

The Wizard's Woods



Dad, gardener, and magician David Ranalli created a Climate Victory Garden and discovered some unexpected magic.

Fresh from tour, magician David Ranalli had a lot of time on his hands. It was summertime in 2017, a slow period for work, but the perfect time to start a vegetable garden in his backyard in Indianapolis, Indiana. But his idea for a garden was unusual—his forest garden turned into the beginning of Ranalli's permaculture journey.

"Permaculture is a design science where you take any landscape and turn it into paradise," Ranalli explains. It takes agricultural designs and combines them with natural ecosystems to

create self-sufficient and sustainable landscapes. With a little more than half an acre to work with, forest gardening essentially meant Ranalli could have his own grocery store literally in his backyard. *[Editor's note: Perennial forest gardens like this one maximize carbon drawdown.]*

But creating a garden, especially a forest garden, meant that Ranalli had to manage his irregular tour schedule with time in the garden.

"I'll go out of town for two or three days then I come back home, then I'm

only home a few days," Ranalli says. So, when he came home from tour, he set a plan in place: "Just a couple of hours here and there" he thought, or at least 20 minutes a day in the garden.

But Ranalli didn't have to face this feat on his own, he had the help of his four-year-old son.

"That's probably become my favorite element of it because it has become a learning environment for him," says Ranalli. His son does basic tasks for the forest garden like working on the bedding or leaves, but he also helps with

their chickens that live in the garden.

“I’m obsessed with eggs in every way and I love eating eggs,” says Ranalli. So naturally, he got chickens for his garden. Ranalli calls them “helping birds” because they provide the family with eggs, but they also eat pests and fertilize the vegetable beds.

The family also has a dog and cat team that helps protect and keep other pests, like mice, out of the garden. But Ranalli’s favorite animal is a rare all-black Ayam Cemani chicken he found locally.

Ranalli also sees forest gardening as a way to participate in the life-giving processes of Earth.

“It’s very much is a magical process,” he says.

Now Ranalli’s forest garden, which he’s named “Wizards Woods,” is home to many different plants. So far, he has apple, peach, kiwi, currant, hazelnut, and elderberry trees. He’s also planted rhubarbs, comfrey, ferns, asparagus, and sweet potatoes.

“There are also a lot of wild plants that I simply find and eat, such as plantain leaves, creeping charlie, wood ear, and amber jelly mushrooms,” says Ranalli. The forest was also already home to oak, spruce, maple, and tulip poplar trees.

Ranalli hopes that by the time his son is in high school, he will gain entrepreneurial skills by working at farmers markets.

But for now, Ranalli says he is using his skills as a showman to educate corporations on environmental trends and new economic models he’s learned through his projects in permaculture.

“It’s symbolic that we can take landscapes and do something very magical with them,” says Ranalli. “That to me is the most important thing that we have on our plates as a society and as a people.”

You can meet Ranalli in the Climate Victory Garden Facebook group at [facebook.com/groups/cvgardeners](https://www.facebook.com/groups/cvgardeners), or follow him on Instagram, [@theforestmagician](https://www.instagram.com/theforestmagician). To learn more about starting your own Climate Victory Garden, go to [greenamerica.org/cvg](https://www.greenamerica.org/cvg).

—Kayla Foster

GREEN LIVING TIP

Streamline Your Composting

Composting is something everyone can do, even if you don’t have a yard. Whether you have a worm bin under your kitchen sink or a pile in the backyard, composting is a great way to divert food and yard wastes from landfills, where they create greenhouse gases. Add the final product to your garden to improve plant and soil health. If you don’t have a yard, donate to a local farm, community garden, or neighbor.

Pro-Tips for Easy Composting:

- 1 Keep a container for food scraps in the freezer to eliminate smells and fruit flies.
- 2 Divert paper from your recycling bin, using it as a “brown” or dry material in your compost.
- 3 Chop or blend food scraps into small pieces so they decompose faster.
- 4 Collect leaves in the fall, as lack of dry materials are often a limiting factor the rest of the year.
- 5 In urban gardens, put mesh wire (sometimes called chicken wire) under the compost (and even up the sides) to prevent rodents from moving into this happy place.
- 6 New to composting? Learn more about getting started at [greenamerica.org/compostbasics](https://www.greenamerica.org/compostbasics).

