

# Time Out

## New York

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## What to do this week

The Mermaid Parade, public spaces

### The grow-your-own revolution

These trailblazing eateries are redefining the farm-to-table model by transforming their roofs and backyards into working gardens.

By **Chris Schonberger**

#### BELL BOOK & CANDLE

A aeroponic farm on an NYC rooftop may sound like cause to call the authorities, but this West Village spot is using the soil-less growing technique to woo locavores, not potheads. The 2,500-square-foot setup looks more like a space-station experiment than your average nursery: Sixty white towers are arranged like sentinels, and they're pumped with nutrient-rich water that trickles at regular intervals from the top of each tower down to the base, feeding vegetables, fruits and herbs anchored inside the structures. The technique facilitates supercharged growing cycles that the restaurant says can account for more than 60 percent of its produce during peak months. Chef John Mooney gamely scales the six-story walk-up to tend to his microfarm, which overflows with an impressively diverse range of crops, including Japanese eggplant, fragrant spearmint, purple tomatillos, Great White tomatoes, bulbs of fennel and even watermelon. Back in the kitchen, he meddles with the haul as little as possible, showcasing the inherent flavors of his crops. The simple Rooftop Green Salad is composed of whatever catches his eye each day (perhaps Bibb lettuce, nasturtiums, cucumbers and cherry tomatoes) and drizzled with a house-made Thousand Island-style dressing; zucchini flowers encase a savory mix of goat cheese and mushroom; and herbs like basil and mint are deployed whole-leaf. And while there's no room for a paddock upstairs, even meaty classics like a cheddar-cloaked patty melt get a homegrown garnish: juicy cukes, cultivated upstairs and pickled in-house.

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