

# OPINION: Well-rooted sense of community keeps urban farm alive



Caption

REAL LIFE WITH NEDRA RHONE

By [Nedra Rhone](#), The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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A “For sale” sign lies in the grass outside Oyun Botanical Gardens, an urban farm, marketplace and event space on a stretch of Washington Road in East Point. Priced at \$249,900, according to the sign, the property had just been sold to two former strangers who share a common mission.

Leslie Zinn, CEO of Arden’s Garden, and Yennenga Adanya aka Queen Yenn, a holistic wellness expert and founder of Oyun Botanical Gardens, were upbeat and excited when I met them last Friday at the farm a few hours after they closed on the property. Just weeks earlier, they connected and became partners in a new venture to support urban farming, community wellness and the city of East Point.

In January, Erin Rodgers, the city’s economic development specialist, called Zinn with an urgent request: An urban farm had just gone on the market and someone, likely a developer, would snap it up. Would Zinn visit the property and consider purchasing it to save the farm?

Founded in 1995 by Zinn's mother, Arden's Garden, the Atlanta-based maker of cold pressed juices and smoothies, has deep ties to the East Point community. Since taking over a vacant fish-processing plant in 2002, the brand has built two production facilities in East Point. Zinn, an Atlanta native, had never been to East Point prior to relocating the plant, but residents quickly embraced Arden's Garden and their mission, she said.

Before they opened the retail store in 2004, residents would see the delivery trucks outside and knock on the door hoping to buy juices. Even as the empire expanded to 16 retail locations, East Point residents have remained the most dedicated.

"East Point is the No. 1 store in our chain," said Zinn. "We truly believe it is because we are in a food desert."

The city had just adopted [an agricultural plan in April 2021](#), with goals that include improving local food access, supporting local urban growers and branding East Point as a local food destination.

When she got the call from the city, Zinn and her husband hopped in the car and drove over to Oyun to meet with Adanya. Zinn knew there was an urban farm in the area but she had never been. Now she realized she lived less than a mile away.

Adanya, a former teacher, had come to the farm in 2015 to help build the education programs at Truly Living Well, which once occupied the site. She had been on her own wellness journey, and after losing 75 pounds, she began sharing what she learned with others. "It's not just changing what you eat, it is changing what you think," said Adanya, who decided to take her interest in wellness coaching full time.

She held the grand opening of Oyun Botanical Gardens on a Saturday in early spring, and the following week, everything came screeching to a halt during the pandemic. Adanya shifted to a virtual business model and eventually moved outdoors, hosting events that brought diverse groups of people together for a marketplace, meditation and fresh foods.

As her business grew, she knew she wanted a permanent space, and she approached the owners about selling the property. But months later when they owners were ready to sell, the real estate market was changing, and Adanya's investor pulled out of the deal.



When Zinn arrived at the farm within 30 minutes of the call from Rodgers, she and Adanya talked and hatched plans for a partnership. For both, it was about keeping a much-needed resource of fresh and healthy foods in the community.

“We are not here just to survive. We are here to thrive but we have to have access and a community that is like-minded,” Adanya said. “We have to support each other.”

As part of their unique agreement, Zinn will deliver the pulp that is a byproduct of the cold pressed juices to the farm for use in growing vegetables. Arden’s Garden will use some of the produce that is grown at the farm as raw ingredients for the plant-based food offerings that are a growing part of the company’s product mix.

In addition to working with Arden’s Garden, Oyun Botanical Gardens will continue to hold twice-monthly market days, wellness classes and events for the community.

In two years, Adanya will have the option to purchase the farm from Zinn at an agreed-upon price.

“We both have the same objective,” said Zinn. “She wanted the opportunity to buy and I think she should have that opportunity.”

As Zinn and Adanya celebrate their new partnership posing for photos on the farm and taking Arden's Garden Hibiscus Jalapeno wellness shots to keep their energy up, traffic on Washington Road starts to pick up.

I wonder if the people driving by know they are passing an urban farm. What would they think of these women, previously strangers, banding together to keep healthy food options in a neighborhood that has been without those options for so long?

Finding the places where we fit with others — spaces where we can work together for a greater good — that is the power of community.

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Nedra Rhone is a lifestyle columnist for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution where she has been a reporter since 2006. A graduate of Columbia University School of Journalism, she enjoys writing about the people, places and events that define metro Atlanta.