

Rolling Hills Herbs & Annuals Interview

Personal History:

- When did you start farming? Did you grow up on a farm? As a very young child I can recall my Mother tending a small vegetable garden behind the small duplex we called home in El Monte. When we moved to north San Diego County at age 9, my Mother continued growing food for our family in the gardens of a fellow church member. While we never grew up on a farm, we always grew some of the fresh herbs and vegetables that made their way onto our dinner plates.
- What brought you into farming (i.e. inheritance)? I became a state licensed, county certified nursery stock grower of starter plants and evolved into an "urban grower" after leaving my first career in holistic health care to focus on my own health and well-being. Having always appreciated the therapeutic value of fresh, organically grown seasonal foods, physical movement and the inherent ability of time in nature to restore both mind and body, the transition from healthcare provider to plant grower/urban farmer allowed me to still hold true to my core desire to empower health and well-being in myself and others while doing a job that was demonstrated all of my life, one that I love and one that I am skilled at - namely growing.
- Are there any differences between your farm now and your farm when you were a kid? My urban garden today is much larger in scale than that of my youth, complete with an orchard of stone fruits and hedges of perennial herbs that were not present in the gardens I grew up with. Today, my urban garden has a commercial component as well, the growing of nursery stock for edible gardens. That was not present in my youth.
- What chores did you have growing up on the farm? Weeding, planting, harvesting and watering.
- What was the biggest change you encountered during your years farming? As a child, I viewed time in the gardens as a chore, especially in the hot Southern California summers. Today, I still struggle with the physical demands of laboring in the high heats of our region along with the physical demands of this line of work.
- What would you say have been the biggest changes you've implemented on your own farm since you've been farming here? Do they correspond with what you think the biggest changes have been in the industry during that time? Being an urban grower, we face the issue of not having the desired defensible space between our organic operation and our neighbors. When our neighbors fumigate their homes, have their properties sprayed for bugs, even have their pools sandblasted or their homes painted, we like other urban growers have a difficult time keeping these chemicals from drifting by wind to our crops.
- What changes have you seen in the business aspect of farming in your lifetime? As a child, I believed everyone had a vegetable plot and to a great extent, they did. These were the 70's. In the 80's through 2010, it seemed very few individuals grew food at home and very few were farming in our local communities on a larger scale. Since 2010, just in our local area alone, I have witnessed several family farms start up and the number of individual households growing more of their own food all year long has grown exponentially.
- Has it been viewed as more of a business for you, or a lifestyle choice? Some combination of the both? Rolling Hills is definitely a combination of business and lifestyle. We literally live in Rolling Hills Rd in Redlands, a residential home on less than a quarter acre where in the backyard

we house our commercial nursery stock growing operation and the front of the property houses our orchards and edible landscape.

- What roles did the members of your family play in farming? Did everyone work on the farm or did people have off-farm employment? My husband grew up in a home much like I did where going out back to harvest fresh fruits and veggies was the norm.
- Have you ever considered getting out of agriculture for a more lucrative career? If so, what type of work did you think you might want to do? Urban growing is my second career, one that allows me to show up every day to do a work I love to do and that benefits the greater community simultaneously.
- How do you see your role in the community? We help provide a tool for individuals who seek to live more simply, in rhythm with nature, more environmentally responsibly while savoring the splendor of nature's bounty through the plants we grow for them to then plant in their home gardens. We help individuals nourish themselves and their loved ones more sustainably which also adds more biodiversity to our local landscapes.
- What did you grow on the farm when you first started? We had vegetables and herbs in our home gardens.
- How many days per week do you sell your produce at farmers markets? Do you have a local retail stand? We participate in only one farmers market - then in our hometown of Redlands on Saturday mornings where you can find our starter plants, artisan products, seasonal cut flowers & produce. Our artisan products for table and body are carried in the University of Redlands Plaza Market during the school year and our organic heirloom starter plants can be found 7 days a week at Clark's Nutrition & Natural Foods Markets in Loma Linda and Chino, CA.

Basic Farming Questions:

- How has labor on the farm changed from when you started until now? What machines have had the biggest impact? In our work, all aspects are still done by hand - no mechanical inputs.
- How have advances in technology such as, machinery, genetics, or chemicals, affected your farm or competition with your farm? Our business is built on the very same principals of my youth - work by hand, use of NO genetically modified organism, the use of heirloom [old fashioned] seed and stocks. The use of old-time techniques and varieties is what our business is built on.
- Have you observed changes in the number, size and type of farms that are found your immediate locale? What is your attitude toward any trends you may have noticed? Yes, since becoming a licensed nursery stock grower, we have seen another join us here in Redlands and several small "backyard" nursery growers pop up in Southern California. In addition, we have seen several small family farms start up in our local area in the past 10 years. We view all of this as very good news for our local community.
- Are you a first generation farm owner or has your family been in farming in the past? I am a first generation nursery stock grower.
- What is the hardest part of farming for you? The physical demands and the extreme heat.
- What is the most satisfying part of farming for you? Germination of seed.
- What time does your day start and end? Typically about 7:30a.m.

- How many acres is this farm? How many employees do you have? We are situated on .21 acres with no employees.
- What crops do you grow? What's your main crop and why that particular one? We grow many varieties of just about ALL annual heirloom herbs & vegetables - some open pollinated flowers and melons as well. As for produce, we typically grow a wide variety of heirloom micro-greens, stone fruits, annual/perennial herbs, heirloom tomatoes/peppers/melons.
- What has been your most consistent crop in terms of making a good profit? Organic heirloom starter plants for the edible garden.
- How do you deal with weeds? With insect pests? We LOVE the use of vinegar as an herbicide to tackle weeds and as for insects/pests, we host a great number of beneficial insects, lizards, and birds that seem to keep the natural balance in check.
- What do you think was the most useful advance in farming? The internet. The ability to source inputs [seed/amends/tools/information] has made the world of difference.
- Are you certified organic? Why or why not? Yes. We simply cannot fathom exposing ourselves to year after year of chemicals that are toxic to humans, pets and our earth and we surely do not want to expose others either.
- What unique farming techniques do you employ? Growing what is seasonally and regionally suitable, crop rotation, companion planting, integrated pest management, use of organically approved inputs.
- Can the public visit your farm? By appointment.

Government's Role in Farming:

- Do you think our agricultural system benefits from subsidies or are they harmful? They could be very helpful to the small scale grower but typically they are not as accessible.
- What do you think the government should do to change the farming industry? Make more available to urban/small scale growers.