

IF YOU LIKE PIÑA COLADA

There are probably many fine reasons to befriend Tim Rowan. But the best might be landing on the receiving end of the massive pineapples he grows on his Homestead farm.

Rowan is a sous chef at the Deering Bay Yacht and Country Club and the owner of The Lettuce Farm, a QCS-certified organic farm. In the winter, Rowan grows lettuce and cabbage, supplying his produce to Norman Brothers and various farmers markets. In early June, when his fields are covered in towering clumps of tall grass and heaps of compost, he focuses his attention on summer fruits: delectable South Florida favorites like lychee, banana, mango and dragonfruit. Then there are his pineapples, about 100 or so plants, some in containers and others in raised beds.

Rowan says he started growing pineapples as an experiment. "My whole business is recycling," he says. "I'd see the tops in the garbage." He planted the crowns in various places on his property. Pineapples require patience; it can take 18 to 36 months from planting to harvest. His plants on the low ground rotted, some ended up "hopelessly diseased" (but he is working

at rehabilitating them), and others thrived, in particular the ones that grew on high ground. He used a 6-6-6 organic fertilizer. This year, he expects to harvest a total of 70 fruits this summer through August. A second crop should be ready in late November or early December.

HEAVIER THAN A PUP

Rowan's pineapples are enormous, each weighing between 8 and 10 pounds, heavier than his four-year-old Chihuahua, Zoey. The fruit is golden, juicy and irresistibly sweet. But you can't buy them. Rowan enjoys sharing his abundance, so he gives away all his pineapples. The only way you can get one is to be a friend or family member, or part of the Temple Beth Am Day School, whose fourth graders help plant and tend a 1,000-square-foot community garden that he oversees. As his crop ripens, he invites friends to stop by, don a pair of heavy



gloves and twist off their own fat, fragrant fruit to take home and enjoy.

While Rowan makes a living selling greens, his pineapples seem to satisfy a different desire. "I love walking outside every morning and getting fresh fruit all summer long," he says simply.

For more on the Deering Bay Yacht and Country Club's garden, read the blog *A Garden on the Bay* at blog.dbycc.com.

GROWING YOUR OWN PINEAPPLES

Pineapples (*Ananas comosus*), in the Bromeliad family, have been cultivated in the tropical Americas and the Caribbean for thousands of years. Commercial production of pineapples began in Florida in the late 19th century, with fields established on Plantation Key and elsewhere; on Elliott Key, an average crop was 50,000 to 75,000 fruits, according to Julia Morton's *Fruits of Warm Climates*. But as prices fell because of increased competition from Cuba and the Caribbean, and fields began to fail when cultivation exhausted the humus, Florida growers gave up commercial production.

Rowan says you can grow your own pineapples in a large container, a raised bed or a backyard area that does not flood or stay wet after typical rains. Make sure it gets full sun. Pineapples can be propagated from the tops (crowns), and from new growths called slips, hapas, suckers and ratoons. Place in soil in a container with good drainage. Water well, place in full sun ... and wait. It can take two years to flower and fruit. Harvest fruits when they turn from green to golden. Twist them out from the bottom. You may see ants feasting on the sugar.

For more information on raising backyard pineapples, go to the University of Florida IFAS Extension website at edis.ifas.ufl.edu. University of Florida Horticulture Program leader Stephen Brown has an excellent video series on growing pineapples here: <http://ow.ly/bW88c>



The crown, or top of the pineapple, can be used to start your own pineapple plant.

You can turn pineapple skins into vinegar. Turn to page 39 for a recipe.

Photos: Alfredo Añez

