

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project
Interview with Ayanna Burroughs by Kaia Godsey
Conducted on June 20th, 2023 in Atlanta, GA

[00:00:00] **LuAnna Nesbitt:** The following interview is a part of the Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project. It was conducted in Atlanta, Georgia by interviewer Kaia Godsey on June 20, 2023. The narrator of this oral history is Ayanna Burroughs.

[00:00:13] **Ayanna Burroughs:** My grandmother and my grandfather, so they were just trying to escape for, a better life for their family, for their kids, end up in Atlanta, and so that's where my mother ended up meeting my dad.

so grew up in urban environments, so they grew up in urban environments. I, Didn't have anyone in the family who gardened or farmed or anything like that. Um, that was like my great grandparents who I had met. Um, and I learned that they had farms and whatnot, but my grandparents on both sides got away from that.

[00:00:46] **Kaia Godsey:** So growing up, where did you and your family access food?

[00:00:50] **Ayanna Burroughs:** The grocery store. So, uh, I remember mom, she loved Kroger a lot. Publix was a place where we would go Um, and also Ingles out in Conyers. So those are like the three places. I didn't go to farmer's markets. Uh, no that's not true. We went to the DeKalb farmer's market a lot.

Um, and I always thought that was an interesting experience. I didn't like to go only because my mom is just real busy and she's looking at everything. And as a kid I'm like Really into the food and seeing all the different fruits and vegetables, things I would never see at an Ingles or Kroger Publix But she just took too long in the shop. So I was ready to go But yeah, that's that was my experience with food. I didn't grow up around any gardens. I didn't see any vegetable farms. I did, we did have like an alpaca farm that was down the street from my house. But I didn't I didn't see where food was actually coming from until a lot later.

[00:01:55] **Kaia Godsey:** Were your family cooks?

[00:01:57] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Yeah, my mom was a great cook.

[00:02:00] **Kaia Godsey:** What do you remember being a staple of your family home?

[00:02:04] **Ayanna Burroughs:** So if my dad was cooking, it was going to be spaghetti and garlic bread. And if my mom was cooking, they were actually different things. Uh, I really liked her smoked chicken. So, lots of meats, um, proteins like that, um, and when I was in high school, she started experimenting with different plant based meals, which I thought was really interesting.

So she started doing a meatless Monday, and I think that's probably where I started liking vegetables, when I started liking vegetables more. Um, I didn't like how they tasted. My dad cooked them because they were so bland. So he was getting the microwavable bags and making, you know, broccoli and whatnot, which is fine if that's, you know, what you have access to. But my mom was cooking more of the fresh vegetables and making them taste really delicious. Um, so I got really interested in plant based meals.

[00:03:07] **Kaia Godsey:** And were you around other people cooking in your family? Did your grandparents cook or were you around them?

[00:03:13] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Not really. Uh, my grandmother, she did cook. She cooked for big, big holidays. Um, but it was kind of like a special occasion thing. Um, I mean she did cook little stuff like, like spaghetti. Pastas, um, simple meals. It, it wasn't, there's nothing that stands out to me that I can think of. It's mostly my mom who's the cook in the family and I wasn't the kid who was around in the kitchen And I appreciate that she didn't force me to be in the kitchen either Just because you know some parents feel like because you're a girl you need to be in this kitchen, you need to learn how to cook. I like that she didn't force me into it. It was actually my brother who was interested in cooking. So he would stand around while she was cooking and learn from her and he would try different recipes Um, so now he's kind of taking on that, like, I guess the chef of the family, he's cooking more.

Um, but not me. Not so much.

[00:04:15] **Kaia Godsey:** That was gonna be my next question, what type of things do you like to cook?

[00:04:21] **Ayanna Burroughs:** I like to cook things in my garden, uh, that's been a really, really joyful experience. Like I have some collards out there, so I've been eating a lot of collard greens and experimenting with different recipes that you can make with collards, um.

So yeah, whatever, whatever I'm, whatever I'm growing, I'm interested in cooking. I wouldn't say I'm the best cook, but I do put my, my heart into it. Um, my go to meal though would be like a vegetable curry. So whatever I have out there or whatever I bought at the grocery store or just in my fridge, I'll just throw it together and make a nice curry with it.

[00:05:05] **Kaia Godsey:** Can you talk to us about your garden setup here at home?

[00:05:09] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Um, so there are several raised beds and some of them I don't use just because most of my time is at my school's garden. So sometimes I feel really bad like coming home, I'm like trying not to look at my garden. Like, I don't, I feel so bad because I don't feel like getting out there.

I'm too tired. But when I do, um. I grow most, like, zucchini I love to grow, collards are out there, there's chard, so a lot of the, um, leftover fall plants that are still doing pretty well, surprisingly. Um, what else is out there? Oh, a lot of flowers. I'm trying to get into flower farming, experimenting with that.

So I think that's how I'll be using my land. Um, to see how different flowers grow and kind of coordinate their bloom times. Um, because I like to make my own bouquets. Um, so yeah, I'll use the school's garden for growing produce and working with kids. And then my home garden for more pleasurable things and things that don't take a lot of my time.

Like there's a lot of perennials out there. Um, like coneflower that the deer keep eating. I don't know, I don't think they're going to bloom this year. They keep eating them. Um, the lantana has come back in full force. Um, and a lot of other things, blueberries and other yummy plants like that.

[00:06:40] **Kaia Godsey:** Of course taste, but what else goes into things that you, um, want to plant either at home and in your school garden that things resonate with you?

[00:06:50] **Ayanna Burroughs:** At home, uh, it's all about what is going to require the least effort, uh, which will not require a lot out of me. And also I plant what I love, love, love to eat. So, um, zucchini, because I love to make zucchini bread, um, cucumbers, cause I love making pickles with them. Um, and it's low effort and then lots of greens like lettuce and collards, cause they're really easy and forgiving.

Um, I've not had success with root crops. I just don't, I'm not sure why. Um, so I've, I've stopped planting those. Maybe I think I'm just too lazy and they need a lot of, a lot of care. Um, well except the potatoes and onions, those did do really well, and the garlic. At the school, um, I try to coordinate with the different harvests of the month, it doesn't always work out that way, um, but just I try to do a larger variety at the school, a little bit of everything so the kids can see how different things grow, um, so we're not growing enough to feed all 350 kids, but we grow enough to do different taste tests with different items, like.

Um, we did a hibiscus jam one time and that was all from one plant. Um, we've, what else have we done? Um, oh, because we had a ton of zucchini. Um, so just enough to give everybody in the school a little taste of what you could do with this vegetable or this fruit or whatever it is.

[00:08:25] **Kaia Godsey:** Are there any seeds that you either grow or foods that you remember from childhood that had a particular connection to your family history?

[00:08:35] **Ayanna Burroughs:** I don't. The closest, not, not from my childhood, more recently, the closest connection I would have to something like that is the hibiscus. Um, so I got the hibiscus plant from Gratitude Botanical Farm. Um, so Chris Lemons gave me, um, that plant and then from that, I saved the seeds and then not too long ago, just at the Georgia organics conference, um, I ran into Farmer Haylene Green, who has her container garden, I believe she's still in the West End. And she told me that she gave him those seeds, so I thought that was a really nice connection. I had no idea, and to now know, okay, well these seeds that originally came from her plant is at my school all the way on the other side of town.

Um, and I saved, I mean there were so many seeds, I brought some home, so there's a plant now in my front yard. And I want to continue that just to continue sharing, continue sharing those seeds and that story and telling people about, you know, those two farms.

[00:09:48] **Kaia Godsey:** How did you get into farming? I know you talked about not having a connection to it in youth. What was that path like for you?

[00:09:57] **Ayanna Burroughs:** It seemed like it was almost God given that I was going to do this. Cause, I mean, if I was like thinking about my childhood, I would have never saw this for myself. I wanted to be a videographer, like a travel photographer, um, really thought that was what I was going to do.

Um, and I went into teaching, I became a teacher, I went to Georgia State for that purpose. And I was teaching at a school, um, called Thomasville Heights Elementary, which unfortunately is not open anymore. Um. But that neighborhood was so deprived of fresh food. The lunches were not great. And a lot of the students just weren't enjoying their experience or enjoying their lunch experience.

And I feel like lunchtime, lunchtime should be a beautiful experience, a time to have good food and connect with your friends. And so they have the time to connect with their friends, but that. Missing the missing piece was having a food that was enjoyable, you know, they weren't excited about lunch. You should be excited about eating And so that was one thing that encouraged me to get into this Um, and then also learning of farm to school and what those programs can look like.

So I went to a school, um, called Atlanta Neighborhood, no, yeah, ANC, Atlanta Neighborhood Charter School, where they have a farm to school program. They have a chef that came from a restaurant and he's, you know, he made, he's cooking all the food and made their menu. And there are kids in the back who are involved in the cooking process.

Um, and it was a completely different demographic where my school was majority, was majority black. There's was majority white. And so just seeing the difference, but I'm like, I started wondering how can I get this at my school? Um, I attended a meeting there and they told us, yeah, we're going to have a lunch provided by the school.

And I'm thinking about my school and the lunch was we have and I'm like, Oh God, I hope not. This is why would they serve us that? Um, and turn out the lunch was delicious. It was homemade hummus, um, which was so good. I still remember those ginger cookies. So yeah, I'm like, I really want something like this at our school. Like our kids will love that. Um, and. There's, there was no, there still isn't any food in that neighborhood, especially now that the school is closed. Um, so when I was reaching out to people, um, uh, my, one of my mentors connected me with the former, uh, farm coordinator, urban act coordinator at the Paideia school.

Um, her name is Tanya Herbert and she is a farmer. And I met with her and told her about my idea and, what I was wanting to see in that neighborhood and at our school and so she was all in and that summer She brought her urban ag students and they built out the farm. So I learned a lot about farming through her What that can look like and then when I went back as you know, the school years in I was a fifth grade science teacher I was bringing my students out there and you know, she was leading farming classes so I'm hearing the way that she's talking about food

and how she's engaging the kids on the farm and then to see the impact it had when I came back in the classroom and we're reading about plants or whatever.

Whereas before they were not engaged in the reading material that we were required to teach them and to give them. Now when it's related to something that they love and they have gotten their hands in the soil and they've tasted this fruit, this vegetable, they're, they were way more engaged in reading and, you know, and It's not that they didn't love to read, it's just that they didn't, they didn't love reading what we were forced, what we had to force them to read, unfortunately.

Um, so all of that, long way of saying that's how I got into farming. Just saying the impact it had on kids, um, from their health to how it can improve a community, um, and improving the resources and how it can make them happy, you know, bring joy and even all the way down to how it can improve their academics. It's all. It all can be done on a farm.

[00:14:33] **Kaia Godsey:** What did it look like to get your school on board for having a farm program?

[00:14:39] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Okay. Earlier I said it was kind of like, God, given that may I be, I was going to do this because it seemed like the path was very easy, almost laid out for me. Um, so I was in a teacher residency program.

It's called the create program, um, based out of Georgia state. And that's my mentor was working there. That's who I reached out to and who connected me. Um, with the, with Tanya Herbert, the farmer. So I had someone who was going to support me cause I didn't have any farming experience. I'm like, I need to find somebody to make this happen.

Um, and to work with me and work with our school and our principal at the time, uh, his name's Javon Miles. He was all in. Because he, I believe he grew food. I know he was, he was very, he's a foodie. He's very into food and like mixology and all that, using fresh ingredients. So it wasn't a super hard sell to get him on board with it.

As a matter of fact, at the time he was the assistant principal. Um, and when I emailed, I believe I emailed the I don't remember who I emailed his bosses. I'm forgetting it was a lot of transition going on. Um, but they told me, well, he's gonna become the principal, so you should just talk to him about it.

So I was like, okay, cool. And he was on board. Um, and because the PDay school, a lot of the resources was coming through their farm, through their farm and through their funding. Um, it definitely helped with, you know, the finances. And then, um, my school, they did a, a grant, like if teachers had an idea they wanted to put forth, they could apply for this grant.

So I applied for it, ended up getting the grant for the amount that I requested. And that helped a lot with irrigation and all that. Um, so it just, it just seemed that things kind of lined up in the way that it was supposed to happen. To bring this project to life and even now where I'm at at my current school Which is Westside Atlanta Charter School.

My principal again, so again was all in So it's these two black leaders in these APS schools who are Really advocating for better food for their school and that is unheard of, unfortunately. Well not unheard of, that's that was extreme. It's rare. There's not a lot of You know, people say, oh, I want a school garden, I love a school garden, but then to actually put the finances behind it, um, is something totally different.

And it wasn't a, it wasn't, for them, it wasn't a hard sell, it was like, yeah, let's do this, this is a good thing.

[00:17:28] **Kaia Godsey:** How do you see the farm to school movement unfolding in Atlanta? Do you feel like it's a ripple effect change, or just kind of scattered individual actors?

[00:17:41] **Ayanna Burroughs:** A little bit of both. It's definitely growing, um, and we have so much potential here, um, to get even bigger. I, um, feel like we need more of a network for sure, um, and because I've gone to different, like, school garden conferences, pharma school conferences, um, you know, in various places or just met with farm to school coordinators virtually that work in New York and California and they talk about how there is a very, very strong network out in Denver.

They have a very, very strong network of school gardens and farm to school programs in Atlanta. We don't have that. There are a lot of schools that have farms. or gardens and they have programs that they do, but we are not, we're not all connected to each other. We're not all aware. Like there are a lot of people who might know, Oh, I know the school does this, the school does that.

But, um, I feel like we could have a stronger network where we're sharing resources, whether that's, you know, applying for grants together or, um, you know, tool share. Work, share, whatever it is. I think we could be stronger in that. That is where I would like to see us grow. Um, and I'm hoping to be a part of that.

That's why, you know, try to reach out to other schools as I can. And, you know, well how can, you know, bring your kids out there. I could bring my students here. And connecting in that way. So, we have a, we have a ways to go. But I see, we're gonna get there. Cause I see more schools are on board. And I, what I'm hoping that it doesn't become a fad that this school wants a school garden just to put on their website or to tell parents during tours that, yeah, we have a school garden and then it's unused.

You know, nothing comes of it or teachers don't bring their kids out. It has to be purposeful and intentional if you, I feel like if you're going to have that otherwise it's, it doesn't benefit the kids.

[00:19:49] **Kaia Godsey:** And you talked about your role at your last school being in the science department. Now, do you still have like a class subject or are you primarily focused in the garden? How do you intertwine?

[00:20:02] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Um, so my role at my school now is farm to school coordinator, so it's all encompassing. I don't have a homeroom class or a group of students that I work with

every single day, not the same kids at least. And I actually really like that. So we're a K through eight school. I ended up seeing every student at some point during the school year.

I'm very proud to say I've worked with every single student. At some point, whether it's one time or two or three, um, at some point in the year. And that's been really nice to collaborate with teachers on projects that they have going on. We are a PBL school, which is project based learning, um, so lots of like student centered projects.

And, um, if it's focused on, you know, something related to plants or the earth or, um, the garden, however the kids want to take it. Um, it's nice to step in and support teachers and students in that way, whereas as a science teacher it was hard to, I felt like my time was split between wanting to learn more about farm education, but then being really restricted.

With the science standards that I could teach and how I had to teach them, that was really a struggle. So in my position now I have way more flexibility to reach students and cover various subjects. And I feel like it allows me to, I guess, touch, I guess make it more personalized and touch on things that I wish I could have in a classroom.

Like as it relates to specific to like black history and um, you know, how that has an impact on how people garden now, how people farm now, or talking about why have we gotten away from it? Why is it important to reconnect? Those are conversations that don't come up naturally within science standards.

Which is purposeful, um, you know, so unless you have a teacher that is gonna go out of their way to talk about that, those conversations aren't had. Even though you're learning about biology and plants, the conversation just doesn't come up. Because you're, the standards are, if you look at, you know, the scientists they have to know about, they're all white men, you know.

And I think they throw George, Dr. George Washington Carver in there, but they never talk about regenerative agriculture. They don't honor him in that way, but they know he's a peanut man.

[00:22:36] **Kaia Godsey:** Kind of off of that, and off of the idea of the communities that you're working in, food apartheid areas, or that you have worked in, what role do you think the school garden has in re empowering these areas?

[00:22:50] **Ayanna Burroughs:** I think it is to show them how a community can come together to support each other. And that happens in various ways through, you know, community resources and community outreach. Um, a lot of schools have like, you know, parent liaisons to connect with parents and other educators who do that, but to have, it's just another resource, um, that is needed.

Everybody needs food and everybody needs, you know, everybody should have access to fresh food and, but also the education behind it. So not just giving them the food, um, or, you know, saying here you are, but also showing them, well, how can you cook this to feed you and your family? And how can it be specific to your diet?

Um, if you have like, um, maybe illnesses or, um, you know, things that's going on with your body, how can you use food to heal yourself and to heal your families? Or how can you come out to the garden to, you know, like workshops. Workshops can be done out there to teach skills, um, you know, to teach families how you can feed yourself.

So here I can give you this vegetable. I can teach you how to cook it, show you how to do this. Um, and also I can give you the confidence to now grow your own food, whether it's in a planter or on your windowsill, just growing herbs to add in, you know, to have some connection to the earth and, um, to get those nutrients in whatever way you can or using those skills to now you can go work at a farm somewhere if you want to.

Um, I think it, it can go in so many directions.

[00:24:31] **Kaia Godsey:** And have you seen or heard of an uptick in students or families starting to grow more independently at your schools?

[00:24:41] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Yeah, um, so one student in particular, I remember, okay her, I probably shouldn't say their names, but she was a 7th grade student. Um, and she told me she actually, if she was on the, we had a program called the green team and they were learning about hydroponics, um, hydroponics, recycling, and, uh, composting.

And so she told me about how her, her and her mom had started composting at home and I was like, Oh, that's so wonderful. That's so cool. Where'd you learn that? And she was like, I learned it from you, Ms. Burroughs. And I'm like, I don't know how I just completely forgot she was a part of that team. And I was like, thank you for sharing that with me, like, that, that really meant a lot.

Um, and then, uh, one that almost made me cry, uh, so there's a, he is in sixth grade now. At the time he was in fifth grade and his brother was in eighth grade and they were on the garden team, the garden club together with me. So we meet every Tuesdays and they were always just so interested, um, in gardening.

They really like in class to see them. They were very reserved, um, pretty quiet for the most part, unless they were talking with their friends. Um, just kind of to themselves. And then to see them in the garden where they felt, seemed like they were more confident in a way. Um, they were a lot more talkative and outgoing and, uh, took on like a leadership role.

I could really depend on them, um, to, if we had a new student join us to say, Hey, can you show them how to like do this? Um, can you show them where this is? It was really nice. And I think they appreciated that as well. Um, and. Last year, uh, the younger brother, he was always asking, can I do this on my own?

He liked to, he liked to work and he started, I guess he got confidence in what he was doing after learning how to use the tools and whatnot, and being on the garden team for after a year. Um, so he wanted to do more independent projects and little did I know they were gardening at home this. This whole time, when they started in the garden club, their mom told me that they

had no interest in gardening, um, they were mostly like video gaming type of kids, um, but she said it was so nice because although her and their dad didn't garden, their grandmother does.

And so now their grandmother is like able to talk to them about gardening and all the different plants. And she said, it's just really nice to see. How those like her kids and then her mother can come together and have a new conversation, something new to talk about, something new to connect about. And I thought that was so lovely.

And then also got on them. Cause I'm like, you didn't tell me you started a garden. Why didn't you tell me? They were like, Oh yeah, we started growing watermelon and dah, dah, dah, dah. I'm like, you left all that out. I don't know why they didn't tell me that, but I thought that was, that was really cool. That was made me tear up hearing about that.

[00:28:00] **Kaia Godsey:** To circle back to your discussion about using food as medicine or plants in general, um, what types of things do you personally use or do you share with students to use?

[00:28:11] **Ayanna Burroughs:** We have a lot of medicinal, not a lot, several medicinal plants growing out there, but the only one I've used, well technically I didn't use that plant. We had calendula growing at the time, um. But I bought like dry calendula flowers and made a salve with the kids and so we passed that around so that they could like, you know, feel it and you know, try it on. We put in like these, like these sample cups and pass it around to the school, to the students who wanted to use them.

And that became really popular. Like, I know my principal for sure, she was like, Are you ever going to make that again? Are you going to make that again? It was so good. But it was nice because then the kids could come out and see what Calendula looks like, what that plant looks like, and to know that these products you can use um, you know, to soothe your skin, um, comes from a plant, you know, is derived from a plant.

We have lavender out there. The kids really love going and like, picking the lavender flower. And I do too. It was very helpful to me last week. Last week was so awful and stressful in my personal life, not like professionally or anything. Um, and I just went out and like. Pick the lavender and like went in the hammocks and just I just kept smelling the lavender and I'm trying to do that I was doing that in front of the kids and I let them because I'm very honest with them I let them know not about my personal business, but letting them know Hey, I'm not really like maybe as energetic as you normally see me just because I'm you know going through some stuff and so then to say that and then to show them.

Well, this is how I'm gonna calm myself down I try to You know, be transparent like that with them and be real with them. Um, so they can see you can use these things to also help yourself. Maybe if you're feeling stressed one day, you just go and like smell some lavender and just, you know, inhale and just breathe.

[00:30:12] **Kaia Godsey:** Circling back to what you said about how you like to make bouquets, can you talk me through the process that you use on deciding what flowers to put in bouquets?

[00:30:24] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Uh, I guess, I don't know if I have a formal process, it's really just whatever looks good, uh, whatever's growing around, so I like to make it from a combination of things that I grow, like different native plants, um, or not native plants, different perennials, like the, what is that, Monarda, what is that, Bee Balm, um, or Bergamot, oh, different names.

So I like to use that in it, um, different, you know, shrubs, I'll just cut those stems up and use those. Things that smell good. So basil is really good. I like to use that in my bouquets. Just cause I like to add that scent. I also like the curry plant. It doesn't last that long, but just to have that, like it's nice in a bouquet, like it's, you know, it's nice, it's visually appealing and then also it has a nice aroma.

Um, so yeah, no particular, no formal process. Or I may look through like a seed catalog or look online and I'm like, ooh, I wanna, I wanna try to grow that. I wanna see what that'll look like. Um, and I'll just buy the seeds, plant it, and yeah, that was really cool. Or even things that grow around, like, um, there's a lot of elderberry out right now.

I don't, I try not to harvest it too much, though, because I do want them to turn into berries. But, um, Yeah, just pretty things like that, whatever's, whatever's going around.

[00:31:53] **Kaia Godsey:** I want you to tell me how you make your zucchini bread.

[00:31:57] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Oh, it's a New York Times recipe that I can send you. I'm not a baker or like, not that I, I don't know by heart, I have to go to that recipe every time.

But if I'm trying to remember, I mean, it's like brown sugar, flour, zucchini, uh. I can't even remember. I do know I had to grate that zucchini. It took forever to like, just grate that zucchini down and Um, but it's super easy and it's delicious. I mean, because the first time I made it was at the school for the taste test.

And so I'm like praying, like, please don't let this mess up. Like I'm banking on this because all these kids got to eat this food. And I was like, don't let it be dry. Anyhow, it came out perfectly, perfectly. I'm like, well, first time, that's awesome. And then I made another time it came out just as good. So it's a good recipe.

[00:32:53] **Kaia Godsey:** It's not New York Times anymore, that's Ayanna.

[00:32:55] **Ayanna Burroughs:** No, yeah, there we go.

[00:33:00] **Kaia Godsey:** Okay, last question. What about your vegetable curry?

[00:33:04] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Oh, that I just, um, there's a, I forget the name, actually I can't even pronounce it. I go to the, oh, dang, what's the name of that market? There's an Asian mart down the street from the Decatur Farmer's Market, and they have this, like, curry paste.

So I just chop up a bunch of vegetables, whatever I have, um, saute them. I'll make some jasmine rice on the side, and then I'll add the, like, the curry paste in there, some coconut milk, and that's it. So I guess it's more of, like, a Thai curry ish meal. Yeah.

[00:33:43] **Kaia Godsey:** How do you shop now? What grocery stores do you frequent, or what areas to get food are important to you?

[00:33:50] **Ayanna Burroughs:** I try to shop as locally as possible, which is why I like this area. I live in Bend Hill. Um, and there's, there's a Kroger down the street, Publix down the street, you know, like eight minutes away. Um, so I try to go there first. When I was living in Midtown, I used to love, like, Trader Joe's. Love that place, but it's It's like 20 minutes from me and I'm like, sure, I do like the products a little bit more.

Sometimes the produce is a little, you know, more visually appealing, I guess you could say it that way, but I don't want to drive that far. I don't think I should have to drive that far. Um, and I really don't need to. Um, and also I just, as far as vegetables, it's mostly what's in my garden. So if I'm getting something from the store, it's something that I can't grow like bread or, you know, things that aren't vegetables.

I do go to the farmer's market quite a bit now that they're back, um, you know, for the spring and summertime. Uh, I just wish we had a farmer's market in this area. That would be so nice. They do have the East Point Farmer's Market, um, but that's about as close as we can get. And then sometimes there's a guy who sets up, um, on Campbellton.

He sells a bunch of watermelon and fruits. So if I have some cash on me, I'll stop and shop with him and get fruit from there, but I rarely have cash on me and he doesn't take card, so there's that issue, but I love that he sets up there because he always has business, so it's nice that the community knows like I can get my stuff from here too, um, and not have to go to like a big box grocery store.

[00:35:31] **Kaia Godsey:** !Do you talk to your students at all about how to acquire food or what it means to be in the food chain?

[00:35:39] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Oh, yeah, uh, so I teach the urban gardening 101 class during the summer time and what I love about it is because I can just I mean I can talk about whatever anyways, but that's a time for that's when I have a class like I'm gonna see y'all for a week every single day And so I always like to start off the week and just talk to them today about like the difference between food desert and food apartheid, um, and teach them about Karen Washington and, um, her work as a food justice activist and why that work is so important.

Um, and I, I shared all of that because it's not just good information to know, but, um, because our school is located and, you know, a USDA zoned food desert. Um, and I talk to them about what that means and ask them, well, where is the nearest place to get grocery store? They all say the gas station, you know, with the crispy, crunchy chicken in there and then the chips and snacks.

And so I let them know, well, while your families and they all do, you know, all their families have vehicles, that's not the case for everyone. So if you have a big family, it's really difficult. You know, to get on the MARTA bus and go to the grocery store, which is mile, like five miles away in a vehicle. I mean, it's not that far, um, but that's a lot if you have a family that you're taking care of and the bus is not always on time, you know, it's not reliable a lot of the times, unfortunately, so you're maybe waiting around, um, or if you can't afford your bus ticket, you can't afford Lyft and Uber because they're so expensive now.

Not 5 anymore. So all of that are just, it's, it's really difficult, um, to manage. Um, and it'd be, I tell them, you know, if you have a little piece of land or, you know, like a balcony or a window seal, it's, you can grow something. So in that way, you're able to spend less wherever you go. Um, so yeah, I definitely have those conversations with them.

Our whole school has been to volunteer at the grocery spot, which was nice. Um, so we did a school wide PBL on food access. And so they hopped on a bus and took a tour of our neighborhood. And they just had to document, like through the iPad, like through pictures, um, that they were given to borrow. Um, and on, in paper, like what, what do you see around here?

What do you have access to? Um, and then they compare that with another neighborhood. I can't remember. I can't remember if they actually went to another neighborhood or if they just looked on Google maps. Can't remember, but either way, they were making some comparisons between like our school community versus, um, you know, a community with, with more access to resources, you know, food resources.

Um, and to see the difference and what that means for these families.

[00:38:46] **Kaia Godsey:** Could you share a bit more about food deserts and food apartheid and differences there?

[00:38:52] **Ayanna Burroughs:** So, when I was working at Thomasville, that is when I learned of what a food desert is. I can't, I don't think I heard of that term before that, before that time.

I also, uh, hadn't, I didn't know much about agriculture anyway. So I'm sure that's probably the reason for that, but I do know just how it feels when I was at the school, like driving through the neighborhood and businesses are run down. Parking lots aren't taken care of. I think there's a Piggly Wiggly down there, but that's a long walk from the school.

I can't imagine there's any family who, I mean, if you have to, but that is a long walk. Um, and it's downhill and in traffic and it's just a lot. I think there's an Aldi's too, but still, that's very, very far from where the actual neighborhood was. So again, the closest access to food that they had was right across the street from the neighborhood was a gas station.

There's always some people hanging around the gas station that, I'm like, I don't know if I would have kids go in there. And then there was the chicken, uh, the chicken wing fast food restaurant. So that's what they, that's where they would walk for lunch. Teachers, when they went to get food, you got 30 minutes so you can't go far.

So where are you gonna go? Either the gas station or to get some wings. Which is great every now and again, but when that's all that is in front of your neighborhood, that's all that you have. That can take a toll on your health, um, physically and your mental health. Like, that's all that you see. And then there was the state penitentiary in the distance.

So it's like, it just felt awful. It really did. Versus where I was living at the time. I was living in Midtown when I was working there. So in Midtown there's Trader Joe's down the street, Kroger, I mean Publix in close act, you know, in close proximity. And then they have Piedmont Park, you know, there's the green market, Piedmont Park and other different little markets and other little mom and pop stores where you can pop in and get fresh food, you know, fruit and whatnot.

So it feels a little more lively and people are out and I don't know. I guess that's about, I still have a lot to learn on, you know, what does it mean to, you know, work to get rid of these? spaces that are impacted by food apartheid. I think I'm going in the right direction, but I do have a lot more to learn.

[00:41:46] **Kaia Godsey:** What are things that you think communities can do to change some of those circumstances? Obviously, that's such a big ask and responsibility with the government and what have you, but if that's your immediate surroundings, what do you think are some good next steps?

[00:42:02] **Ayanna Burroughs:** I think if you're starting on a, like, individual level and you have a garden, Like for me, I'm trying to do better about reaching out to my neighbors.

So when I have extra produce, like just knocking on doors, like, Hey, do you want this? Do you want that? Um, and nine times out of 10, they're going to say yes. So sharing what you have and there are several people around here with gardens. There's, I think there's a community garden, not too far away. And I'm curious, I'm curious if they do that, if they share their produce.

So that's something an individual can do, sharing what you have on a community level. Um, if there is a space where you can come together and there's some like minded people who are willing to put in the work to start a community garden, that is a big task. But if there's one there already there, um, some space accessible, maybe not where you have to dig in the ground.

Cause that could be a lot of work, especially if for somebody who's older, but if you have. You know, maybe you could have, just like in containers, like in pots, grow in pots. Um, or like grow bags. Um, things that you can share with your families and I think that, that could be really helpful on an individual and like a community level.

If we're just talking about like the people, that would be helpful.

[00:43:28] **Kaia Godsey:** What are some values that are really important to you, that you center yourself on in doing this work?

[00:43:33] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Okay, so I wrote peace of mind, activism, health and nutrition. What did I write there? That was 2020. Okay, yeah, so definitely, um, I would say peace of mind.

That's a value that I have. So, um, when I'm out in, like, green spaces, it really does bring me peace, um, in so many ways. Uh, just from learning about how, like, you know, the microbes in the soil can improve our, improve our health and improve our happiness. And just being around beauty, that's definitely one reason why I'm wanting to get more into like, um, you know, flower farming, just to be around beautiful things because when they're, the world is so chaotic and ugly and unfair and unjust and all of that can really weigh on you.

And so if you have something that you can look at that's beautiful, it's, um, I think that's really important, you know, to have beauty in your home. So I guess maybe that would be more so self care that that's what that is But I also like push back on that term because sometimes self care can be inaccessible at least that's how they sell it to us. You know that luxury and self, you know luxury go hand and self care go hand in hand, which they don't necessarily You know, just you don't have to spend a lot of money to take care of yourself It could be as simple as just having something beautiful that you grew or eating something that looks really lovely that you grew whether it's like Maybe you want to grow it like a different type of tomato like a purple tomato That is like so interesting and that little that small little thing can bring you so much joy So that is a big value that I have

[00:45:27] **Kaia Godsey:** in your immediate community What are some ways you have found or some tools you've used to build up your community?

[00:45:35] **Ayanna Burroughs:** I suppose it would be education That's my background, and I think kind of the space that I'll always be in, in some way, even if I'm not directly out of school. Um, and it's really just about showing people a different way, which I was doing even before gardening, just showing kids that you don't have to, you know, subscribe to this thing that people are telling you you should do or believe in.

That there is a different way, and it all just depends on how you want your path to look. Just teaching people what gardening can look like and how different it can be. It doesn't have to be big and expensive and beautiful and like something on HGTV. It can be as simple as something that you're throwing in your windowsill or a pot, but yeah.

[00:46:24] **Kaia Godsey:** What is the first plant that comes to mind if I ask what's your favorite plant?

[00:46:30] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Sunflower, that's my mom's favorite plant. And, uh, when I asked her why when I was a kid, she told me it's because The sunflower is usually the plant that's going to grow the tallest in the field and it's always like looking towards the sun.

So it's not really, you know, worried about what's growing beneath it or around it. It's its own little thing and it's shining so bright and you have to notice it. Like when you go outside, like you see a sunflower, when you see a sunflower, it's like it really catches my eye. Um, it's really a showstopper.

But it's so simple. So ever since she told me that, I was like, I love sunflowers too.

[00:47:12] **Kaia Godsey**: Would you tell us what made you want to become an educator?

[00:47:20] **Ayanna Burroughs**: Oh yeah. Uh, so I was at Georgia state. I forget what, I totally forgot what my first major was. But yeah, that didn't happen. Uh, and so I was like really feeling like I was in a crisis, like, Oh my gosh, I have to decide, like, I'm going into my sophomore year.

I don't know what I want to do yet. I just felt like I was so short on time, uh, because I'm like, I can't stay here for too long. It feels expensive. Um, and so I was telling my mom, like, maybe I should just take a year off and like work and figure out what I'm going to do. And she's like, no, don't do that.

Cause if you, you know, you take some time off, you probably not going to go back for a long while. She said, I haven't seen it happen. Just, she said, just stay in it. She was like, well, you love art and being creative. So why don't you be an art teacher? And she's telling me this because she's always wanted to be a teacher.

Um, so she didn't go to school, um, immediately after graduating high school. She got married and, you know, eventually went back to it. But she said that when she, you know, was graduating high school, she always wanted to be a teacher. So um, I know that's probably where that came from. And it really interested me.

I'm like, Oh, okay. I guess I could be an art teacher. Like, that would be cute. Uh, so I changed my major to education. I started taking these classes and just learning about the state of our education here in Georgia. And it is, it was so awful and devastating learning about, um, just how, how much we need to grow, um, and how much we need to progress in our schools.

And how much of a disservice we're doing to students. So I became really passionate about wanting to become a teacher and like changing these things and impact impacting, um, having some sort of change on students and schools. So that's what inspired me. Yeah, just hearing from my professors and learning about education in Georgia, in Atlanta specifically, um, they were so passionate.

Mm-Hmm, that it inspired me. So, shout out to my mom for pushing me that way. I didn't do art though. I was like, no, I can't be an art teacher. I just do this for a hobby. I switched it to ELA and social studies.

[00:49:39] **Kaia Godsey**: Do you create any art now? Especially with anything from your garden?

[00:49:43] **Ayanna Burroughs**: Well, I guess I have bouquets. That is an art in a way. Um, but like, paint, like I've, well, it's behind that bag, but like, I painted that, um, so I do little stuff like that. But I don't create anything. Well, yeah, no, I haven't made anything with my, with the stuff I grew.

[00:50:01] **Kaia Godsey**: I was going to ask if you have a favorite edible plant.

[00:50:04] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Uh, well, based on what's out there now, like shishito peppers. I love like some blistered shishito peppers. Like, put them in a pan real quick with some sea salt. Oh, it is so good. Yeah. So that's definitely one of my favorites. Um, zucchini and, uh, cucumbers. And tomatoes, like a fresh tomato is like, the store just doesn't compare. It really doesn't. I mean, I mean any vegetable I feel like when you eat it fresh out of like a farm or a garden, it's like what are they selling us?

What is this? It does not taste the same. Lacking in flavor. Like where did the flavor go? The one that's traveling from a whole other country, I mean, what do you expect? You said they're shishito peppers? Mm hmm. I guess it's a mild pepper. Um, they say like one in every six is spicy. Um, yeah, it just has a pretty mild flavor.

I don't know. It's really good. Um, a lot of people season it up with different stuff. I just keep mine simple with some sea salt and oil. That's it. It's really good.

[00:51:19] **Kaia Godsey:** Well, is there anything we haven't asked that you would like to share?

[00:51:23] **Ayanna Burroughs:** Not that I can think of. Um, I guess as far as for seeds, um, that story I was sharing about, uh, the hibiscus seeds made me really interested in learning more about the stories of seeds.

I wish my memory was better because I'm like, I want to remember like all the different stories about the seeds that I purchased from, uh, like from not stores, but from. CSE sellers. Cause when I read the descriptions, they have some really, really interesting stories and like how, even like how, you know, like the heirloom seeds and sometimes how far back from the 19 early hundreds and sometimes even farther back, how those stories are saved.

And there was, where did I go? There was a plant sale at Shades of Green Permaculture and they have a garden on the side. And she said that, You know, everybody who works there, they all came together and had a meeting where they planted or shared their seeds. And one of them had a plant from a seed that was saved in their families for like generations and generations and generations.

And when I was listening to her talk about this, I can't remember the story she was saying, but I just kept thinking about how unfortunate it is that, that I don't have that connection with plants and seeds in that way. I mean, I do, but I just don't know the story behind it. That has been completely lost.

And I'm, you know, that's very common amongst black people. And it's just really unfortunate that we have been pulled away from that. Um, so I appreciate that y'all are doing this and, um, hopefully more people will continue to just reconnect with the land because we have gotten so far away from her.