

# HAUTE HORTICULTURE

*Design innovations are reinvisioning urban agriculture. Here are three of the latest ways Brooklynites are transforming cramped cribs into edible oases.*

BY LOUISE MCCREADY

## BEST WAY TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX TRUCK

After seeing a friend's mobile art gallery—outfitted in an 18-foot diesel box truck with completely clear walls—26-year-old Fort Greene resident Nick Runkle had a vision: a greenhouse on wheels that he could drive across country—fueled only by recycled vegetable oil and solar and wind energy, of course—and thus bring the sustainable agriculture gospel to the masses.

Runkle, who grew up in Iowa, called up childhood chum Justin Cutter, 27, who at the time was working at a bio-intensive mini-farm in California. Together they perfected the “Compass Green” greenhouse-on-wheels plan and this spring they launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise the \$27K to make their dream a reality. In a beguiling video, the two dudes—who could easily have stepped out of a Pendleton for Opening Ceremony ad—describe their plans to drive their fully functional mobile greenhouse to educational institutions across America.

By the end of April, 335 people donated, catapulting Runkle

and Cutter past their goal and into mobile greenhouse reality. They wasted no time converting their truck's engine to run on veggie oil, installing two deep garden beds along each wall, inserting Plexiglas windows into the truck's sides and roof, and outfitting it with two enormous barrels to catch rainwater, provide irrigation and keep the plants at a regulated temperature. Solar panels on the roof will provide electricity for ventilation, heating pads under the roots, and a projection screen on the side of the greenhouse.

At press time, the duo were growing vegetables in a farm parked curbside in Brooklyn, but by the time you read this they'll be at large in America, teaching both kids and adults easy, practical steps toward a sustainable future through biointensive sustainable agriculture presentations, greenhouse tours and gardening workshops. Compass Green will visit summer camps, summer programs, parks and farmers' markets.

“It's remarkable how unifying this project is,” says Runkle.



Photograph: Courtesy of Compass Green

While the two share experience in agriculture and construction, they've happily accepted help from friends and neighbors. Complete strangers—from ranchers in Idaho to teachers in Georgia—have already offered Cutter and Runkle places to stay along the way.

“It's not at all about us,” says Cutter. “We're trying to carry something forward that a community of people in Brooklyn—and across the country—are doing for the Earth.”

