



Why Are Community Gardens So Important?

Food Production

- Many community gardeners, especially those from immigrant communities, take advantage of food production in community gardens to provide a significant source of food and/or income.
- Community gardens allow families and individuals without land of their own the opportunity to produce food.
- Community gardens provide access to nutritionally rich foods that may otherwise be unavailable to low-income families and individuals.
- Urban agriculture is 3-5 times more productive per acre than traditional large-scale farming!
- Community gardens donate thousands of pounds of fresh produce to food pantries and involve people in processes that provide food security and alleviate hunger.

Youth

- Community gardens offer unique opportunities to teach youth:
 - Where food comes from,
 - Practical math skills,
 - Basic business principles,
 - The importance of community and stewardship,
 - Issues of environmental sustainability,
 - Job and life skills.
- Community gardening is a healthy, inexpensive activity for youth that can bring them closer to nature, and allow them to interact with each other in a socially meaningful and physically productive way.

Community Organizing

- Community gardens increase a sense of community ownership and stewardship.
- Community gardens foster the development of a community identity and spirit.
- Community gardens bring people together from a wide variety of backgrounds (age, race, culture, education, social class).
- Community gardens build community leaders.
- Community gardens offer a focal point for community organizing, and can lead to community-based efforts to deal with other social concerns.

Crime Prevention

- Community gardens provide opportunities to meet neighbors.
- Community gardens build block clubs (neighborhood associations).
- Community gardens increase eyes on the street.
- Community gardening is recognized by the many police departments as an effective community crime prevention strategy.

Cultural Opportunities

- Community gardens offer unique opportunities for new immigrants (who tend to be concentrated in low-income urban communities) to:
 - Produce traditional crops otherwise unavailable locally,
 - Take advantage of the experience of elders to produce a significant amount of food for the household,
 - Provide inter-generational exposure to cultural traditions,
 - Offer a cultural exchange with other gardeners,
 - Learn about block clubs, neighborhood groups, and other community information.
- Community gardens offer neighborhoods an access point to non-English speaking communities.
- Community gardens allow people from diverse backgrounds to work side-by-side on common goals without speaking the same language.

Health

- Studies have shown that community gardeners and their children eat healthier diets than do non-gardening families.
- Eating locally produced food reduces asthma rates, because children are able to consume manageable amounts of local pollen and develop immunities.
- Exposure to green space reduces stress and increases a sense of wellness and belonging.
- Increasing the consumption of fresh local produce is one of the best ways to address childhood lead poisoning.
- The benefits of Horticulture Therapy can be and are used to great advantage in community gardens.

Green Space

- Community gardens add beauty to the community and heighten people's awareness and appreciation for living things.
- Community gardens filter rainwater, helping to keep lakes, rivers, and groundwater clean.
- Community gardens restore oxygen to the air and help to reduce air pollution.
- Community gardens recycle huge volumes of tree trimmings, leaves, grass clippings, and other organic wastes back into the soil.
- Community gardens provide a place to retreat from the noise and commotion of urban environments.
- Community gardens provide much needed green space in lower-income neighborhoods which typically have access to less green space than do other parts of the community.
- Development and maintenance of garden space is less expensive than that of parkland.
- Scientific studies show that crime decreases in neighborhoods as the amount of green space increases.
- Community gardens have been shown to increase property values in the immediate vicinity where they are located.

Notes:

We are indebted to Gardeners in Community Development (Dallas) for condensing this list that was originally published by Gardening Matters as "Multiple Benefits of Community Gardening."

The American Community Gardening Association's website is also a great resource for learning more about the many positive benefits of community gardening. <http://communitygarden.org>