

Community Gardens: The Benefits

Health gains:

- People who grow their own food have access to a variety fresh produce which supports nutritional health, decreases susceptibility to illnesses and overall reduces the burden on the health care system.
- Gardening involves physical activity so it helps individuals improve their physical fitness.
- Community gardens are a great place to escape from the noise and commotion of everyday urban life.
- Studies show the following health benefits to be associated with involvement in community gardening: strengthened immunity, reduced rates of asthma, decreased stress, increased overall sense of wellbeing and reduced risk of childhood lead poisoning.

Educational opportunities:

- A community garden can be both a classroom and a textbook for formal and non-formal education programs and institutions.
- Learning to grow plants is mentally stimulating and adds to an individual's wealth of knowledge and expertise.
- Growing a garden teaches people to think sustainably and use long-term problem-solving skills rather than relying on quick fix, short-term solutions.
- Gardens can educate the public on issues such as waste minimisation and recycling through composting and mulching.

Economic benefits:

- Community gardens can be a significant source of food and/or income for community members. This is especially helpful for families and individuals without much land who would not otherwise be able to produce their own food.
- Urban agriculture is 3 to 5 times more productive per acre than traditional large scale farming.
- Studies show that community gardens can increase neighbourhood property values.

Environmental benefits:

- Rainwater is filtered through gardens, helping to keep lakes, rivers and groundwater clean.
- Community gardens restore oxygen into the air and help reduce air pollution.
- Large quantities of organic waste can be used to fertilize gardens, thus helping to minimize a community's overall waste output.

Cultural opportunities:

- Community garden projects give community members the opportunity to work side-by-side, regardless of cultural background or native tongue.
- New immigrants can produce traditional crops that are otherwise unavailable locally.
- Gardening can expose new generations to cultural traditions and promote inter-generational learning.
- Community gardening enables participants from different cultural backgrounds to exchange gardening- and non-gardening-related knowledge with one another.

Community building:

- Community gardens are a valuable social venue where neighbours can get to know one another, and build a sense of community and belonging.
- By working together for a common purpose, community gardeners learn to make communal decisions, solve problems and negotiate with one another.
- Collective gardening increases the sense of ownership and stewardship that exists, and fosters the development of community identity and spirit.

Youth engagement:

- Community gardening is a healthy, inexpensive activity for youth that can teach them about appreciation for the natural world and how to interact with others in a socially meaningful and physically productive way.
- Not only can youth gain practical job and life skills through gardening (such as math skills and understanding of basic business principles), they can also learn about the work that goes into getting the food they eat to the table and about the importance of community, stewardship and environmental sustainability.

Crime prevention:

- Many police departments recognize community gardening projects as an effective strategy to prevent local crime. They foster a sense of mutual respect among community members, lead to the formation of neighbourhood associations and social networks, and increase the number of eyes on the street.
- Studies have shown that areas with above average green vegetation have less graffiti and littering, and lower crime rates (with no correlation between the amount of green space and income level).

Urban improvements:

- A few plants and some elbow grease can transform empty lots into beautiful green spaces.
- Gardens increase and protect vegetation diversity in a community, while also providing habitat for urban wildlife.

Strengthened governance:

- Community gardening projects are mutually beneficial to governmental bodies and local citizens:
 - Better relations between government and citizens
 - Improved organizational performance of government due to improved communication and cooperation with community members
 - Strengthened civil society
- Community gardens can help translate government policy into action (e.g., Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act, Nova Scotia's 2020 Vision, Agenda 21).

Resources:

Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network <www.communitygarden.org.au>

Community Gardens in the City of Toronto <<http://www.toronto.ca/parks/programs/community.htm>>

City Farmer - Canada Office of Urban Agriculture <www.cityfarmer.org>

Edmonton Community Garden Network <<http://www.edmcommunitygardens.org/index.php>>

Gardeners in Community Development, Dallas Area Community Gardening Program <www.gardendallas.org>

Halifax Land Share <<http://www.ecologyaction.ca/content/halifax-landshare>>

National Gardening Association <www.garden.org>

Sackville Community Garden <www.sackville.com/community/heroes/community_garden>

Urban Farm Museum Society of Spryfield <<http://www.urbanfarmspryfield.com/>>

Vancouver's Community Gardens <<http://vancouver.ca/parks/parks/comgardn.htm>>