

ESG promotional content
produced by The Japan Times Cube

sustainable japan

Matthew Peterson grows premium sprouts, spreads word at schools

Blue Leaf Microgreens: Big impact from urban farm

Name: Matthew Peterson
Title: Founder of Blue Leaf Microgreens
URL: www.blueleafmicrogreens.com
Hometown: California, U.S.
Years in Japan: 6

Leaders & Readers

MIKA OSAKI
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

They say good things come in small packages. It perhaps follows that the very best things are the smallest — micro, even. Microgreens, harvested just as the first leaves emerge from the seed, are the beautiful tiny herbs and sprouts that chefs use to elevate the aesthetic and flavor of their dishes. Despite their size, they pack an incredible punch in terms of nutrient density and concentrated flavor. Matthew Peterson, the founder of Blue Leaf Microgreens, is growing premium organic microgreens in an underground Tokyo farm. His impact is further distinguished through sharing sustainability practices and conducting community outreach programs in schools.



Each batch of Blue Leaf Microgreens is grown to order in small, customized batches.
HARUO MOTOHASHI

Tucked into the eclectic enclave of San-genjaya lies a screen-printing studio. Nothing outside indicates that the basement contains an oasis: a grow space whose shelves are packed with rows and rows of carefully curated trays of absolutely beautiful microgreens, all grown to order for clients across the city. It is hard to imagine that Blue Leaf Microgreens' first grow space was a spare bedroom.

Peterson originally started growing microgreens in his native Southern California. His journey led him to Dallas, where he grew microgreens for a sushi bar. He was about to pack up and move to New York when a customer changed his life forever. A woman frequenting the sushi bar was in Dallas for a five-month business trip from Tokyo. Lightning struck, and the two fell in love. By the time she had to return to Tokyo in February 2019, the pair were engaged, and a new chapter began for Peterson in Japan. In a way, the origin of Blue Leaf Microgreens was a love story.

He didn't jump directly into business ownership, and had quite a journey to get to where he is today. At first, he grew and maintained roses at Tokyo Station. Unfortunately, COVID led to downsizing and he was out of work. He then found a job with a German hydroponic startup that was expanding into Japan. It had a series of grow hubs across Europe where it grew fresh herbs directly in supermarkets and was looking to expand to Asia. Things were going well, but unfortunately the war in Ukraine directly impacted the business because the energy source for the European side came from Russia, and the business had to shut down. Although that opportunity didn't work out, the practical

knowledge and skills he gained equipped him to begin his own venture. "It was a good time to do things for myself," he said, reflecting upon the transition.

In the spare bedroom, Peterson started testing seeds and trying different varieties, and in the first year was able to develop 18 varieties. His very first client was Coaster Shimokitazawa, which at the time had just opened and now is a well-known Tokyo taproom and kitchen. As he started distributing to more and more restaurants, he began to outgrow the bedroom. One day, walking down the street, he saw a screen-printing studio. Wanting to create T-shirts for his new business, he struck up a conversation with the owner. It turned out that the basement just happened to be ideal for creating a grow space. Being underground and windowless makes it very difficult for insects to get in, and the concrete walls make it easier to control the temperature year-round. "I just use regular 20-watt LED lights," he said of his energy usage. Now he grows over 40 variants and is in the process of building new shelves to meet growing demand.

"Microgreens are inherently highly sustainable," Peterson said, and his methods are remarkably clean and efficient compared to traditional farming methods. He doesn't use soil, which can lose nutrients if not consistently maintained and is just plain messy. Instead, he uses coconut fiber, which is cleaner, compostable and holds water well. Coconut fiber is a byproduct of coconut processing that would otherwise be discarded, so finding uses for it prevents waste. Because of how well the fiber retains water, he uses about 90% to 95% less water than traditional farming methods require to grow the same



HARUO MOTOHASHI

plants. The lack of insects in the space also means he doesn't need to use chemical pesticides; the only thing he adds to the water is kombu (kelp), which provides additional nutrients and helps him control the rate of growth for clients who want larger leaves. "The only thing that touches the microgreens is pure filtered water, coconut fiber and sometimes kombu," he said.

Peterson's urban farm produces almost no waste. He grows the greens per client requests, so he is able to tightly control the exact amount of seeds required for a specific volume of microgreens. Recently, he has begun experimenting with freeze-dry-

ing extra microgreens, which would let him create unique seasoning powders and find various other uses while completely eliminating waste. He also repurposes the spent coconut fiber and organic waste through his relationship with various local schools, where he teaches workshops and classes about sustainability and urban farming and helps kids grow their own plants and vegetables. He composts spent coconut fiber in school gardens, creating new life yet again and leaving the soil in better condition than he found it.

The next step for Blue Leaf Microgreens would be for Peterson to be able to produce

Southern California to Texas to Tokyo

Originally from Southern California, Peterson first started growing microgreens in his home state. His journey led him to Dallas, where he began growing microgreens for a sushi bar.

He was about to pack up and move to New York when a customer changed his life forever: His future wife began frequenting the sushi bar. They got married and moved to Japan in 2019. He found work tending to the roses at Tokyo Station, but due to COVID his job was cut. This led him to a German hydroponic startup where he maintained mini grow spaces around Tokyo for supermarkets. But because the company's fuel for its operations in Europe came from Russia, it had to close down.

Peterson learned a lot during this time, and was ready to begin his own venture. He started Blue Leaf Microgreens in a spare bedroom and now serves clients all over Tokyo from a professional grow space.

his own seeds, giving him total control over the entire growth cycle. This would require an outdoor grow space where he could allow plants to mature and produce seeds. He would still be able to keep his process very clean by continuing to compost the microgreens' organic waste, removing the need for fertilizers that end up in water runoff when it rains. By layering compost "like a lasagna" and leaving behind the roots of harvested plants, Peterson would improve the soil instead of making it worse, like many agricultural processes do. "Soil is finite, so once it's gone it's gone," he remarked. This harmonious ecosystem is the ultimate goal of the business.

Peterson's positive impact on the community around him expands far beyond the sustainability of his urban farm. He has found scrappy uses for organic byproducts, wastes almost no water and electricity, and improves his community by teaching the next generation about sustainability and urban farming.

Times Gallery



Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic during an audience with the emperor. DIMITRIJE GOLL



Indian Textiles Minister Giriraj Singh speaks at the inauguration of the 16th India Trend Fair in Tokyo. EMBASSY OF INDIA



Jamaican Ambassador Shorna-Kay Richards meets with Oblique Seville, who claimed victory for Jamaica in the men's 100-meter final at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo, clocking a personal best time. EMBASSY OF JAMAICA



The Canadian Embassy's Sirine Hijal joins Canadian artists Alexa Kumiko Hatanaka and Johnny Nghiem at their exhibition "Patience and Persistence," exploring nature, resilience and culture through washi-based art and photography. EMBASSY OF CANADA



The Embassy of Hungary welcomes world renowned Hungarian virtuoso violinist Zoltan Maga and his orchestra. EMBASSY OF HUNGARY



The American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) hosts the event "Osaka to Orbit" at Expo 2025's USA Pavilion with renowned space industry pioneers on Aug. 19. ANDY BOONE



The 6.8-kilometer run Larian Merdeka Tokyo (Independence Run Tokyo) celebrates Malaysia's 68th Independence Day on Aug. 31 in the heart of Tokyo. EMBASSY OF MALAYSIA



The Embassy of Romania and the Romanian Cultural Institute-Tokyo participate in EU Languages Day, an annual project of the EU Delegation to Japan, in Tokyo's Hiroo area on Sept. 28. EMBASSY OF ROMANIA

How a joined-up education sets pupils up for lifelong success

Sponsored content

Parents naturally hope their child will live a meaningful and successful life. But in today's shape-shifting world, is it any wonder parents fear what lies ahead? Many question whether they are making the right choices, especially around schooling. Schools often promise exceptional outcomes — but how many actually deliver? Fewer than parents hope, for reasons that are layered and not always obvious.

A tripping point in education

Ask any parent and they can share equal parts war stories and celebrations about how quickly their child grows and changes. This is the beautiful — but sometimes stressful — reality of parenting. Combined with disjointed school transitions, it creates an undercurrent of worry for many families.

The Cambridge Primary Review found such transitions can "trip pupils up while they are adjusting to the new social environment." This is the perfect adolescent storm: making new friends, adapting to an unfamiliar curriculum and shouldering greater responsibility. This is why many educators encourage a consistent educational pathway. Each stage builds on the last, giving children the confidence to experiment, test their limits and thrive.

The integrated advantage

What makes the British independent school pathway so effective? Coherence, joined-up learning and academic rigor — paired with structures and support systems within the school ecosystem. Together these factors reduce disruption, provide in-depth aca-

demic and pastoral support, and give pupils space to blossom.

For example, Bilton Grange prep school flows directly into Rugby School U.K. — one of the most prestigious boarding schools in Great Britain. This partnership rests on a shared philosophy, helping pupils move from elementary to senior school.

Japan's 3-18 pathway

In Japan, Rugby School Japan follows the same principles. In partnership with Phoenix House International School and Clarence International School, it offers a continuous educational pathway.

The journey begins at Clarence International School. From 18 months, children follow the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, which builds curiosity and confidence through play-based learning and exploration.

Next, pupils transition to Phoenix House International School (PH), a British-style prep school where small class sizes ensure every child is known and supported. Following the National Curriculum for England, pupils are challenged to develop intellectual depth and academic curiosity. This is complemented by a rich program of music, drama and sports, fostering not only academic growth but also resilience, integrity and kindness through character education.

By the time they reach Rugby School Japan at age 11, pupils have already developed a love of learning and a strong sense of belonging. RSJ builds on this through its "Whole Person Whole Point" ethos, which emphasizes character development through academic and co-curricular excellence, and exemplary pastoral care. These factors give pupils the foundations they need to hone their unique strengths and forge their own path. The starting point for this outcome? The stability of a joined-up journey from preschool to elementary to senior school.

What makes this pathway so powerful? The schools' unified ethos and shared systems. Pupils feel a reassuring sense of familiarity as they move from CIS to PH to RSJ, where each stage is tailored with the support every child needs to thrive even as routines and curricula evolve from preschool to day school to boarding school.

What is more, many pupils transition with



Pupils engage in creative discussions with their teacher in a supportive environment. RSJ

their friends, adding comfort from day one. This lets pupils focus less on "new school jitters" and more on progressing academically, physically, creatively and personally. One parent, whose children moved from CIS to PH, summed it up:

"The most important thing is that character education has been there all along, so that children were not floored by change. They understand that change is a natural part of developing. The children also understand what it means to go to the limit of what you think is possible and see that there's someone next to you saying, 'I know you can take the next step.'"

This shared commitment ensures that while the world may be unpredictable, a child's journey at CIS, PH and RSJ is grounded in common purpose and values.

The future you choose

The choice you make for your child's education is among the most important of your life. While many Tokyo schools offer excellent programs, few can provide a seamless journey from first steps in preschool through to the confidence and independence of senior boarding.

That is what sets Clarence International School, Phoenix House and Rugby School Japan apart. This is Tokyo's only fully joined-up British boarding pathway: one that begins with curiosity and play, grows into academic and personal discovery, and culminates in the transformative experience of boarding.

It is a one-of-a-kind model in Greater Tokyo, designed to give children the continuity, character and resilience they need to thrive in an unpredictable world.

Take the first step today. Explore our schools in-person or online, and see how this 18 months to 18 years can set your child up for lifelong success.



Pupils benefit from small class sizes of 18, receiving tailored support. PHOENIX HOUSE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL