



Woman Faces Jail Time for Planting Vegetables on Own Property

Resident Julie Bass is learning this the hard way. After Bass's lawn was torn up during a sewer line's replacement, an ambitious green thumb and the price of organic food inspired her to pursue a botanical project a bit more interesting than watching grass grow. The result was five large planter boxes boasting fresh basil, tomatoes, carrots, cabbage, cumpers, and more — all visible from the street. Explains Bass, "We thought it'd be really cool to do it so the neighbors could see. The kids love it. The kids from the neighborhood all come and help."



But one neighbor wasn't so helpful. He called the city and complained, prompting a visit from a code enforcement officer. Bass related what happened next to ABC News, [stating](#):

They warned us at first that we had to move the vegetables from the front, that no vegetables were allowed in the front yard. We didn't move them because we didn't think we were doing anything wrong, even according to city code we didn't think we were doing anything wrong. So they ticketed us and charged me with a misdemeanor.

Bass now faces a jury trial and a possible 93 days in jail if convicted.

And why is the city seeing red at Bass's green? MyFoxDetroit.com explains, [writing](#):

The city is pointing to a code that says a front yard has to have suitable, live, plant material. The big question is what's "suitable"?

We asked Bass whether she thinks she has suitable, live, plant material in her front yard.

"It's definitely live. It's definitely plant. It's definitely material. We think it's suitable," she said.

So, we asked [Oak Park City Planner Kevin] Rulkowski why it's not suitable.

"If you look at the definition of what suitable is in Webster's dictionary, it will say common. So, if you look around and you look in any other community, what's common to a front yard is a nice, grass yard with beautiful trees and bushes and flowers," he said.

Since Rulkowski's definition is likely foreign to even the wordsmiths among us, I checked a few Internet resources. Dictionary.com [defines](#) "suitable" as meaning, "such as to suit; appropriate; fitting; becoming." Google's online dictionary offered a similar definition. Finally, when I checked Merriam-Webster.com, I found [this](#) entry: "*obsolete*: similar, matching." Well, perhaps Rulkowski is an old-fashioned guy.

Of course, maybe the city planner will use an original-intent argument; perhaps his definition wasn't obsolete when Oak Park's regulations were crafted. Whatever the case, in an age of budget woes, some



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on July 9, 2011

may wonder if prosecuting greenhorn gardeners is a wise use of the public treasury. And with all the concern about civilizational collapse — with citizens stocking up on food, water, ammunition, and other emergency supplies — it could be said that Bass's botany represents a kind of self-sufficiency that should be encouraged.

So shame on you, heavily Democratic Oak Park. What would Michelle Obama think?



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