# MY STORY AS AN URBAN FARMER & A VERY SPECIAL HERB



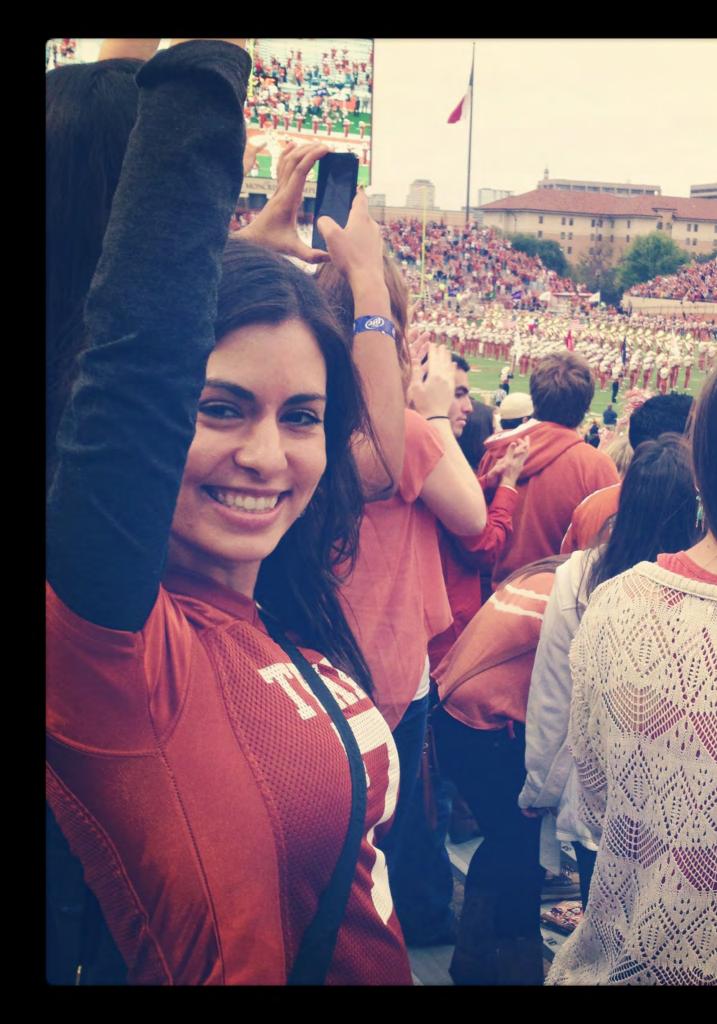
# LIFE BEFORE FARMING

- Born & raised in Monterrey, Mexico
- BSc. in Economics & Finance, Monterrey Tec
- Worked in corporate banking for 5+ years
- Cooking kept me sane



# MOVING TO AUSTIN 2012

- Came to Austin to obtain a Master in Business from the University of Texas
- Met wonderful people but SURPRISE! corporate life wasn't for me



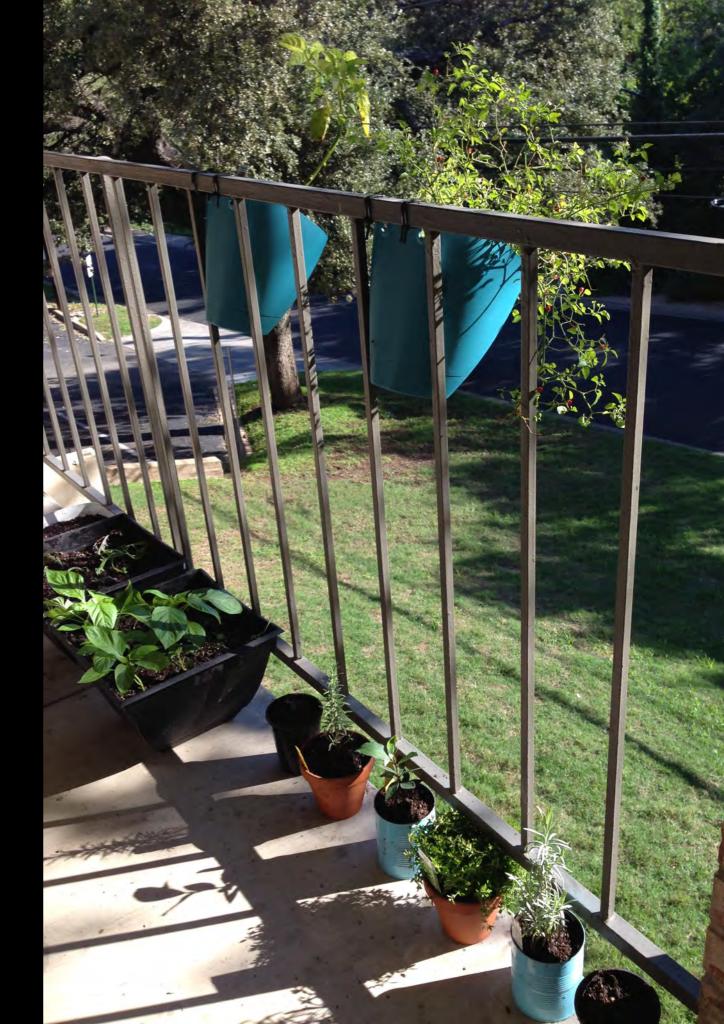
#### WHAT NOW?

- In 2014, finished MBA at UT and had no clue what to do next
- Started cooking authentic Mexican recipes as a stress release



# FARMER BY ACCIDENT

- Couldn't find the right ingredients for authentic Mexican food, started growing herbs & peppers in apartment balcony
- What if local restaurants & chefs had a similar problem?



# FOODIS MY PASSION

 Eating & cooking have always been passions of mine, so you could say food was the gateway drug to farming!



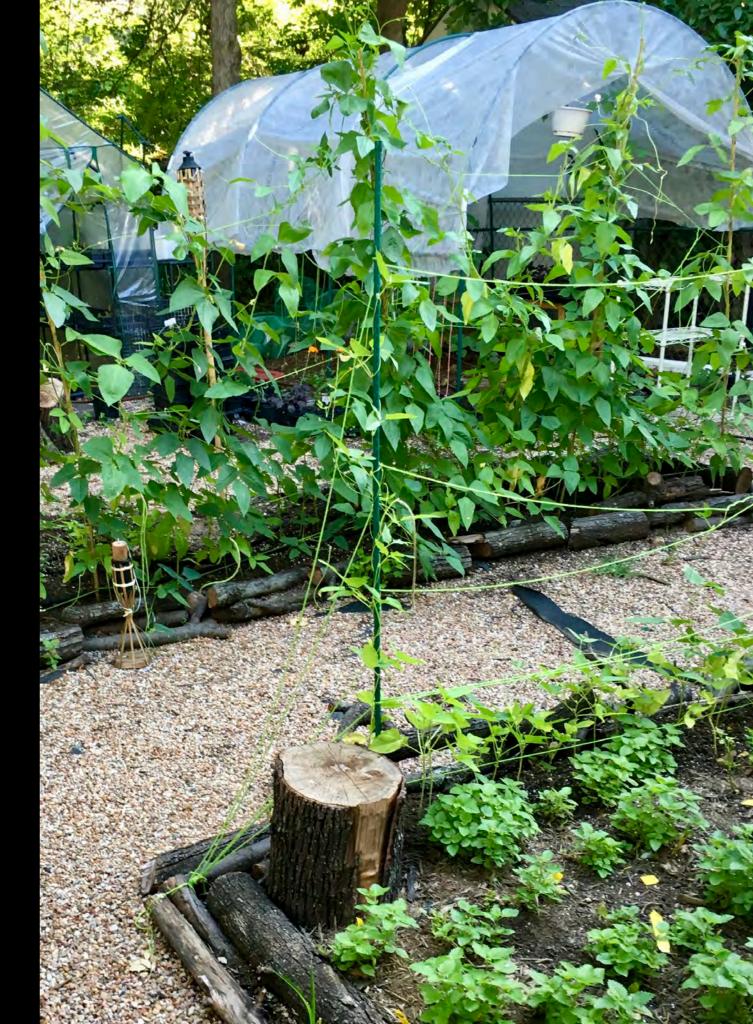
#### WHY LA FLACA?

- As an immigrant, wanted something that represented my history & culture
- After all, I started my farm with the intention to locally grow ingredients that I missed from Mexico
- LA FLACA in Spanish literally means Skinny Woman but it can also be another name for the grim reaper
- I chose LA FLACA as nod to our celebration of the Day of the Dead, one of my favorite Mexican traditions



#### STARTING LA FLACA 2014/15

- Moved from an apartment to a house with a tiny backyard
- Started selling to Austin restaurants out of my backyard on April 2015
- Pictured is said backyard where I grew herbs & edible flowers for a handful of restaurants: Olamaie, Emmer & Rye, L'Oca door



# GROWING LA FLACA IN 2016

- Bought first "farm"—a house in the suburbs with an 1/4 acre backyard
- Received grants from UnLtd USA, Austin Food & Wine Alliance to transform said backyard into a farm



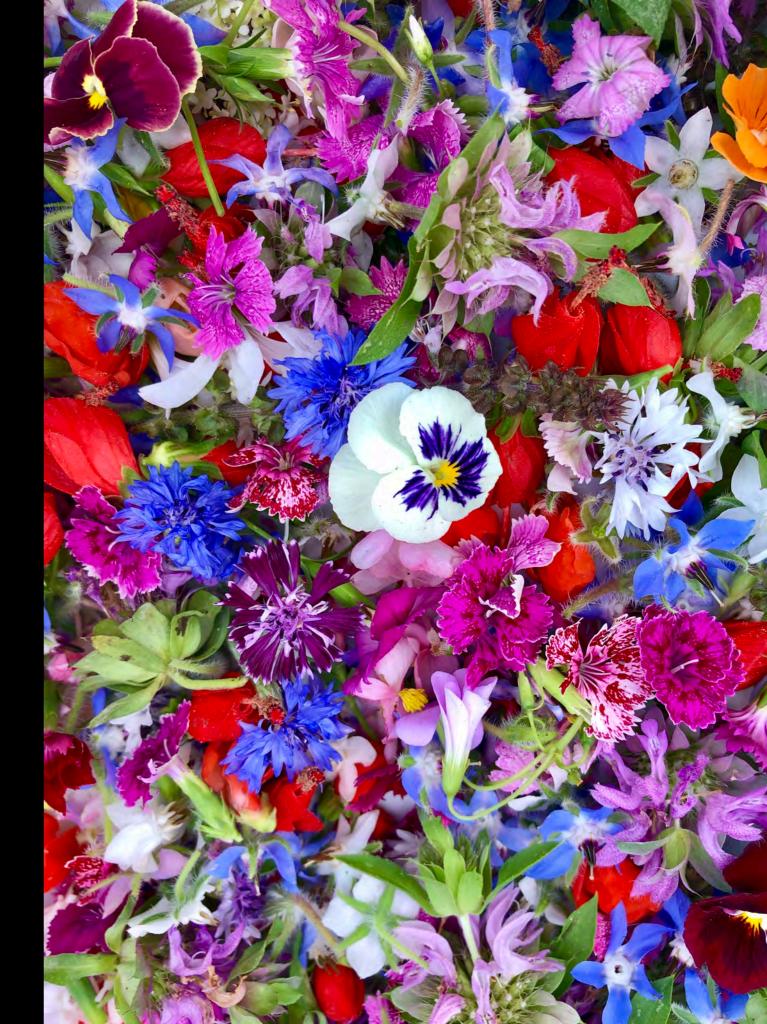
#### FROM LAWN TO FARM

- Summer of 2016, transition from lawn to farm
- <u>https://www.youtube.com/</u> <u>watch?v=EF84w3snA00</u>



#### WHAT WE DO

- We sustainably grow edible flowers, herbs, and hot peppers for local chefs
- In 2019, we harvested over 100,000 edible flowers for 40 local restaurants & caterers–Emmer and Rye, Royal Fig, Lucky Robot, Suerte, Comedor, Olamaie



#### WHAT WE DO

- We harvest our flowers, herbs, & peppers at their best to transform them into flavorful seasoning salts, beautiful pressed flower art
- You can buy our products through our website or at seasonal markets such as Blue Genie Art Bazaar



#### WHY WE DO IT

- Sustainable farming is the way of the future: we can't expect to take from nature without giving back
- Space for our community to learn about farming
- Providing locally-grown beautiful flowers and fragrant herbs to Austin kitchens
- Safe space for pollinators



# GROWING PRACTICES

- IT'S ALIVE! Healthy soil is an active biome of bacteria, fungi, and insects. We only feed it nutrients in the form of organic compost or decomposed mulch
- NO PESTICIDES! We take an integrated approach to pest management based on early action, healthy soil, & strong plants
- SEASONAL! We work with nature, not in spite of it. Each season comes with its unique mix of herbs & flowers fit for cold or hot weather



# MOMENT OF TRUTH

- Passion is not enough to be a farmer, commitment & resilience are a must to survive changing seasons
- Profits are slim but satisfaction is high– sustainable farming is a worthy purpose



#### MARIGOLDS & MEXICO

- Marigolds (genus Tagetes) have been grown by indigenous peoples of Mexico for centuries before colonist arrived
- They're a big part of Mexican culture, which is evident in our food & traditions

Fragment of Florentine Codex (1577) 186v. depicting Tagetes lucinda and Tagetes erecta in contemporary Mexico with writing that explains properties and uses



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#### MEXICAN MINT MARIGOLD

- Tagetes lucida is a compact perennial that grows up to 2ft tall, 1 ft wide
- Other names alluding to its fragrance: sweet mace, Texas tarragon, sweet marigold, anise herb, root beer plant
- Originally from Mexico and Guatemala



#### FUN FACTS

- 'Huichol' is a traditional variety used by Huicholes in Mexico that grows at an elevation of 5,000-6,000ft
- Its blooms are amongst the most sweetly-scented of all flowers; they can be used to obtain a yellow dye
- Good companion plant for tomatoes-secretions from the roots have an insecticidal effect on the soil, effective against nematodes
- The dried plant is burnt as an incense and to repel insects



#### GROWING MINT MARIGOLD

- Tolerates heat & drought well, as it prefers dry or moist soil
- Suitable for: light (sandy), medium (loamy), & heavy (clay) soils; prefers well-drained soil
- Suitable pH: acid, neutral, & basic
- Prefers full to part sun, can't grow in the shade
- Plant transplants after last frost, water regularly until established



#### GROWING MINT MARIGOLD

- During summer, water deeply weekly to encourage root growth
- Thrives in compact spaces, somewhat deer resistant
- Harvest its distinctive aniseflavored leaves from spring to first frost
- During the fall produces bright yellow flowers that attract migrating butterflies and other pollinators



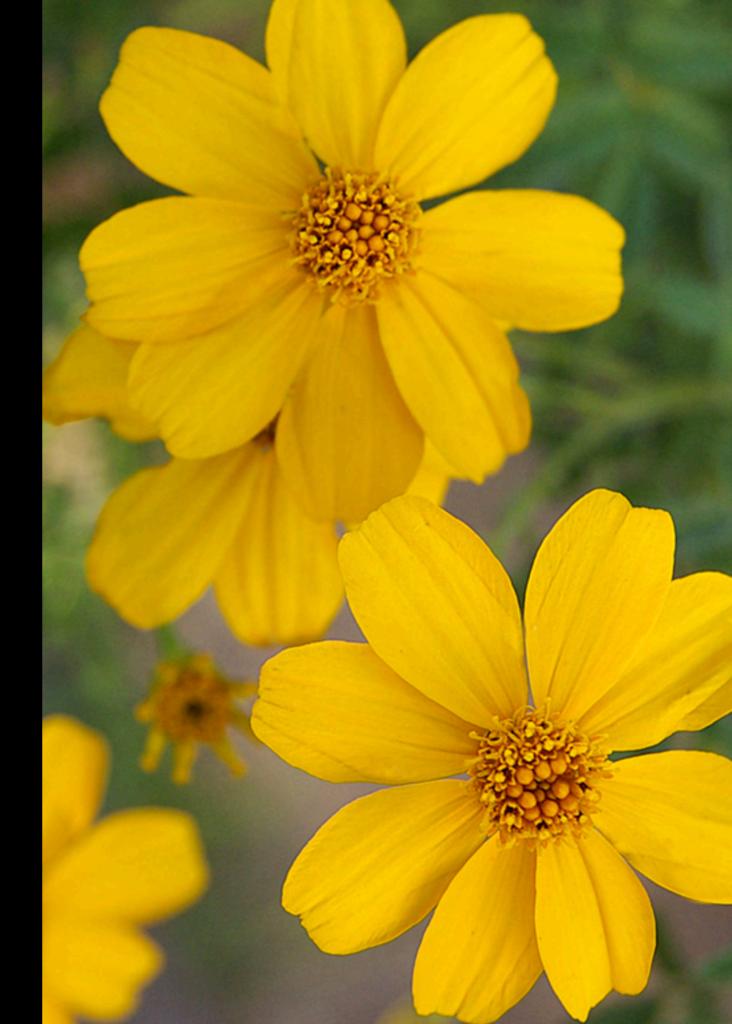
#### PROPAGATING MINT MARIGOLD

- Divide plants by digging the clumps every two to three years
- If stems fall over and touch the ground, they will take root, causing plants to spread
- Remove young shoots (5 10 cm tall) making sure to get as much of the underground stem as possible. Pot up and keep in light shade until roots are formed, usually take 2-3 weeks
- Seeds should be started indoors for germination in 2-weeks



#### OVER WINTERING MINT MARIGOLD

- May freeze to the ground during winter, doesn't mean it's dead!
- Whether it freezes or not, shear it back to the ground in late winter or early spring, only the harshest of winters will kill its roots
- To prevent freezing, cover the roots of your mint marigold with a couple of inches of hardwood mulch
- If flowers are left to seed, it may reseed itself but doesn't tend to spreads readily



# CULINARY USES

- Can be used as a substitute for French Tarragon, which doesn't grow well in Texas
- Has a unique anise-like flavor
- Leaves can be used in soups, salads, sauces, eggs, and fish
- Try chopping fresh leaves into chicken salad, eggs, & pesto
- The petals are also edible and have an intense anise flavor



# CULINARY USES

- Unlike French tarragon, which doesn't retain its best flavor when dried, mint marigold dries quite well
- To air dry, bundle tightly with twine and hang to dry in a cool, airy place
- Ideally, use dehydrator on the lowest setting to dry leaves and flowers in 4-6 hours
- The dried leaves and flowers are brewed into a pleasant aniseflavored tea–a popular drink in Latin America known as 'pericon'



# TRADITIONAL USES

- The dried leaves were an important flavoring for chocolatl-stimulating cocoa drink of the ancient Aztecs
- Huichol Indians in northern Mexico ceremonially smoke a mix of tobacco & mint marigold leaves to induce visions
- Both Mayans & Aztecs used a tea made with mint marigold to treat gastrointestinal ailments
- There are reports from various parts of Mexico of message-carrying longdistance runners using robust mint marigold tea to for strength & stamina



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# BASIC HERB BUTTER

- 1/2 pound butter (unsalted)
- 1 tablespoon chives
- 1 tablespoon mint marigold
- Dash of salt

Bring butter to room temperature. Lightly chop herb and blend with butter in a food processor or chop more finely and blend in by hand. Refrigerate at least 6 hours or overnight if possible.



#### MINT MARIGOLD LIQUEUR

- 1/3 cup of chopped mint marigold leaves
- 1 cup Brandy
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons water

In a clean half-pint mason jar combine the marigold and brandy. Let sit for 5 days, shaking daily. On day 5 make a simple syrup with the sugar and water over low heat. Allow to cool. Strain the herbs from the brandy through a fine cheesecloth. Add simple syrup. store at room temperature or in the refrigerator, capped tightly. Keeps indefinitely. Sip cold or add to cocktails.



#### MINT MARIGOLD STEAMED FISH

- Place one pound of fresh fillets on a piece of buttered aluminum foil
- Slash the fillets at 2-inch intervals and insert a thin slice of lemon into each cut
- Generously dot the fish with herb butter, salt and pepper to taste, sprinkle 1/4 cup of chopped mint marigold leaves
- Double-fold the edges of the foil to seal; fold parchment around the fish, letter style, then turn the ends under
- Bake the packet no more than 20 minutes in an oven preheated to 350°F



# MEDICINAL USES

 Medicinal uses include treatment for upset stomach, for stimulating the appetite, as a diuretic and stimulating beverage

 There are reports from various parts of Mexico and the southern United States of message-carrying long-distance runners using especially strong mint marigold tea to give them strength and stamina; the robust tea acting similar to the caffeine in strong coffee



## AZTEC MARIGOLD

- Tagetes erecta is an annual native to Mexico & central America
- Flowers are edible and can be used in dye and food coloring
- May help soothe digestive and respiratory ailments



## AZTEC MARIGOLD

- Know in Mexico as "flor de muerto" they are everpresent in Day of the Dead altars and offerings, why?
- Chosen by Aztecs to honor their dead on Day of the Dead (Nov. 2) for their prolific, bright blooms from September to December, a tradition passed on to modern times



# AZTEC MARIGOLD

- Their vibrant color is said to represent the sun, which in Aztec mythology guides spirits on their way to the underworld
- During the Day of the Dead our ancestors believed their strong aroma together with incense would guide the dead back to their families

CEMPOAL XOCHITL Caryophylli Mexicani planta.

