

Community Matters

Community Gardens: More Beneficial Than Many Think

(NAPS)—People around the U.S. are increasingly bringing the “green” back to their neighborhoods. In addition to initiatives like Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) and environmental education through the schools, residents are starting to focus much of their attention on building long-lasting landmarks such as community gardens.

The American Community Gardening Association estimates that there are already 18,000 community gardens throughout the country, and for good reason. According to Minnesota nonprofit Green Matters, community gardens decrease crime in urban areas with little vegetation, increase the value of properties in the surrounding area and can help locals save money on food through garden-generated produce. Instead of driving to a distant supermarket for produce or a faraway park for some green space, it’s just a matter of walking over to the nearby garden.

The health benefits associated with these gardens show how important open garden spaces can be to otherwise “greenless” urban environments. In 2013, University of Utah researchers found that residents who get involved with community garden projects have recognizably lower body mass indexes than nongardeners, with less chance of being overweight. Not only that, fresh produce from community gardens is less likely to be contaminated with pesticides than other kinds and can be used to teach kids about better nutrition.

Organizations such as GrowNYC try to make neighborhood gardens more prevalent. It has already helped establish more than 70 community gardens in New York City, one made with recycled beauty waste with the help of Garnier and recycling company TerraCycle. Initiatives like these not only help establish com-



A community garden can be easier to establish than many people realize.

munity gardens in areas with otherwise sparse vegetation, but get the public involved, increase environmental awareness, and educate the community at the same time.

Assistant Director Lenny Librizzi shared these tips for getting involved in a community garden.

- **Look Online**—Well-organized community gardens usually have websites or Facebook groups.

- **Visit**—Take a walk through nearby gardens to see which one you’re most drawn to.

- **Get Your Hands Dirty**—Being a member of a community garden is about more than just growing vegetables. All members should expect to help with common areas, composting, watering, or volunteering time.

- **If At First You Don’t Succeed**—Each garden has different rules and management systems. If you don’t feel like you’re gelling with the group, try out another one or consider starting your own.

Organizations such as the National Recreation and Park Association and the U.S. Department of Agriculture offer grant programs to communities to help fund garden projects. Some companies are also helping. For example, TerraCycle and Garnier will bring another Garnier Green Garden made out of recycled beauty waste to one of five urban areas in the U.S. in a contest decided by a public vote.

To vote and learn more, visit www.green.garnierusa.com.