



Chef's Kitchen Garden at the Virginia Beach Convention Center

In the spring of 2008, the Centerplate culinary team at the Virginia Beach Convention Center decided to try their hands at growing a small fresh herb garden. They started with throwing some plants in the ground to see how they would grow and over the next couple of years it steadily expanded with Chef Desiree Neal and her team managing the upkeep.

In 2010, it was time to once again expand and they enlisted the help of a local master gardener, Rex Hamaker. He designed and built ten raised garden beds and one flower bed to attract bees and birds to pollenate the fruits and vegetables. With his help, the garden took off and flourished.

Every season a selection of different herbs and vegetables are planted. The spring garden includes such items as oregano, thyme, basil, chives, rosemary, sage, bay leaf tree, tomatoes, watermelons, cantaloupe, honeydew, cucumber, squash, peppers, grapes, and blueberries. The fall garden

includes such items as Swiss chard, mustard greens, cabbage, brussels sprouts and other winter vegetables.

Chef Desiree has always had a love for gardening. Growing her own fresh fruits and vegetables has excited her since her small tomato garden as a kid. She finds it to be relaxing and rewarding when she sees the results of her hard work. The garden gives the culinary team the opportunity to be creative every season and give a natural organic flavor to their signature recipes.

Rex Hamaker is a Virginia Beach local, retired Master Gardner, and Master Craftsman. As owner of Hamaker Reclamations, LLC, he utilizes his small construction and handyman business to repurpose materials and use eco-friendly products. Devoted to the local environment, he volunteers with Lynnhaven River Now and Buy Fresh Buy Local Hampton Roads.

"Each season, this garden brings so much happiness and light to the Virginia Beach Convention Center and the Centerplate culinary team."
Chef Desiree Neal