

Benefits of Community Gardens

Health gains:

- ⑤ 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.**
- ⑤ Gardening involves **physical activity** so it helps individuals improve their physical fitness.
- ⑤ Community gardens are a great place **to escape from the noise and commotion** of everyday urban life.
- ⑤ 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.**
- ⑤ Allow for a **dignified way to access** healthy food.

Educational opportunities:

- ⑤ A community garden can be both **a classroom and a textbook** for formal and non-formal education programs and institutions.
- ⑤ Learning to grow plants **is mentally stimulating and adds to an individual's wealth of knowledge** and expertise.
- ⑤ Growing a garden teaches people **to think sustainably and use long-term problem-solving skills** rather than relying on quick fix, short-term solutions.
- ⑤ Gardens can educate the public on issues such as **waste minimization and recycling** through composting and mulching.
- ⑤ Creates **community resource people** to support others who are interested in gardening.

Economic benefits:

- ⑤ 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.
- ⑤ Urban agriculture is **3 to 5 times more productive per acre** than traditional large scale farming.
- ⑤ Studies show that community gardens can **increase neighbourhood property values.**

Environmental benefits:

- ⑤ **Rainwater is filtered** through gardens, helping to keep lakes, rivers and groundwater clean.
- ⑤ Community gardens **restore oxygen into the air** and help reduce air pollution.
- ⑤ Large quantities of organic waste can be used to fertilize gardens, thus helping to **minimize a community's overall waste output.**
- ⑤ **Reduce soil erosion and runoff**, which lessens flooding and saves the city money.
- ⑤ By **reducing the "heat island" effect**, gardens lessen the need for air conditioning and lower electric bills.

Cultural opportunities:

- ⑤ Community garden projects give community members the opportunity to work side-by-side, **regardless of cultural background or native tongue.**
- ⑤ New immigrants can produce **traditional crops** that are otherwise unavailable locally.
- ⑤ Gardening can expose new generations to cultural traditions and promote **inter-generational learning.**
- ⑤ Community gardening enables participants from different cultural backgrounds to **exchange gardening- and non-gardening-related knowledge** with one another.

Community building:

- ⑤ Community gardens are a valuable social venue where **neighbours can get to know one another**, and build a sense of community and belonging.
- ⑤ By working together for a common purpose, community gardeners learn to make **communal decisions, solve problems and negotiate** with one another.
- ⑤ Collective gardening **increases the sense of ownership and stewardship** that exists, and fosters the development of community identity and spirit.
- ⑤ Can **reduce isolation** for seniors and other residents not connected to the community.
- ⑤ Increase **self-esteem** as gardeners see what they have created and the skills they have built.
- ⑤ **Create leaders** by giving community members the chance to take the lead in projects.

Youth Engagement

- ⑤ Teaches them about **appreciation for the natural world** and how to **interact with others** in a socially meaningful and physically productive way.
- ⑤ Community gardening is a **healthy, inexpensive activity for youth.**
- ⑤ 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:

- ⑤ 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.
- ⑤ 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:

- ⑤ A few plants and some elbow grease can transform **empty lots into beautiful green spaces.**
- ⑤ Gardens increase and protect **vegetation diversity** in a community, while also providing habitat for urban wildlife.

Common Complaints about Gardens and how to refute them

When listening to people's concerns about your proposed garden it's very important to stay calm and respectful as best you can. Hearing someone criticize your idea for what may seem to be unimportant reasons can often make you feel under attack. However, the focus should always be on building consensus. Ask for suggestions of how the idea could be adapted to suit their concerns rather than going on the defensive, making fun, or becoming condescending. If it is clear that the person critiquing your plan is not willing to be flexible, let them know that the garden committee will discuss their concerns and that you will agree upon a way to address them. It doesn't happen very often, however, if you face a particularly aggressive group, it might be worth stating at the outset that personal attacks and aggressive behavior (shouting, name calling) are not permitted in the discussion.

They attract rodents

- ⑤ Emphasize that it's important to you as well that the garden is a clean and safe place to visit.
- ⑤ Rodents are attracted to spaces where they can find food, water and shelter. You will prevent them through good planning. The set of rules that all gardeners will agree to should say that all produce will be harvested in a timely fashion, standing water will not be allowed, and dense plant growth will be kept to a minimum.
- ⑤ If you will be composting in your garden, poorly tended compost bins can also attract rodents. Tell community members worried about rats that your composters will be lined with wire mesh to keep rats out and rules for good compost management will also be included in the guidelines.
- ⑤ If compost turns out to be a real deal breaker for your community or housing provider, consider starting your garden without compost for the first season, until they have been convinced that you will maintain it. Or you could consider composting with worms, a method which is less likely to attract rodents (SEE INFO SHEET 3 for more)
- ⑤ If other rodents (i.e. squirrels) are a problem, agree to have a community brainstorm about ideas for protection, but agree that squirrels are not a reason not to have a garden. Take a look at the resources in SECTION 6 for more information.

They are an eyesore

- ⑤ Gather pictures of beautiful and well organized community gardens. Share them with your community and tell them that you want their input on how the garden looks so that it is a place everyone can enjoy.
- ⑤ To prevent the garden from looking run down if people don't care for their plants, suggest a rule in the garden guidelines to address this. For example: gardeners must maintain communal spaces and tend to their own plot at least every 2 weeks or they will receive a warning and may not be invited to participate in the garden again the following year.

- ⑤ Suggest planting a floral border around the garden so that flowerbeds will be the first thing passerby see. Invite some of the people resistant to the garden to participate in the upkeep of these floral beds

They increase loitering and crime

- ⑤ Collect information to promote the social and health benefits of the garden – group gatherings, relaxing space, and “weeding workouts”.
- ⑤ Gardens have actually been found to reduce crime, as they foster a sense of mutual respect among community members, lead to the formation of neighbourhood associations, and increase the number of eyes on the street. A space with gardeners, children and residents passing through it at all times of day is much less likely to have criminal activity than an underused area.
- ⑤ If you have Community Police in your area, you can offer to connect with them to have them help patrol the area in the evenings. If crime is a real concern, consider having your garden in a well-lit area with a locking fence surrounding it, though this may reduce the community engagement in the site.
- ⑤ If a particular group of individuals is focused upon in resistance to the garden, pull together partners to develop an advocacy plan.

We’re using that space for something else

- ⑤ This complaint can best be addressed by careful planning. Have as many people as possible at site planning meetings to ensure the garden site will not conflict with dog walkers, sports or children’s play. To engage many people in the site plan, consider the activity listed in APPENDIX B under “picking a site”.
- ⑤ If people are resistant to give up any space for the garden, appeal to their sense of goodwill by agreeing to have one garden bed that is growing food for donation to a local food bank or charity.

Gardens are too exclusive/elitist

- ⑤ Share information about the process of getting a garden bed and emphasize that it is open to anyone in the community who is interested.
- ⑤ Include images of gardeners that reflect your community in the garden pictures you display. This will further help to deepen the idea that the garden will be a place everyone can enjoy together.
- ⑤ Ask for suggestions about how it can be a dynamic community space, perhaps by including a sitting area, fire pit, kid’s space or other amenities the community can enjoy together