

Sowing Seeds of Happiness, Unity, and Healthiness

By: Sarah Strang

City of Easton,

I have often walked through Easton passing many vacant and deserted lots wondering what purposes they serve for our community. Then one day I came across an idea, “Why not a community garden?” Community gardens transform empty, vacant lots into beautiful, vibrant green spaces for everyone to enjoy. A community garden is simply “a piece of land gardened by a group of people” (“Community Gardens”). A community garden can exist almost anywhere- vacant lots, parks, or school grounds, for example. Not only does a community garden make a city more aesthetically pleasing, I believe that a community garden can make Easton a better place for its residents and for the town government.

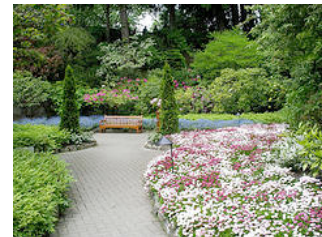
The idea of community gardens has existed since the beginning of time. Archaeological digs show that many ancient cities often contained a shared garden. The first community garden in the United States was created by the Moravian settlers in North Carolina in the 1700’s. In the 1800’s, cities across the country began to allot pieces of land to the homeless in order to allow them to grow their own food. “You may recall in the 1940’s, World War II Victory Gardens in which civic duty brought gardeners together to grow food for the war effort” (“Bloom to Grow”). Community gardens have existed in a



variety of cultures throughout time, serving a variety of different purposes within a community.

In today’s world, we have lost sight of what a community truly is and what it means to be a part of a community. The very essence of a community is that its members work together to achieve common goals. Community gardens allow people of all ages and backgrounds to work side-by-side to organize and manage an area that reflects a wide variety of interests and cultural ideals. Community gardens can serve as a “place where cultural traditions can be practiced by elders and passed down” (“Community Gardens Help Create Vibrant Neighborhoods”). They can also provide younger students with hands-on learning in an “outdoor classroom” setting. In addition, it has been found that the presence of community gardens has even reduced neighborhood crime and vandalism. The act of working together to care for a community garden can give Easton a strengthened sense of community and cultural understanding.

A community garden is also a good reminder that we need to be conscious of the environment and understand that all of our actions have an effect on it. This mentality could benefit not only



Easton, but also the surrounding areas. In our modern society, we have created distinct boundaries between rural areas and city. This does not have to be the case; the two settings need to be incorporated within a town. The simple act of seeing a garden on a daily basis in the midst of traffic lights and tall

buildings is a constant reminder that we need to work on preserving nature and the world in which we live for generations to come.

Towns can benefit in many ways from community gardens. Some of these benefits include the following:

“increased food security, chemical-free food consumption, improved population health, and diversion of kitchen waste from landfills through use of composting” (“Community Gardens Help Create Vibrant Neighborhoods”).

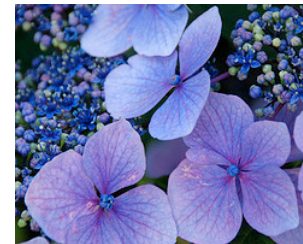


Produce also becomes more reasonably priced, since the produce does not have to be imported from elsewhere. This could be especially beneficial right now because of the current state of our

economy. Some of the produce from the garden can even be used in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, or schools and even businesses. The overall health and well-being of Easton could easily be improved with a community garden.

Not only do communities benefit, but the actual gardeners also gain many health benefits from working in a community garden. The various types of physical activity involved with gardening, such as raking and pushing a wheelbarrow, can improve a person’s health and well-being. It can “improve self-esteem, lower blood pressure and heart disease” (“Community Gardens Help Create Vibrant Neighborhoods”). Gardening also “helps to build endurance, flexibility, and strength. This endurance will help the heart, lungs, and circulatory system, as well as contribute to higher energy levels and muscle and

joint flexibility” (Community Gardens Help Create Vibrant Neighborhoods”). Gardeners also are more mentally healthy, with greater self-reliance, responsibility, and sense of belonging. The act of caring for a garden is very rewarding because it can teach invaluable life skills, such as responsibility. Gardens can benefit a wide range of people of all ages and backgrounds in many valuable ways. My personal experience in gardening involves volunteering at a non-profit community garden nursery. This type of garden is different than most community gardens in that people with certain disabilities are the primary gardeners and caretakers of the property. The plants and produce are sold and the profits go towards an organization that helps benefit those who are mentally and/ or physically handicapped. The gardeners learn valuable life skills and are given the opportunity to interact with others. After their plants have grown, volunteers can help them sell their plants to the community who then benefits from gaining access to a wide variety of plants. Everyone can benefit from this type of community garden. Playing an active role in a community garden is very rewarding for all those involved-gardeners, volunteers, and the entire community.



Community gardens are essential parts of a city or town. “The simple act of planting a garden can create positive environmental, economic, and social impacts on a neighborhood” (“What is a community garden?”) This quote sums up why a community garden should be implemented into the country of Easton.

Community gardens serve a variety of different purposes and benefit almost everyone in the community. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at strangs@lafayette.edu.



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