Learning Objectives

1. Explore green roof systems and how they can expand beyond the traditional into the edible.
2. Learn about permaculture and designing beautiful gardens with edible plants.
3. Understand the challenges and opportunities in designing rooftop gardens for food production and community use.

Schedule

7:30 AM 1 McCormick Place Roof Garden
8:55 AM 2 Gary Comer Youth Center
10:45 AM 3 Heartland Alliance
11:50 AM 4 Roof Crop
Molly Meyer
mmeyer@omni-ecosystems.com
Molly Meyer is the CEO and Founder of Omni Ecosystems, LLC in Chicago, IL. Molly earned her B.S. and M.S. in Earth Systems from Stanford University, and she studied and installed all varieties of green roofs as a Robert Bosch Fellow in Germany. She has brought this expertise to the United States where she invented Omni’s living wall panel and patent-pending green roof drainage system. Molly is also the Co-Founder and Co-Manager of The Roof Crop, LLC.

Alex Poltorak
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As an Education Pioneer Fellow, Alex learned the impact that lack of healthy food access has on kids in Chicago schools. To confront the issue directly he founded Urban Canopy as a “for purpose” business whose vision is to create a sustainable and equitable food system. Since starting in 2011, Urban Canopy has started several community farms/gardens, a city-wide food scrap collection program, small CSA membership and runs 8 farmers markets in “food desert” neighborhoods.

Ben Helphand
bhelphand@neighbor-space.org
Ben Helphand is the Executive Director of NeighborSpace, a nonprofit urban land trust dedicated to preserving and sustaining community managed open spaces in Chicago. Helphand is a co-founder and board president of the Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail that advocated for the conversion of the Bloomingdale rail embankment into what will be The 606 park and trail network. He was awarded a Chicago Community Trust Emerging Leader Fellowship.

Annamaria V. Leon
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Annamaria León has a Permaculture Design Certification and a Certificate in Sustainable Horticulture and Sustainable Agriculture. In 2014, she received the Cook County, Chicago-at-large, Peggy A. Montes Unsung Heroine Award. Currently, Annamaria is developing and managing the Edible Landscaping Division at Christy Webber Landscapes. In addition to designing edible landscapes, she teaches Permaculture and is a Traditional Chinese Feng Shui Consultant.

Presenters with Co-Leaders:
Liz Dafoe, ASLA ldafoe@uplanddesign.com
Camille Applewhite, ASLA capplewhite@dwp ltd.com
The largest Farm-to-Fork Rooftop garden in Chicago is a soil based garden located at McCormick Place West. The garden planted and designed by Chicago Botanic Garden’s Windy City Harvest Program started as a 20,000 square feet vegetable and herb garden. Windy City Harvest is an apprenticeship program that provides students with a hands-on certificate course in sustainable urban agriculture. The Farm is partnered with SAVOR…Chicago, the caterer for McCormick Place, which utilizes the produce to reduce their environmental impact and meet economic goals.
GCYC was established in Chicago’s Greater Grand Crossing Neighborhood in May 2006. The Youth’s Center’s mission is to provide the support for all of its students to graduate from high school, prepared to pursue college and careers. Programs within the 80,000 square-foot facility include college readiness, athletics, academic tutoring, performing and visual arts, health and wellness, culinary arts, technology, media and horticulture. The Youth Center draws its primary membership from the immediate neighborhood as well as youth from throughout the South Side. The award-winning Gary Comer Youth Center was designed by John Ronan Architect and includes a green roof, rain gardens and outdoor classrooms on their campus. A 1.75 acre youth education and community garden located across the street from the youth center also supports the center and community.

Gary Comer Youth Center
Marjorie Hess
GCYC Garden Manager
Harvest Commons, formerly one of the worst transient hotels, was rehabbed by Heartland Alliance into a historically preserved, sustainable development with 89 units for residents. Residents have all experience homelessness, are at risk of homelessness, and/or who have been formerly incarcerated. Harvest Commons redefines “green living”, offering residents the opportunity to volunteer in the onsite urban farm, with the flock of chickens, and to learn about nutrition and green living from partners Heartland Human Care Services and Heartland Health Outreach.
The Roof Crop is an urban farm dedicated to local sustainable food production. The new facility was a gut rehab of an existing building on Chicago’s near west side. The Roof Crop’s commercial green roof farm is a comprehensive green roof system developed by Omni-Ecosystems and supports a large and diverse variety of plants at a shallow depth and ultra-lightweight. The facility which also houses a produce processing plant, Omni-Ecosystems headquarters and an event space provides a case study in zero maintenance, revenue-positive, ultra-lightweight green roof systems.