

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

About the EarthDance Organic Farming Apprenticeship Program

What will I learn as an apprentice at EarthDance?

- **composting and methods of soil fertility management;**
- **crop planning; propagation (both in a greenhouse and direct seeding) of a wide variety of vegetables, herbs, and flowers;**
- **organic pest and disease management;**
- **proper harvest and post-harvest handling techniques;**
- **selling and marketing via farmers markets, CSA, restaurants, and other wholesale customers;**
- **how to work effectively as a team player;**
- **and more!**

How much of a time commitment is the program?

Apprentices commit to a total of 10 hours (minimum) per week to the program. This includes 8 hours of farm and market labor (field work, harvest days, and selling at farmers market), and 2 hours per week of enrichment. Enrichment includes on-farm workshops, field walks, classroom sessions with guest lecturers, and field trips to local farms. And, since the Earth Dance mission entails community engagement, apprentices are asked to devote 10 hours (typically 2 events) throughout the course of the season to represent Earth Dance in the community - such as at the St. Louis Earth Day festival, public farm tours, featured farmer dinners, health fairs, etc.

Every apprentice is entitled to 2 weeks off of the program during the season.

Also, we wish to emphasize that the EarthDance apprenticeship is a serious commitment. The program spans from mid-February to mid-November; while 10 hours per week of your presence is required, keep in mind that the commute and any at-home reading and additional learning you wish to do will add to the amount of time this will take up in your life. As with anything, the more you're able to put into it, the more you'll get out of it.

I'm interested in learning more about organic farming/ gardening, but I don't have any experience yet. Is the EarthDance apprenticeship appropriate for me?

Farming and gardening experience is not a pre-requisite to participating in the apprenticeship program. Our apprenticeship alumni have had a range of experience going into the program - from having worked on an organic farm for 4 seasons to having started a small garden in their backyard to never having

planted a seed before. All of them came away from the program with new skills and knowledge. Something to keep in mind is that the program spans from mid-February to mid-November, so be honest with yourself about your tolerance for inhospitable weather conditions (farming happens in the cold, rain, heat, and sun!), and your aptitude for the hard (but rewarding!) physical labor that farming entails.

I already have a lot of experience growing vegetables organically. Is the EarthDance apprenticeship appropriate for me?

Experienced growers are welcome. New learning experiences for the seasoned gardener include: working collaboratively to operate a 100 share CSA; marketing at farmers markets; deepening your understanding of the Saint Louis region's food systems, visiting neighboring farms, and workshops with local organic farming experts.

How much does the program cost?

The application fee is \$25, nonrefundable. Thanks to the generosity of donors and foundations, enrollment in the apprenticeship program is only \$550 per person for the entire 9-month season, and includes a weekly CSA share during the harvest season. The full tuition is due January 31st, or can be paid in 2 installments of \$285 (first due Jan. 10th, second due Jan. 31st). You will be asked to purchase 2 tools for your use during the season, and for you to keep afterwards (approx. \$50 cost total). Food and transportation costs for field trips are not included in this fee.

Are scholarships available?

A limited number of scholarships are available. However, to make the EarthDance apprenticeship as accessible as possible, the \$550 tuition is less than the actual cost, per participant, of conducting the program. Please ask to be considered for a scholarship only if the cost of tuition would represent a significant financial hardship.

To apply for a scholarship for the 2011 apprenticeship program, see the 2011 Apprentice Scholarship Request here: <http://www.earthdancefarms.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/2011-Apprentice-Scholarship-Request4.pdf>

Is vacation time allowed?

Yes! Every apprentice is entitled to two weeks of vacation time! Please let us know several weeks in advance if you will be missing your usual shifts. It may be necessary to find other apprentices to fill in. Once the farmers market schedule is made, you will be responsible for finding others to substitute with you to fill your shifts if you are unable to work on your scheduled market day.

What if I cannot complete the program?

When possible, EarthDance will try to work with an apprentice whose participation is unexpectedly limited by unforeseen circumstances. For example, one 2010 apprentice injured his arm at home in early April this past year, and therefore was unable to carry out any physical labor until late July. He remained a part of the program, though, and was able to fit in all of his required “graduation hours” (and then some) once his arm had healed. Upon ending one’s full participation in the program, a CSA share will no longer be allocated to that apprentice. If apprentices are not able to remain in the program though, the following refund policy applies.

Is my tuition refundable if I cannot complete the program?

EarthDance Refund Policy

Your apprenticeship tuition is a crucial part of covering the operating costs of our educational apprenticeship program. Therefore, we must enact a refund policy to ensure that we do not suffer too many losses due to circumstances beyond our control. We are committed to providing an exceptional experience for our apprentices and strive to create additional opportunities beyond this program to ensure that our apprentices will grow the good food movement in our region. Please understand that it is with those commitments and goals in mind that we state:

- * If an apprentice chooses to forfeit participation in the program after payment has been made, but before February 13th, a 90% refund will be given.
- * If an apprentice decides to end her/his commitment to the program between February 13th and April 1st, a 50% refund will be given.
- * If an apprentice decides to end her/his commitment to the program after April 1st, no refund will be given.
- * If imprudence and misconduct deems it necessary for EarthDance staff to ask an apprentice to withdraw from the program at any point, no refund will be given.

Note: Upon ending one’s full participation in the program, a CSA share will no longer be allocated to that apprentice.

Can I volunteer at the farm if I cannot commit to the full apprenticeship program?

EarthDance welcomes volunteers. We will be publicizing when our regular volunteer work days at the farm are in the spring. If you have a specific interest

or skill, please contact us to let us know when you would like to help out, and in what capacity.

I have children, and I'd like to bring them to the farm while I work. Is this allowed?

It is our intention to allow apprentices to not only cultivate their own farming and gardening skills but also to share this experience with their families. However due to the labor-intensive nature of the program, and the need for farm efficiency, EarthDance has a childcare policy that apprentices must read and agree to, if they plan to include their children in their farming education.

Please read our Childcare policy here: <http://www.earthdancefarms.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/EarthDanceChildcarePolicy2011.pdf>

Are there any animals on your farm?

Insects! (including bees that a local beekeeper, Sharon Gibbons, keeps on the Mueller Farm.) Currently, EarthDance does not raise any farm animals.

However, many of the farms we visit during field trips do include animals, so there will be opportunities for curious apprentices to learn a bit about keeping flocks and herds.

What do your apprentices do after the program?

Some are in the first stages of beginning a farm enterprise. During the 2010 growing season, 6 of the 12 apprentices who completed the 2009 apprenticeship program grew food commercially and supplemented their income with their sales. Others are working collaboratively to establish highly productive backyard gardens or youth gardening initiatives. Some are rejoining the program as sophomore or junior farmies! Returning apprentices take on more responsibility at the farm, such as leading a farm crew and participating in winter planning for next year's growing season. Also, EarthDance staff regularly seek out opportunities, such as creative land lease agreements, marketing opportunities, and professional development workshops and conferences, that are applicable to both alumni and current apprentices' interests and needs, and passes this information on via the apprenticeship listservs. EarthDance is strongly invested in contributing to the success of their alumni's future agricultural endeavors!