was already buying. Soon, the chef was getting yields almost daily. Wasabi greens, a lettuce with a horseradish bite, inspired a salad on Julep's menu, with pears and a sweet sorghum vinaigrette.

With an eye toward selling to other chefs, Jenkins took



Joe Jenkins

over his neighbors' yards in exchange for landscaping services, partnered with Josh Dzeigeil, the boyfriend of a co-worker he knew from Tarrant's, and pored over a book called "The Market Gardener," a primer for grossing over \$100,000 on 1.5 acres, as if it were the bible.

Bowtide — the name nods both to his sartorial taste and love of Alabama football — began filling 50- x 30-inch beds with 96 tomato plants (whereas traditional methods would have dictated that farmers place tomatoes two feet apart, with only 45 plants in the same-size plot).

Like many small urban farmers, Jenkins prioritizes quick-to-harvest seeds, finished in fewer than 60 days. By contrast, large, commercial farms tend to grow one crop that takes longer to finish, like corn, on big swaths of land.

Jenkins's client list has expanded to include Edo's Squid and Dinamo, and he is currently awaiting his certified naturally grown status from the USDA.

Pretty astonishing for a three-quarter acre farm on the North Side — and from a farmer who almost wasn't. —Genevlyn Steele

Events

MARCH

1-4

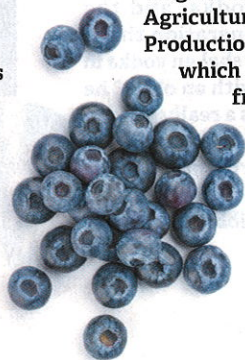
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24-25

APRIL

All, Aboard

The Virginia Wine Expo, one of the largest wine and spirits events in the state, is pulling into Main Street Station, and promises some of the best that the state's wineries have to offer. The event also has a series of six culinary events, as well as walk-around grand tastings from selected vineyards from Virginia, and the guest regions of Oregon and New Zealand. Prices vary. For tickets and information, visit virginiawineexpo.com



Ripe for Ideas

Virginia State University's College of Agriculture hosts its annual Berry Production and Marketing Conference, which helps growers take their berries from the ground to consumers.

With a focus on sustainable blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries, the conference is \$20, with lunch included. The conference lasts from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. ext.vsu.edu

Hilltop Blarney

With more than 30 Irish vendors, dozens of musical acts, and a hefty portion of children's entertainment, the Church Hill Irish Festival starts on Saturday with a short parade. On Sunday, it begins with a charity 5k. \$5. churchhillirishfestival.com