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Bringing Us to the Table When we turn on our television to find **LIDIA BASTIANICH** preparing dinner in her home kitchen, we can't wait to cook what she's cooking. Maybe it's the relaxed way the 61-year-old host of *Lidia's Italy*, among other series, tells us to trim an artichoke or prepare a ragu that makes us want to try it for ourselves, to experience the joy of cooking that she radiates on-screen. "Food is a gift," says Bastianich, and over the five decades since her family left Istria, in northern Italy, she has been more than generous with it. Starting in 1971 with a 38-seat restaurant in Queens, New York, she has expanded her reach, overseeing a multifaceted empire that includes her television shows, cookbooks, restaurants, Italian vineyards, and other culinary businesses, which she runs with her children. We're in awe of how consistently Bastianich has remained true to what she feels is the most important: the pleasures of the table and their ability to bring people together. "I want everyone to know they can cook," she says. "It's an innate part of being human." ☆

GARDEN CITIES

The distance from farm to table in American cities is getting shorter. In parks, in vacant lots, and even on the grounds of abandoned factories, **URBAN GARDENS AND FARMS** are growing better food than their commercial counterparts and bringing fresh produce to lower-income neighborhoods where markets are often scarce. In Milwaukee, for instance, an organization called Growing Power, established in 1993 by the former pro basketball player Will Allen (below), created a two-acre urban farm whose organic produce is as popular with the community as it is with the city's chefs. (Allen was awarded a MacArthur "genius grant" for his efforts in 2008.) In Detroit, the Garden Resource Program Collaborative has turned vacant lots into over 100 gardens, where local residents grow spinach, garlic, and more. Farms are also popping up in cities where cheap real estate is scarce. In Brooklyn, New York, the Red Hook Community Farm supplies a Community Supported Agriculture club from its three acres, and in Boston, the Food Project has encouraged

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officials to incorporate food gardens into community development plans. The dividend for these urban communities? Better access to fresh food, and a sure path to delicious meals. —Tracie McMillan, a Brooklyn-based journalist