

Two years ago, my wife and I bought a house in Brownsville and moved from Brickell to serve. On our home lot and swale, one block away from Glenwood Park, we have planted several diverse plant species to enhance the local ecology and test plots to see what food crops do well in the sandy and rocky soil of the area. As we have planted, nurtured, and harvested crops without using harmful chemicals, many neighbors have stopped by, admiring the space, asking for seeds, and children wanted to know how and what to grow. We have intentionally not installed fences to keep our plantings open for everyone to enjoy. Our house has been broken into and many plants have been stolen, but despite these anticipated setbacks it has given us a better sense of what grows, the local cultural ecology of the community, the rich history of Brownsville, what plants and techniques are appreciated, and what is needed to promote environmental education in this community as residents. The churches and faith are connected to the extended family system here and an important part of how the community is organized. Education merges with family and faith binds the community through poverty and social injustice over generations. To that end, we believe that environmental education needs to be provided hands-on, in schools beginning from the early years and needs to be a material investment in this community, drawn from its history, and respectful of its faiths and institutions.

We have established the Brownsville Community Garden to achieve these objectives of food security, environmental education, and to develop community. Students in my courses have volunteered in the garden as well as engaging students and faculty in the FIU Schools of Public Health and Medicine. We are using the intellectual and material resources of the university to improve the lives of our community through planting and education.

<https://www.brownsvillegarden.miami/>

<https://www.wlrn.org/post/new-garden-brownsville-park-meant-increase-access-produce-unite-community>

<https://wsvn.com/news/local/fiu-professor-leads-project-to-turn-brownsville-park-into-community-garden/>