



Sydney Food Fairness Alliance
working towards food security and sustainable food systems

FOOD FAIRNESS ILLAWARRA
A community based alliance enabling healthy food for all

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY GARDENS? A DIY approach to growing food in our cities

Community gardens — a new way to grow food and a sense of community in our cities

GROWING YOUR OWN fresh food in your local community garden is a new way to healthy eating practiced by increasing numbers of Australians.

Community gardening is more than simply growing food. It is also a way to grow a sense of place and community.

The number of community gardens in Australia is increasing. What started as isolated examples of urban food production in the late-1970s has blossomed into a movement promoting nutritional health through the growing, sharing and eating of fresh, locally grown food. Community gardeners know that sharing land to grow food builds a sense of place and community.

Benefits

Community gardeners report a number of benefits from their gardens:

- easy access to fresh, nutritious food
- the sense of achievement that comes from growing some of your own food
- making friends with neighbours and other people who live in the area and who garden
- learning the skills of gardening and of the shared decision making and cooperation that are necessary to successful community gardens
- the healthy outdoor exercise gained from gardening
- having a constructive and productive recreational activity
- improving the local environment.

Combining these benefits with the responsibility of caring for an area of land creates a sense of place and identity. Add the benefits of working with local people and, over time, a sense of community can develop.

This is one of the reasons why professional community workers are starting to make use of community gardens in their work. They know that a sense of community creates a safer and constructive environment and that community gardens are safe places for families. A 2005 University of NSW study by Dr Bruce Judd and Dr Rob Samuels of the AHURI UNSW-UWS Research Centre, carried out in nine public housing estates, found that community food gardening was effective in reducing the incidence of crime.



Happy community gardeners with baskets of fresh, nutritious greens. Community gardens are filling the baskets of many urban dwellers as they discover the pleasures of garden agriculture and each other's company. Community gardens are a key element in making Australia's cities socially and environmentally sustainable. In a world challenged by climate change, economic uncertainty for families and the peaking of global oil supplies, community gardening contributes to the food and social security of urban people.

Community food, local food

Community gardens are part of a growing preference in Australia for locally-grown foods. Such foods are fresher and have not been transported great distances - they have fewer 'food miles' - a measure of the energy and pollution used to move food from farm to home.

Although a household cannot obtain all its food locally, vegetables, culinary herbs, fruit and eggs can be produced on the edge or within the suburbs of cities such as Sydney. Community gardens are a new element in the mix of market gardens, farmer's markets, fruit and vegetable shops and organic retailers providing regionally-produced foods to city people.

Types of gardens

Community food gardens are found on land owned by local government, schools, churches and state government housing estates. Common to all gardens is the sharing of land and responsibility for looking after it.

There are two types of community garden:

- the **shared garden** in which gardeners have responsibility for the entire garden, doing whatever work is needed at the time and taking a share of what they grow
- the **allotment garden** in which gardeners have their own garden plot.

Many community gardens combine the two, and even in allotment gardens there is shared work to do in maintaining the communal areas. Both types have been proven to work well. The type chosen depends on the preference of the gardeners.



The community of the table

There is no better way to build a sense of community and to make new friends than to share the growing and cooking of food – what noted chef and author, Stephanie Alexander, calls the 'community of the table'.

Although in most community gardens people harvest what they grow and take it home to cook, more and more gardens are discovering the joys of preparing the food they grow and eating it in the garden. According to Rob Joyner from Sydney's Eastern Suburbs Community Garden, "we have a monthly meeting... and at the end of the meeting we have a lunch that is based on whatever is currently in the garden — we use the garden produce as much as we can. We extend the gardening experience to actually preparing the food, and that's very popular".

An accepted urban land use

As the number of gardens grows, community gardening has become an accepted use of urban land. Both state and local governments assist gardeners by providing land and other low-cost help.

In essence, community gardening is a do-it-yourself initiative that brings people together to produce fresh, local food, to improve their neighbourhood and build a sense of belonging and community. Community gardens are part of Australia's cities of the twenty-first century.

Information

www.communitygarden.org.au



Creative Commons licence

www.creativecommons.org
Permission to reproduce and redistribute this discussion sheet for non-profit purposes is granted providing content is not changed and the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance is credited as the source. Reproduction and distribution must be under the same Creative Commons licence and carry this notice.