How Gardens Grow Communities

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Prologue

We've left something of ourselves here.
When you've planted a garden, you've left something permanent.
They can't take that away from you—
no matter what,
short of digging up the land.
But other than that
the land which remains here,
even if nobody tended this garden for years,
something would remain here,
something would still be growing here
that we had something to do with.
And you could come back here
and look at it and smile,
—Evelyn McMahon

Wild, dirty children are damming water in the mud and their parents look on with relaxed amusement while finishing the colorful salads and cracked wheat bread.

Dedicated gardeners harvest the last of the potatoes and carrots, while others talk in low tones with old and new friends. At this autumn harvest celebration, all are pleased with the success of the community garden. There is an experience of deep joy, a sense of being exactly where one should be and doing exactly what one should do. It is a sense of being utterly in place, and of the origins of all that one finds authentic. The harvest festival has a sense of transcendence; it is more than a group of people eating and working together. It is beautiful.
Gardens are beneficial on many levels: psychological and emotional, nutritional, social, economic, environmental and rehabilitative and restorative (Shafer 69). Specifically, community gardening is thought to empower the individual and help the entire community grow the bonds necessary for collective caring and action. Such cooperation strengthens social and economic ties; beautification instills community pride, and trust is built as primary human needs are met. Working with the earth and producing wholesome food is an invigorating and therapeutic exercise because of the opportunity to experience wholeness and completion. The labor also fosters a sense of self-reliance and independence and a special dignity associated with gardening.

Moreover, the rewards are visible and stem from a close relation with the physical environment. Gardens are a meeting of humans and nature. This relationship is enhanced by the ancient Greek belief that contact with the earth makes people more virtuous and happy. On the community level, the community garden acts as an association which empowers individuals, builds a stronger community, creates effective citizens and makes democracy work.

This thesis explores a garden, located on the Carroll College campus in Helena, Montana as one of thousands of community gardens that fulfills unique community needs. It details how community gardens help build healthy communities and more specifically, how the Helena Community Garden is successful in this effort.

The majority of my research rises from two full seasons of participant observation. I am one of the core organizers of the garden and thus, I have ample experience with the community involved with the garden. While formulating the foundational ideas of the garden, I communicated at length with members of established
gardens in other communities and with the members of our team. As the garden developed, I discussed the idea with master gardeners, teachers, members of community service organizations and community developers.

The research also includes the results of a detailed survey distributed at the autumn harvest celebration (see Appendix A). The discriminating factors for selecting people to complete the survey were gender (half were given to men and half to women) and age (those old enough to read and write). From the ten surveys, six participants were selected for in-depth interviews. The interviewees were selected because of their diverse gardening experience, different age, sex, current family structure and experience with the community gardening community. The survey included: their role as a volunteer, their relationship with the community, their perspective on children in the garden, and the role of churches and local government (see Appendix B).

The academic research includes books, newspaper articles, magazine articles and online information. That research yielded both quantitative and qualitative perspectives demonstrating the importance of gardens. The majority of information is anecdotal, gleaned from interviews, observation and surveys. A few important empirical studies which demonstrate the importance of gardens are also drawn on to help substantiate and clarify the thesis conclusions.
Cultivating the Earth is in my history, a collective memory carried within me. It is in everyone's history, everyone’s ancestors were connected to the earth.
—Patricia H. Hynes, A Patch of Eden

In order to gain a better perspective of how contemporary community gardens work in a myriad of ways, a history of the community garden movement in the United States will be explored. There are roughly seven periods to garden history: Potato Patches (1894-1917), School Gardens (1900-1920), Liberty Gardens (1917-1920), Relief Gardens (1930-1939), Victory Gardens (1941-1945), and Community Gardens (1970 to the present) (Bassett 1). All of the movements were promoted by reformers as “palliative measures to help society adjust to living under stressful social or economic conditions” (Bassett 1). The specific causes the gardens were directed to varied: “work relief, nature study, civic beauty, patriotism, or wholesome food production, sustaining morale and supporting the social framework” (Bassett 1).

Potato Patches

Similar to the origins of the gardens of England and northern Europe, allotment gardening in the United States started out of the desires both to feed and to control the poor. The historian, Sam Bass Warner describes the initial forces behind the first gardens in the U.S.:

the trigger was the economic depression of 1893-97. Detroit, then a manufacturing city with a specialty in building railroad cars, was one of the cities hard hit by unemployment. Its mayor, Hazen S. Pingree, noticed during the spring of 1894 that few jobs were being posted. He called for owners of vacant land at the edge of the city to lend their property so that the unemployed might at least raise sufficient potatoes to carry their families through the winter (Bass Warner 13).
The intention of these garden allotments seems to be philanthropic; however, a problem with these initial gardens has persisted through contemporary gardens. Landowners (both private and government) allowed their land to be gardened until the land was sold forcing the gardeners to find a new space. This transitory nature of community gardens has persisted through time and is the greatest battle for contemporary urban gardens.

**School Gardens**

The next garden period, from 1900 until World War I, was a result of the urban environment of the Industrial Revolution. Gardens provided small oases of nature in crowded, polluted cities. “Some civic improvers saw the congestion and the absence of nature in the urban world as a blight that impaired the physical, mental, and moral development of the city’s lower-income residents” (Bassett 3). Some schools responded to these ailments and implemented garden plots at schools. These school gardens were often viewed as “an adjustive mechanism, as a way of opening children’s minds to their civic responsibilities as well as to human-environment relationships” (Bassett 3). These early educators were among the first Americans to begin the traditional coupling of schools and gardens. This partnership has proven to be an opportunity for experiential learning as discussed further in chapters to come.

**Liberty Gardens**

The Liberty Garden movement, which lasted from 1917 to 1920, was prompted by the “food shortages of World War I, the massive drafts of men into armies, the blockades of food shipments, and the destruction of crops and farmland during the fighting [which] caused severe food shortages across Europe” (Bass Warner 17).
address these needs, the government set up the National War Garden Commission in 1917 to increase food production (Bassett 4). They presented the idea of American people who will valiantly support the nation’s institutions and democratic ideals in trying times (Bassett 8). Urging this “army of the soil” to “take up their hoes and cultivate all vacant lands became the major task of the commission. By trying to show that bearing one implement, the hoe, was as patriotic as carrying the other, the rifle, the commission systematically associated gardening with going to war” (Bassett 4).

Formerly thought of as poor people in want of food and instruction, the gardeners became full-fledged, patriotic citizens. The leader of the United States campaign for war gardens imagined the gardeners to be people who, unable to serve in the army, wanted to “take an active part in some effort which would show tangible results in the struggle for right and justice.’ The National War Garden Committee, an affiliate of the American Forestry Association, issued press releases and posters to encourage people to grow vegetables—‘Every Garden a Munitions Plant,’ ‘Sow the Seeds of Victory,’ ‘War Gardens Over the Top’” (Bassett Warner 17). Other, less patriotic people, planted gardens in vacant spaces of cities to cope with rationing and high prices (Bassett Warner 17). This first round of war gardens illustrates gardens can be tools for developing citizenship.
Relief Gardens

The fourth period of gardens coincided with the era of the Great Depression from 1930 to 1939. During this time, a number of cities in the United States, and a number of railroad and industrial corporations, established "relief gardens" which were plots for their few workers and the unemployed to plant gardens (Bass Warner 18). The New Deal also experimented with "a very ambitious 'subsistence homestead' program for urban industrial workers. On the fringes of Chicago, Wilmington, and Los Angeles it built small houses on one-to three-acre lots that were themselves planted with fruit trees and vegetables. At the time of the 1935 report 22,000 people had applied for 5,000 proposed homesteads" (Bass Warner 19). These relief gardens demonstrated how gardens can become an alternative food source when emergency food sources run low and when people are unable to provide for themselves.

Victory Gardens

Similar to the gardens of the first world war, Victory gardens were a response to the second world war from 1941 to 1945. The advertising strategies of the government were successful again and "during the peak year, 1944, 20 million victory gardeners produced 44 percent of the fresh vegetables in the United States" (Bass Warner 19). The gardens continued after the armistice so that "food supplies of the United States could be supplemented and more food made available for the starving peoples of Europe and Russia" (Bass Warner 18). Once again, these war gardens show that Americans responded to the call to patriotism and to the demands of practicality.
Community Gardens

The contemporary gardening movement that began around 1970 is the child of a different political and social atmosphere. There are various reasons for the new tone. The political force of community gardening does not rest so much upon philanthropy but springs from a new kind of grass-roots politics that grew out of the civil rights movement. This politics emphasizes self-help, and it insists on the dignity of all participants. The inclusive, empowering civil rights tradition has made it possible for welfare mothers, newcomers from the suburbs, and overseas immigrants to join together in garden associations. One answer is posed by Bass Warner:

The new politics arose out of the Afro-American civil rights movement of the 1960s. The vacant lots came from the emptying out of the centers of American cities when they were rebuilt in their current low-density suburban-metropolitan forms. Together the empowerment of new politics and the opportunities of vacant land have created a historically unprecedented series of class and racial coalitions—organizations of blacks and whites, poor and well-to-do, longtime city residents and newcomers from the suburbs. These new coalitions bring urban neighbors together to plant and maintain community gardens, to manage neighborhood land, and to set fresh goals for the rebuilding of the American city. (20)

Groups as varied as their gardens take part in the current movement: young, old, poor, wealthy, students, suburbanites, the imprisoned, and the handicapped. “Gardens are appearing in church and school yards in Houston, on university grounds in Ann Arbor and Berkeley, in public parks in San Jose and Portland, along power line rights-of-way in Los Angeles, around housing projects in Chicago, and on hospital grounds and rooftops in New York and Washington, D.C.” (Bassett 7-8). Ordinary city dwellers and landless suburbanites stopped waiting for public institutions to provide land for them and began, instead, to demand land and services from their municipalities.
This tidal change took place sometime between 1968 to 1976 (Bass Warner 22). In 1972, local initiatives stemming from the new garden outlook began to multiply rapidly in New York, Boston, Syracuse, Burlington, Vermont and by 1978, the organizers of community gardens from many American cities came together in Chicago to meet each other for the first time, to compare experiences, and to form a national organization, the American Community Garden Association (Bass Warner 23).

Public response to this garden movement has been mixed. As citizens of an affluent nation which shows limited respect to those of its citizens who are poor, many Americans dismiss these city gardens as insignificant activities. Many still see the gardens as temporary uses to be tolerated only during the interval between land clearance and new construction. Government officials and private landowning citizens deny the legitimacy of vegetable and flower gardens as permanent uses for urban land. Yet other uses are unsatisfactory to the people in the gardening coalitions: “the muddy, car-filled lot, the chain-link fence, the paved parking spaces, all stand in opposition to the public desire to use city land directly—to gather together, to party, to make noise, to debate, and to garden” (Bass Warner 22). This movement is also significant in that “it is not a movement of philanthropy or a case of the rich helping the poor. Instead, it is primarily a grassroots movement of people promoting people to help themselves” (Shafer 11).

*The Helena Community Garden*

In the summer of 1997, inspired by a visit to the lush community gardens in Missoula, and as a student at Carroll College in Helena, I began to envision a similar community garden program in Helena. I called the city parks department and was informed of the current community garden on Waukesha street. The Waukesha garden,
an acre plot in northwestern Helena, is divided into about twenty-five plots which are rented to Helena residents for a nominal fee. The tending responsibility rests solely with the renters. Naturally, some plots are better tended than others, with half the available area dedicated to organic production, while the other half may use chemical techniques. This garden serves an important community role by providing a gardening space for apartment dwellers who do not have greenspace. In contrast, I sought to bring groups in the community together to establish a garden with a communal garden space and to donate some of the produce to Food Share, the local food bank.

Through my continued search of the web of the community, I contacted Matt Waugaman, a VISTA volunteer, Debra Beaver and Suzanne Wilcox (and her husband Galen who has helped with the garden public relations), members of Roots and Wings, the children in a poverty task force group at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Helena, and Jan Jahner, a member of St. Paul’s. During the first meetings, we discovered our mutual excitement for the community garden idea. We envisioned a place to bring together children, seniors, students, and community members and also to provide some fresh produce for those in need. We discussed funding, organization and who to involve but our primary task was to find a garden plot. I asked Lynn Etchart, the Vice President director of finance, administration, and facilities Carroll for a place for the garden on campus. She allowed us to use the old backyard of the Psychology House on Ralph Street as well a free tap into the water system. That October, a group disked under the packed down Kentucky bluegrass (and in the process tore up some buried internet wires, but that’s
another story). Jim Barngrover, an organic farmer tested the quality of our soil and at his suggestion we planted some winter rye to add some nutrients to the soil. In January, we were joined by Sondra Hines, a teacher and Jim Bauermeister, a parent of children from the Helena Community School which is “an independent learning center built on the belief that educational excellence is essential to a promising future for our children, our communities, and the larger society” for children from preschool through fifth grade (“What is HCS?”). Sondra, Suzanne and Galen and Jim would all act to bring the Helena Community School children to the garden. In March of 1998, the group planted starters of squash, cabbage, lettuce, radish, corn and flowers in the Carroll greenhouse. Members of the Carroll Habitat for Humanity, Carroll students, garden organizers and members of the community helped build raised beds to give shape to the forty by sixty foot plot. A tool shed, tools, topsoil, compost, and seeds were all donated to the project. That summer, Matt Waugaman, the VISTA volunteer unsuccessfully attempted to establish an intergenerational gardening mentor program with seniors in the RSVP program and the youth from the Youth Advisory Council.

The following summer months were punctuated with monthly garden group gatherings and concluded with a joyful harvest celebration. All of the produce was donated directly to Food Share. Youth groups from the community helped “put the garden to bed”. The following spring of 2000, the group celebrated Earth day in the garden by designing garden t-shirts, “turning the beds” and cold season planting. The summer brought many groups of children and youth to the garden. The produce was split between Food Share and the Women Infants Children (WIC) program. Due to inclement
weather, the harvest celebration and the Halloween “putting the garden to bed” parties consisted of a faithful few.

With the financial help of the Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) I went to the American Community Garden Association annual meeting in Atlanta, Georgia in the September of 2000 to present the Helena Community Garden. I facilitated a spirited discussion of how to best engage children and youth in community gardens. In October of 2000, I was awarded the Governor’s Award for Civic Engagement for my work with the community garden. At present, the garden group consists of Debra Beaver, Sondra Hines, Suzanne Wilcox, Jim Bauermeister, and myself. We have planned another Earth Day celebration.

Reflections

This journey of the community garden movement shows how gardens can create an association which empowers individuals to provide food for the hungry, build a stronger community, create citizens who are willing to engage in grassroots movements and make democracy work. The succeeding chapters will demonstrate how the current garden movement and the Helena Community Garden movement in particular have been successful in these efforts.
Chapter 2 Engaging a Diversity of Groups in the Community

Networks are a crucial part of social capital, and one of their critical features is diversity. While internally homogeneous groups are often the basis for diversity within the community, there must also be formal and informal community networks that include individuals of diverse characteristics: young and old, men and women, various racial and ethnic groups, different social classes (often more difficult) newcomers and old timers.

— Cornelia Butler Flora

The visions for contemporary community gardens include engaging different groups in the community. This chapter focuses on the immediate concerns of families: food, raising children, care for the elderly, neighborhood sociability and the general empowerment of ordinary citizens. Sectors of the community are often judged according to their needs: children need more money for a good education, youth need after-school programs to keep them out of trouble; and welfare recipients need jobs to begin to provide for themselves. An alternative view is to look at the assets of certain groups and at every individual as having capacities, abilities and gifts. The object here is not to lump people together, but to hold each person as an individual: “We all bring our individual gifts and not necessarily according to the group we ‘belong to.’ I believe this is especially important when referring to ‘welfare recipients.’ Members of that group are also young or old, wise or funny. . . humans. It is again a matter of all being in this together, rather than separating, isolating” (Wilcox).

Children and Youth in the Garden

The unique energy and creativity of youth is often denied to the community because the young people of the neighborhood are all too often viewed only in terms of their lack of maturity and practical life experience. However, children and youth bring much

Maya smelling a flower.
to communities. They have time, ideas, creativity, connection to place, strong peer
groups, strong family relationships, enthusiasm and energy. As John Kretzmann proposes
in his workbook for community building, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A
Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*, given the proper
opportunities, youth can always make a significant contribution to the development of the
communities in which they live. What is needed for this to happen are specific projects
that will connect youth with the community in ways that will increase their own self-
esteem and level of competency while at the same time improving the quality of life of
the community as a whole (29).

As teachers at the turn of the 19th century discovered, gardens are ideal
classrooms for children to develop a “sense of place” around their local environment;
gardens replace learning about the environment only as something “out there” as some
traditional environmental education suggests. The Helena Community Garden is a
garden for youth and children in many ways. Since the beginning of garden, the children
from the Helena Community School have

played a continuous role in planting, tending and
harvesting the garden. Parents of Community
School children and teachers have been
instrumental in involving the children. The
parent of one student marveled at the “sense of
wonder and playfulness the children brought to the garden” (Beaver). For the past two
seasons, children have had outings to the garden during the regular term and there has
been a special summertime session. This past summer, the teachers worked out a creative
program called "GardenWorks 2000." This program involved learning in many subjects including: garden science of learning about compost, animals, and plants; entomological study of beneficial insects; garden art (making stepping stones, a bird bath mosaic, fence weaving, pot totems, and stakes; garden café with a solar oven, snacks and cooking). As this sampling of garden activities reveals, the garden provides an outdoor, hands-on setting in which students can learn through exploration, observation and experimentation about environmental topics. Such "experiential learning can lead to a greater interest and deeper understanding of science subjects than can classroom based learning" (Community Greening for Urban Revitalization). Jim Bauermeister, the father of Sam and Mara, two young gardeners, feels strongly about providing his children with a sound relationship with the environment: "I have always felt that all people, but especially the young, need to understand their relationship with the earth in order for them to really become well-adjusted, mature, and balanced individuals" (Bauermeister). The Community School has also been involved in delivering the produce:

Last Thursday the Community School delivered the first load of produce from the community garden to Food Share. We had ten kids and every one of them had at least one bag of lettuce or radishes. The Food Share people were great. They were very gracious and appreciative. They gave us graham crackers and water so I don't know if they realized a net benefit from our visit, but we sure did. The kids felt very good about giving fresh vegetables to hungry people. (Bauermeister 1)

Gardens are an important site for growing healthy children and the harder-to-reach group of young adults. The Helena Community Garden has been the site for service projects for three different groups of youth. Local Girl Scouts and a Helena
middle school builders club came to help “put the garden to bed” for the winter and a high school youth group traveled from Enum Claw, Washington to work in the garden for a week. They were a great help in completing large projects, but in return for their days of weed-pulling, shoveling and raking they were taught responsibility and consideration for living creatures, and given the calmness that comes with patience, pride for a day of hard work, and a feeling for how a garden works. A professor at Carroll College who has brought classes to the garden sees it as an important learning tool for all ages and a place where young people can learn selflessness and where food comes from (Mundinger). Another group involved in similar programs is spearheaded by Alice Waters, the owner of a gourmet organic restaurant in Berkeley, California. One of her projects is the Edible Schoolyard, which she founded at Martin Luther King Jr. High School in Berkeley:

From the garden, and the kitchen, and the table, you learn empathy—for each other and for all creation; you learn compassion; and you learn patience and self-discipline. A curriculum that teaches these lessons gives children an orientation to the future—and it can give them hope. (Wolcott 13)

Community gardens can be a tool that places both families and communities responsible as the ground-level generators and preservers of values and ethical systems. This is best achieved through a healthy community where parents have a moral responsibility and ample opportunities to invest themselves in the proper upbringing of their children, and conversely, communities have taken the responsibility to provide opportunities to enable parents to so dedicate themselves (Etzioni 54).
Seniors in the Garden

Perhaps the most undervalued group in our society is our seniors. Yet they have much to offer: economic resources, culture, tradition and history, experience and skills, time and peer groups. Until the present time in most communities throughout the world, the elders of the community have been viewed as the primary sources of wisdom and experience. “In highly competitive modern industrialized societies such as our own, however, senior members of the community often tend to be narrowly defined as the elderly and, as a result of this labeling, seniors become effectively marginalized from the activities of the mainstream, and their potential contributions to society become lost for both present and future generations” (Kretzmann 51). Unfortunately, it has been difficult to engage them in the community garden. Several attempts have been made to try to engage the groups in a cross-generational mentoring group and in the summer activities. The only small success thus far is with a very experienced master gardener in the community who has visited the garden on a couple of occasions.

Women in the Garden

There is a long history of the close relationship between women and plants, and women and gardens in particular. For countless centuries women have toiled in gardens for survival, for relief from house and field work, and in keeping with or in rebellion against the correlation of flora and femininity (Hynes 153). Women often bring gardening wisdom from their mothers or grandmothers. This wisdom can be relayed in the form of stories of success and failure of sowing and tending, medicinal properties of flowers and herbs or the storage and preparation of fresh vegetables. In return, gardens often provide a retreat for women.
The garden becomes a wall-less “room of one’s own” (Hynes 154) for women to express their culture, skills, vision, creativity, and productivity.

*Artists in the Garden*

Gardens are an outdoor place to experiment with creative fantasy, to experience the joy of creating something. The Helena garden has provided an opportunity for both individual creativity and communal expression. The garden is colored with brightly painted stakes, rocks, a birdhouse and shed. Tiles from a local business have been used to make mosaic stepping stones, a birdbath and a bench. Unique planters like a basketball, a shoe, and a bathtub are scattered through the plots. Festivals have been celebrated by making corn necklaces, corn husk dolls, and t-shirt painting. People of all ages and skill levels have participated in the art projects. This supports the idea that art and culture can be found not only in museums and similar institutions but also in everyday lives of ordinary people. The garden projects move us closer to uncovering the true artistic and cultural resources that can be found in local communities. The problem is that many members of the community who have true artistic ability do not look upon themselves as “artists.” (Kretzmann 95). A local artist empowered a group of children to become artists by inviting the students to his studio to make ceramic row markers to be used in the garden.
Engaging the Poor

Although they are frequently lumped together as a group and labeled as recipients of public assistance, “welfare recipients” include a wide variety of individuals whose specific assets can make significant contributions to community-building efforts. However, the poor are by far the most complex and difficult group to engage. The reasons for this difficulty could be that as a labeled group, those individuals who are currently involved in the receipt of institutionalized services must now function with the additional handicap of being misunderstood and stigmatized by those members of the community who are not on welfare at the present time. As a result, welfare recipients frequently tend to become increasingly isolated and marginalized from the active life of the community (Kretzmann 83). However, as the famed sociologist Robert Bellah counters:

The very existence of groups who do not meet the criteria for full social participation (such as welfare recipients) is anomalous. There should be no such groups. Their existence must be someone's fault, either their own—perhaps because their culture is defective, and they lack a “work ethic” or there is something wrong with their family system—or someone else's: economic or political elites perhaps oppress them and prevent their full participation. (Bellah 206)

Whatever the reason for their existence as a group, the problem remains that coupled with this inequality, socially disadvantaged individuals are more likely to be disorganized as well as impoverished. However, it is one of the paradoxes of social organization that those who stand to benefit most from organization tend to participate least; in contrast, people with strong families, churches, unions, political parties, and ethnic alliances are not likely to be dominated or deprived for long (Walzer 135). More associations representing a greater range of interests are found in wealthier than in poorer
communities regardless of race or ethnicity. Even where organizations exist, participation is highly related to income and education levels. America's largest cross-class associations have withered. As Theda Skocpol holds in her article, "Don't Blame Big Government," the best educated people are still participating in more groups overall, but not in the same groups as their less-well-educated citizens. One answer to improving the nation's civic life will turn out to lie in encouraging privileged Americans to rejoin—or recreate—the group settings in which they have daily chances to work with a broad cross-section of fellow citizens to address the nation's concerns. Americans need to place a new emphasis on working together, not just on "helping the poor." "Doing with" rather than "doing for" should be our watchword, if we want to revitalize the best traditions of American volunteerism (Skocpol 43).

Community gardens by their nature contribute to social equity by trying to unite people of different backgrounds in a shared interest and promoting collaboration in the name of a common goal (Shafer 48). In the pilot season of the community garden, the fresh produce was donated and distributed through Helena Food Share. The process of planting, tending and harvesting consumed all of us that summer and it was not until the second year the garden group began to try to reach out through the WIC (Women Infants Children) program as well. The HCG recognized that it is better to empower the women to take part in the garden itself rather than just giving them the food. This is the basic difference between justice in charity where "justice distributes power so that the weak become stronger and better able to take care of themselves...charity meets people's immediate needs in ways that keep them dependent" (Stivers, et al. 79). There are several obstacles to engaging this population.
Mike Henderson, the organizer of the WIC (Women Infants Children) program in Helena, identified these as lack of transportation, feeling of incompetence among the women, lack of communication between all the groups and the general isolation of the women. However, the garden organizers feel confident these obstacles can be overcome with careful planning, one-on-one communication and encouragement, and the implementation of a better advertising campaign of our large events. Other more well-established community gardens are very successful in engaging this population. These gardens contribute to economic security and opportunity by increasing self-reliance and providing a means by which lower income families can reduce their food bill and eat more nutritious meals.

*Role of Local Businesses*

Local businesses can provide or donate the resources which make projects like the community garden possible. The Helena project has been well supported by businesses in the community. The Good Humus Boys have brought compost to the garden on several occasions. Alan’s Tile donated tiles to be used for steppingstones. Gardenwerks has donated and installed our drip system (and fields maintenance calls). Image by Design has helped make brochures, a photo presentation, posters and a website. Other contributors include: Helena Industries, Mark’s Lumber, Power Townsend, Valley Landscape Supply, Shades of Green, Quick Signs, and State Nursery & Seed Co. The garden has advertised their generosity and they will further benefit from the returned revenue from a stronger local community.
Role of Non-Profit Organizations

Non-profit organizations which offer grants are often a significant source of financial and material support for community gardens. The Helena Garden has been supported by both national and local non-profits. On the national level, we were awarded a seed grant from the America the Beautiful fund which sends surplus seeds to gardens nation-wide. The American Community Garden Association awarded our project a Youth Garden Grant which included several installments of tools, seeds and bulbs, and other materials. On the local level, AERO (Alternative Energy Resources Organization) awarded the garden project a monetary grant under its SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Resource and Education) project. Carroll College has donated the land, water and use of the greenhouse.

Reflections

The community garden has engaged the strengths of local children, youth, women, artists, businesses, and the poor. People in these groups bring assets unique to who they are as individuals and as a group to the community garden. The garden has been supported by the community though both national and local non-profits and businesses. Community-oriented projects are more successful when they take this asset-based, positive approach.
Chapter 3 *Individuals and Community Involvement*

If you look closely you will see that almost anything that really matters to us, anything that embodies our deepest commitment to the way human life should be lived and cared for, depends on some form—often many forms—of volunteerism.

—Margaret Mead

The central question for those in community oriented organizations is “What is the motivation for one to be involved in their community?” Studies centered on this question have yielded a range of answers. A general theme is the idea that humans are intrinsically community based. The more individual motivations vary. Some live according to an altruistic virtue, while others are involved with religious organizations which urge them to help others. One common tension for community-oriented people is to maintain some sense of individuation. These and other concerns are the focus of this chapter.

*Community Centered Humans*

Human life is fulfilled in the context of community. No matter what particular goals or interests we may pursue, it is in our doing so in the context and community of our peers that makes our pursuits and activities meaningful. With rare exceptions, the good life is a life with other people and the goal of the good life is to deserve their affection and respect. We cannot be healthy living entirely alone because we instinctually aim to satisfy a self that is part of society. Indeed, “neither human existence nor individual liberty can be sustained for long outside the interdependent and overlapping communities to which we all belong” (Etzioni 253). The community determines not only who we are and what sorts of people we will be; the community is also the object of our concerns, whether in our personal relationships or the more general sense of community. Thus, community has both instrumental and intrinsic values. “The
extent to which community is present or developed in a local population can influence the level of achievement of common goals by that population . . . the community also has intrinsic value in social well-being, constituting, as it were, a natural disposition among people" (Wilkinson 3).

The United States remains, as historian Arthur Schlesinger once described it, a "nation of joiners" (Baggett 3). Even so, some individuals are more drawn to community-based activities than others and some are more likely to volunteer their personal resources to benefit the community than others. Participating in a community garden is one activity which completes our "communal self". The garden group is a small sample of community oriented people who reveal some reasons why community involvement does occur.

*The Virtues of a Community Oriented Individual*

The significance of community is found in a certain kind of attitude, a fellow feeling about one's place in the world with others. It is essentially compassion which is not indifferent to others; it is also not an immersion of the self, but it is a sharing and enlargement of the self. This is similar to the virtue, the *arête* (excellence) of the Greek theorists and which describes the disposition of a person whose conduct is guided by a shared, consciously held value or principle rather than by private, unexamined needs and desires. This kind of excellence, moreover, is a personal ideal as well as a collective one, in that "it describes a personality sufficiently integrated both to live up to commitments and to cooperate with others to achieve common values" (Sullivan 241). It is thus an ability to acknowledge the interconnectedness that binds one to others whether one wants
to accept it or not. It is also the ability to engage in the caring that nurtures that interconnectedness.

*Community Involvement*

In the classic work *The Compassionate Beast* by Morton Hunt, the reasons behind an individual's involvement are explored in depth. To show how individuals are affected by their societies, he uses a garden metaphor:

> Depending on the soil and weather, a seed can remain dormant, sprout but do poorly, or flourish. The newborn infant's biological predisposition toward altruism is like a seed; the culture of the society in which the child grows up is like soil and weather . . . In a favorable environment, even an untended plant will grow, though not to its potential; in an unfavorable one, despite diligent cultivation it will struggle for life; and given a benign environment and skillful gardening, it will thrive and develop fully. (63)

In every culture a wide variety of norms prescribe the kinds and bounds of behavior, and determine the extent to which a concern for others will develop in the average individual. And yet there are great variations in levels of kindness, generosity, helpfulness and concern for others in one society. Why is there such great variation? “First, there is no one-to-one relation between values and norms. Two people may both believe in kindness but spell it out very differently in their specific rules of conduct. Second, certain other values and norms may conflict with, and take precedence over, those of altruism” (Hunt 73). One Helena gardener articulated the reason why she became involved in the garden:

> I believe deeply that it is most important not to TRY to BE altruistic, as it can become a shallow effort to ‘do good’ rather than a genuine part of oneself . . . I love playing in the dirt, the beauty of the garden, eating wonderful, healthful, fresh organic food. I love simply the pleasure of knowing that I grew the food. I love that my kids experience all of that and know the resourcefulness of growing their own food. I love the sunshine on my back and the rain and mud and when
it’s not freezing cold outside. And I love the miracle of an enormous zucchini plant or sunflower that comes from a single tiny seed. (Wilcox)

As this gardener illustrates, motivations for most volunteers are mixed between giving and receiving.

A more disturbing idea is the selectivity with which kindness is offered. As Hunt proposes, people tend to practice it toward those in their own group but not those outside it, for whom they feel anything from indifference to hatred. Of course to some people, their own group can be as large as their society, or even much of humankind; to others it can be as small as their own immediate family. “Wherever they draw the line, those within it are we (the in-group as social scientists say), one's fellow human beings, who merit help when in need; those outside it are they (the out-group) who do not receive help” (Hunt 87). Hunt’s assertion is too simplistic. It is difficult for people to divide all people into either the “in-group” or the “out-group”. Another challenge to Hunt comes from the surveyed garden participants who felt they would respond to all people in crisis—regardless of their race or nationality. One gardener went so far as to say he felt he “would be interested in growing culturally-preferred foods for them” (Bauermeister).

The importance of recognition may also be a factor in how one responds to a call for help. “We are far more likely to do something to benefit our fellow human beings when they know of our actions than when they do not” (Hunt 143). Garden folk generally concurred with this idea and the majority would like to see the results of their labors, but to quote one active member: “To see the results of your work is gratifying, but not necessary” (Hines).
The Role of Individualism

One of the most significant factors in an individual’s involvement in community is American individualism. Individualism has long been suspect in the social sciences as a foe to moral commitment through voluntary associations and communal ties that encouraged charitable participation. The critics of individualism say it is a philosophy which locates personal happiness in individual liberties and the quest for wealth, and which finds community in the “union of moneymaking” (Hynes 114). Although it does have an emphasis on self-interest and rights, it is also allows personal freedoms. Few would give up the freedoms that came with the Enlightenment: the freedom to reject traditional beliefs that oppress women and minorities, the freedom to choose our own way and to say what we think and to some degree create our own norms and values. However, linked with the separation from the traditional community is the closely related gain to objectify and criticize (Cobb 188). In more recent times, the communal ties have weakened while the frontier mentality has persisted—although in less tangible forms, as the frontier becomes more metaphoric than geographic. As a result, the once creative tension between individualism and commitment has drifted into a state of opposition, all too often with community on the losing end.

For one celebrated sociologist, to a certain extent it is a problem of language—of how we speak publicly. Robert Bellah and his co-authors identified this major problem in their stimulating examination of American public life, Habits of the Heart. In preparation for writing the book, the five authors interviewed more than two hundred Americans from various walks of life, attempting to discover how these people thought about or became involved in public life. Of all the themes that emerged, the one that
most consistently caught the attention of the authors was the way people used language that portrayed them as being more isolated, more cut off from the world, than their stories showed them in fact to be. To the extent that our language of individualism keeps us from naming and building on that we have in common, we are impoverished not only in language, but in many other ways as well. Cries for a culture other than that of rugged individualism are often heard in community building circles. Romantics call for a renewal of a culture of cooperation (the “barn-building culture”). Thankfully, Bellah also discovered a second language of tradition and commitment:

If the language of the self-reliant individual is the first language of American moral life, the languages of tradition and commitment in communities of memory are “second languages” that most Americans know as well, and which they use when the language of the radically separate self does not seem adequate. (204)

To give an example of this language, we might refer to language of that sort in the Preamble to the United States Constitution. It is full of common language, describing a relationship of diverse individuals to common ground. The collective “We the People of the United States” gathering together “in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity...”. The language is not that of individual rights, but “of shared gratitude, echoing humility and hope. Such language is a start toward the articulation of common ground; but standing by itself, it can readily be dismissed as mere sentimentality” (Kemmis 169). According to Bellah, those who do not respond to “community language” might have an insufficient moral language to address the needs of people whose lives have not been fulfilled by the constitution’s promise:
The extent to which many Americans can understand the workings of our economic and social organization is limited by the capacity of their chief moral language to make sense of human interaction. . . But that means that much, if not most, of the workings of the interdependent American political economy, through which individuals achieve or are assigned their places and relative power in this society, cannot be understood in terms that make coherent moral sense. It further suggests why, in order to minimize "cognitive dissonance," many individuals tend not to deal with embedded inequalities of power, privilege, and esteem in a culture of self-proclaimed moral equality. (204)

That is, many people cannot conceptualize inequalities in our theoretically equal society. Only those who have the moral language to make sense of the system will see and respond to those in our society who need help. This could be a factor in why some people do not recognize the need for groups which address basic human needs. With remarkable insight, Tocqueville discerned this "condition of equality" to be compatible—paradoxically—with both freedom and a subtle form of despotism. An unquestioned ethos of individual equality awakens people to the conviction that the goods of the world should be equally available to all, even though they are typically allotted on the basis of ability and good fortune. The ensuing discrepancy, he argued, breeds an intolerable level of frustration and envy among citizens, who, as atomized individuals, are impotent to effect any change (Baggett 161).

Aside from the problem with language, there is also the problem of viewing one's primary task as "finding oneself" in autonomous self-reliance, separating oneself not only from one's parents but also from those larger communities and traditions that constitute one's past. This view leads to the notion that it is in oneself, perhaps in relation to a few intimate others, that fulfillment is to be found. Individualism of this sort often implies a negative view of public life. Bellah suggests an alternative in which "becoming one's
own person, while always a risky, demanding effort, takes place in a community loyal to shared ideals of what makes life worth living” (Bellah 252).

A different way of conceiving the individual is not individualism but individuation. This view seeks to find the positive aspects of individuation starting with the assumption that “fully developed individualism includes a dedication to the common good” (Colby & Damon 297). That is, mature individuation implies fully articulated links with others and with society as a whole. Even as individuals seek their own unique destinies, they do so in the context of relations with family, friends, and others in their communities. “Strong social relations provide a setting in which the exploration of self flourishes. So, in the course of human development, socialization and individuation are really opposite sides of the same coin” (Colby & Damon 297). This view is backed by interviews with several “moral exemplars” who are actively involved in their communities. Through their involvement in the community they better define themselves as individuals:

As the exemplars have developed a finer sense of their commitments and how to achieve them, they have acquired a better sense of who they are and what they want to become. Conversely, as they have come to know themselves better, they have better understood the limits and potentials of their moral contributions, thereby sharpening their effectiveness and increasing the durability of their commitments. (Colby & Damon 298)

This is not to say they never feel conflict in their lives—but when they do, it is a conflict between two commitments rather than between their individual welfare and their societal contributions. For example, “the most frequent conflict reported by the exemplars was their need to divide their efforts between their families and society at large . . . Their real dilemma was in deciding how to parcel out their limited time and energy to all the others whom they felt called upon to serve. It was a dilemma in human limits not
one in personal temptation” (Colby & Damon 299). This dilemma could be resolved in the participation in the community garden by young families. The parents are welcome to bring their children to the garden and it does not force people to choose between time with their families and the community.

A combination of Bellah’s musings on language with theories that one’s individuality is realized in community, is represented in the ideas of Ceceilia Dougherty, a political activist who was interviewed by Bellah and his colleagues. Dougherty articulates her sense of self in virtues that define a worthwhile life and have been passed on and modeled by others who have shared that tradition, not in a contentless freedom attained by leaving concrete commitments behind (Bellah 161-162). The distinguishing feature of Dougherty’s second language is her notion that community means a solidarity based on a responsibility to care for others because that is essential to living a good life. This tends to confirm Tocqueville’s claim that public order and trust cannot spring from individual spontaneity alone, but require the kind of cultivation that only active civic life can provide. Like many other noteworthy volunteers, she exemplifies a kind of individualism that is fulfilled in community rather than against it.

*Individual Civic Engagement*

Some people move beyond volunteerism to the greater action of civic engagement. Civic engagement is identifying a social problem, creating a vision to address the social problem and taking a position of leadership to ensure the problem is addressed. “Getting involved” in this sense expresses a genuine concern for one's local community, a concern expressed in working for its betterment and caring for those in need within it. “This form of getting involved implies an extension of the notion of
family to include the local community” (Bellah 191). These people are often very
dependent upon their families and communities because public involvement is often
difficult and demanding. Even though they have strong relationships with others these
are not the source for their involvement. In most cases, the original act of commitment
was an intensely personal experience. Each had some guidance from parents, friends,
and religious leaders, but their lasting commitment was initiated by their own vision.

Reflections

Groups like those involved with the community garden are comprised of
dedicated individuals. Their personal motivations vary, yet all are committed to the
revival of local interdependent communities. As this chapter has shown, in order to better
understand community engagement, it is important to tease out why these particular
people care about their communities and why they are willing to volunteer.
Chapter 4 Building Civil Society

Whether tending a garden, cooking in a soup kitchen or organizing for the protection of old-growth forest, there is a sense of being sustained by something beyond our individual power, a sense of being acted "through." It is close to the traditional religious concept of grace, yet distinct in that it does not require belief in a particular God or supernatural agency. One simply finds oneself empowered to act on behalf of other beings—on behalf of the larger whole—and the empowerment itself seems to come through that or those for whose sake one acts.

—Joanna Macy

Community gardens bring people together in the civil society. In this realm of civil society the personal and everyday is governed by values such as responsibility, trust, fraternity, solidarity and love. In his early nineteenth century assessment of the blossoming United States, Alexis de Tocqueville touted civil society as one of the greatest assets of American Democracy. A contemporary incarnation of civil society, community gardens have unique attributes which make them especially adept at reinvigorating the United States Tocqueville saw over a hundred years ago.

A General Understanding of Civil Society

"Civil society" names "the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks—formed for the sake of family, friends, interest and ideology" (Walzer 123). It is organically created, not engineered. It isn't so much about problem solving as about citizen and neighbor creating. It is possible because humans are naturally disposed to find fulfillment in what is traditionally called a life of virtue. Civic virtue is the excellence of character proper to a citizen. Citizenship requires a shared life, which is possible only when the members of a community trust and respect one another. To participate in such a shared life is to show concern for and reciprocity with others. "Such participation is at the same time beneficial to the individual by activating his or her social capacities, finding a common good by sharing an admirable and worthwhile form
of life” (Sullivan 240). The civic tradition also has provided important resources for thinking about human relationships. The very status of citizen provides a concept of rights and duties, of mutual respect and obligation.

**Value of Voluntary Society**

As several sociologists have discovered, a casual division of our social ecology into “public government and private business sectors is too simplistic. While it is perhaps less visible than the other two, we overlook this third, voluntary sector at our analytical peril” (Baggett 3). The third sector of American life has been likened to the invisible presence of “Holy Ghost of the American Trinity” (Waldemar Nielsen quoted in Baggett 3). Alexis de Tocqueville marveled at this sector and the ability of Americans to gather to work for the common good in his classic piece *Democracy in America*.

While our tradition is heavily tilted in favor of private life, we do inherit a tradition of caring for the community. Writing of what he had seen in the 1830s, Tocqueville judged Americans to be avaricious, self-serving, and aggressive; but he was also amazed by our eagerness to form clubs, to raise barns or town halls, to join together in one cause or another. These are the countless gatherings of people who saw a need and responded to it through an astounding variety of voluntary associations:

Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations . . . Americans combine to give fetes, found seminaries, build churches, distribute books, and send missionaries to the antipodes. Hospitals, prisons, and schools take shape in that way. Finally, if they want to proclaim a truth or propagate some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form an association. In every case, at the head of any new undertaking, where in France you would find the government or in England some territorial magnate, in the United States you are sure to find an association. (Tocqueville cited in Baggett 13)
Tocqueville found a vital connection between these associations and the skills necessary to make a democracy work. In a democracy, there is no mechanism for ensuring collective action, so these collective associations in American life bring the people together and are capable of generating a sense of responsibility for the public good beyond self-interest.

Another political theorist convinced of the benefits of civic participation was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his renowned text The Social Contract, "he envisioned an ideal society in which citizens would participate extensively and in the process learn to let go of their own particular wills and think in terms of what is best for all, the general will. Civic participation and mutual cooperation with others, he suggested, instill in people a deeper sense of belonging to their own society" (Baggett 122-123).

Voluntary associations provide individuals with opportunities to enact their deepest values; they are also institutional bearers of "evocative narratives and language (biblical, civic, humanistic, and so forth) through which those values come to make sense and actually obligate people to behave in accordance with them" (Baggett 5-6). In other words these voluntary groups become a means through which values are applied in practical life. These *mores* or "habits of the heart" include "ideas, dispositions, and habitual practices (such as volunteering and charitable giving) necessary for producing virtuous citizens and thus a strong tradition of participatory democracy" (Baggett 13).

In recent times there has been a mountain of data displaying our civic depletion and cynicism. Some of us yearn for the confident reassurance that government can get things right if we but let it and give it leave to do its job. But this is a task for our associations of civic life in which citizens build families, schools, churches, unions, and
all the rest, including state and local governments without which there is no democratic
culture and, indeed, nothing for the federal government to either correct or curb or serve
(Bethke Elshtain 28-29). Communities and civic groups and churches have strengths and
abilities beyond the dreams of government. They are actively and intimately involved in
needy individuals’ lives. “They share a common code of moral responsibility that
provides guidance and guardrails. They have elements of faith that touch people in a far
more profound way than a check or voucher” (Kuo 92).

The New Civil Society

No one can argue that associational life in the United States has changed since
Tocqueville made his rounds. Americans have retained their social and civic instincts,
and they have little choice but to shape them to the new realities of two-career families,
suburban life styles, and rapid career changes. Including garden volunteers, people still
find civil society in neighborhoods, families, and churches, but the breakdown of
traditional communities sustained over time and place has made self-identification in
non-geographical ways increasingly important. While one used to relate to civil society
through family, church and neighbors new types of self-identification play roles. These
may include one’s profession, political party, online groups or race and ethnicity.

There are several reasons for this shift in self-identification. Some place modern
technologies as the cause—the railroad, telegraph, telephone, and television and the
modern corporation. However, these same technologies made possible a great national
community. Our national feeling is nicely reflected in Hillary Rodham Clinton's recent It
Takes a Village. Clinton readily contends that strong families, neighborhoods, and
churches are essential to the physical, psychological, and moral well-being of children.
That stated, however, she quickly reverts to themes more congenial to the project of national community; that such traditional local institutions have been hopelessly undercut by technology; that we therefore must now rely heavily on the advice and assistance of trained professionals and experts; and that we should consider a variety of new government institutions to ensure that all families are able to secure such advice and assistance. The small, real-life village quickly yields to the metaphorical national village (Schambra 47).

These newly emerging ways of forming civil society can act as a buffer between the market and the state, protecting Americans from the consequences of selfishness on the one hand and coercive altruism on the other. Still, will they encourage people to practice political participation, learning through the local and the immediate what it means to be a citizen of the nation and even the world?

Compared with familial, religious or community ties, connection with others through the internet, work, political affiliation or Clinton’s allegiance to the nation-state is thin stuff for daily satisfaction. Although time is the best test, they seem insufficient to encourage in people a sense of responsibility for both themselves and those with whom they share their society. Many need stronger and richer human connections. Perhaps these indictments are premature, and don’t give sufficient consideration to the capacity of Americans to perpetually reinvent themselves. It is “a testimony to Americans that they constantly tinker with families, neighborhoods, and churches, searching for new forms that provide for both tradition and modernity, freedom and community” (Wolfe 22).
The Role of Religious Groups in Civil Society

Church-affiliated groups are the backbone of civil society in America, involving almost half the population. Religious associations offer ways for people to give money, receive aid, hold meetings, recruit members for other associations, and learn about public issues. They are especially valuable for people with little income or education, who tend not to join other groups. “Polls show that membership in such groups correlates with voting, volunteering, charity, and political activity” (Galstan 33). Churches are also the country’s single biggest source of volunteers, way ahead of workplaces, schools or colleges, fraternal groups, and other civil institutions. As Gallup has summarized the evidence, “Churches and other religious bodies are the major supporters of voluntary services for neighborhoods and communities. Members of a church or synagogue . . . tend to be much more involved in charitable activity, particularly through organized groups, than nonmembers. Almost half of the church members did unpaid volunteer work in a given year, compared to only a third of nonmembers (Dilulio 57). The high occurrence of religious volunteers can be explained in many ways.

Tocqueville saw religion as reinforcing self-control and maintaining moral standards but also as an expression of the benevolence and self-sacrifice that are antithetical to competitive individualism. He suggests that Christianity teaches “we must do good to our fellows for love of God” (Bellah 223). The major philanthropic work of religion is in response to “the scriptural precepts to feed the hungry, take in the stranger, shelter the homeless, and find justice for the oppressed” (O’Neill 23). It is important to remember, however, that these people and groups are generally not the religious institutions themselves, but religiously affiliated groups or paradenominational groups, as
Jerome Bagget names them. These groups “are an important example of a social form of religion to which Putnam and other theorists have given little consideration. These are religiously inspired, though usually ecumenical, voluntary associations with explicitly public missions. They include organizations that stir social activism such as Bread for the World, a lobbying group on hunger issues, and Pax Christi, an advocacy group for peace and disarmament” (Baggett 18).

A similar group has been involved in the Helena Community Garden. Roots and Wings is the children in poverty task force group at St. Paul’s United Methodist Church in Helena. They are founded in the religious mission of Methodism and their involvement in the community outside of St. Paul’s is evident. These paradenominational groups have a very important place in society, “their willingness to voice religiously derived expressive values in public can serve as a corrective for a retreat into the private realm and for a religious fixation on the self. If they succeed in this mission, there is reason to believe that these groups can become institutional sources for social capital, passing on a greater knowledge of public affairs, imbuing individuals with civic virtue, and convincing them that the rationalized social structures that shape our lives are not impervious to religious values emphasizing human dignity over instrumentality” (Baggett 29). Churches and affiliated groups remind us that in our independence we count on others, and help us see that a healthy, grown-up independence is one that admits to healthy grown-up dependence on others.

For some of the garden participants who are not currently involved with a faith community, the ways which faith brings them to community involvement are more private. And among those who do belong to a particular church, there are several whose
spiritual faith is a deeply personal matter despite the community that nourishes it. This is not an idiosyncratic approach for Americans, indeed there seems to be a trend for the relationship of the individual to God to be ultimately personal, but to be mediated by the whole pattern of community life (Bellah 227). Congregations of mainstream churches are asking their leadership to respond to this shift as well. When asked the direction the church should take in future years, the two things that “a national sample of Catholics most asked for were ‘personal and accessible priests’ and ‘warmer, more personal parishes.’” The salience of these needs for personal intimacy in American religious life suggests why the local church, like other voluntary communities, indeed like the contemporary family, is so fragile, requires so much energy to keep it going, and has so faint a hold on commitment when such needs are not met” (Bellah 233).

Social Capital

The political scientist Robert Putnam states that “as the ‘networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit,’ social capital provides people with the resources that encourage and enable them to become more politically engaged citizens” (Baggett 14). Social capital itself can be organized in a number of different ways. Social capital can be inclusive, hierarchical or nonexistent. Each variation has different implications for community and how newcomers can become native to place. The best method for building community is inclusive social capital which implies egalitarian forms of reciprocity. Each member of the community is expected to give and receive, and gains status and pleasure from doing so. Each person in the community is seen as capable of providing something of value to any other member of the community. “Contributions to collective projects, from parades to the
volunteer fire department and Girl Scouts, are defined as ‘gifts’ to all” (Flora and Flora 219).

As Tocqueville reveals, one strength of traditional American communities was the amount of collective work that went on. “Barn building, quilting, joint harvesting, church repair—all contributed to the sense of having earned the right to ‘belong.’ Many of those functions have been transferred to the industrial, money economy now, where machines and a few skilled people perform them continually” (Kittredge 260). The picture is of people freely associating and communicating with one another, forming and reforming groups of all sorts, not for the sake of any particular formation—family, tribe, nation, religion, commune, brotherhood or sisterhood, interest group or ideological movement—but for the sake of sociability itself. For we are by nature social, before we are political or economic beings. The phrase “social being” describes men and women who are citizens, producers, consumers and members of the associations.

*Community Garden as a Community Building Tool*

Community gardening is a foundation for community development. The Helena Community Garden is an association of local citizens joined together with a vision of a common goal. To achieve that goal, we decided on a common problem, shared in developing a plan to solve the problem and took action to implement the plan and solve the problem. The garden group is one example of the thousands of groups which are focused in churches, voluntary associations and grass-roots associations to build America's civil society one family, one block, one neighborhood at a time.

We come together a little out of sentiment, yes, but much more out of necessity.
We are dedicated to a place, to a community, to helping our neighbors, and in turn to being helped by them. "It seems that human beings, because of our limitations and necessities, seek out one another and engage in cooperative behavior. With time and the right conditions, practices and customs arise that celebrate this heretofore instrumental gathering (Vitek 177). We must first accept and embrace the necessities of our naturalness. We are natural beings whose bodies must be worked, whose minds must be challenged, whose skin must be touched, whose hearts must be loved. We are also beings in a place (Vitek 181).

Reflections

Gardens contribute to a sense of community by providing a forum in which people with shared interests come together, work with their neighbors, and form bonds with those around them. Gardens create an opportunity for people to interact and form social ties through participation. Being a member of a garden also gives a gardener a sense of identity and connection to a larger community of gardeners. For these, and the many reasons described above, community gardens have been shown to be successful in building community.
Chapter 5 Human Relationships with the Environment

The garden is a blend of domestic and the wild... Where else can one be so much a part of nature and the mysteries of God, the unfolding of the seasons, the coming and goings of the birds, the pleasures of planting and the joys of harvest, the cycle of life and death? Where else can one still touch hands with an earlier people through hands that work? Sure, there are periods of hard work. But it is labor with dignity, working together with family, neighbors, and friends.

—David Kline, "An Amish Perspective"

Community gardens are places to care for growing things, to actively participate with nature by digging in the soil, planting, watching things grow, experimenting and learning, following growth cycles, and observing the process of nature. Gardens promote a stewardship model of care for the environment in a unique way which other greenspaces cannot. They are essential elements to be included in designs for improving urban ecology.

Building a Relationship with the Earth

Being a gardener makes one yearn for the first shoots of spring and hope to stretch summer into fall with cool-tolerant plants. Gardeners are attuned and attached to weather: they scan the sky for rain in dry seasons and sun in wet periods. They mark the days in a garden year by rituals: maple sap flowing, strawberries ripe for picking, the first corn of the season, new potatoes, autumn harvest, and even the first hard frost.

Gardeners can be struck by the profound potential of tiny seeds. A gardener from Harlem gives a parable about a dandelion growing through rubble in the Bethlehem-Fairfield naval shipyard near Baltimore. As she watched one of its seeds waft across a naval destroyer, she reflected that the seed held more power than the ship. Left to itself, the steel ship would rust and decay. "But that one tiny dandelion seed had in itself the force
of immortality beyond my lifetime, because it held inside that tiny little shell the power of growth” (Hynes 155).

Along with the rhythms of the earth, gardeners learn to respect the cycles of life and death.

There’s something that is healthy about accepting the mortality of a beautiful plant. Watching death take place in the garden has helped us grow inside. Another gardener experienced a spiritual transformation by watching the cycles of nature: “my spirituality has shifted to include a broader sense of the universe, so now when I’m with nature I have a sense of it being a part of me. I now accept that all things in nature—including me—have their own special functions” (Goldman & Mahler 46). Gardens are places where the growth of plants provides a mirror to encourage inner human growth.

The following is a story told by one learning the importance of pruning:

Each of those little green shoots seemed so eminently deserving of life that I could never pluck up anything that had sprouted from a seed. The result? A disaster. A horticulture nightmare, a mishmash of vegetation fighting for limited light, water, and soil. The garden never worked. Pruning a garden means admitting there isn’t space for everything to grow. But pruning is necessary to live. Whether for plants in the garden, or for people in the second half of life. We can’t avoid pruning but we can make ourselves sick and die buried in our own accumulated collections, like the mishmash I called my garden for so many years. This truth is as simple as breathing: breathing in and breaking out, building up and breaking down. The cycle of life depends on that rhythm. (Goldman & Mahler 154-5)

The relationships formed between gardeners and the earth are the foundation of an environmental ethics based on stewardship. By providing an opportunity to learn about and develop an appreciation for the earth and natural processes, people develop a greater commitment to protecting natural resources by experiencing nature up-close.

Ben planting a seedling.
This is an important development: “If we are to survive as a species and preserve the environment on our troubled planet, we must claim, celebrate, and protect our precious bond with nature. We can do this in our gardens” (Goldman & Mahler 202). A garden might be seen as a minor, merely local, and cosmetic experience of nature that could be more authentically sought in wild and remote places. Yet gardens, comments Michael Pollan, with their “middle ground between the wilderness and the lawn,” may “suggest the lineaments of a new environmental ethic . . . and help us out in all those situations where the wilderness ethic is silent or unhelpful,” or where the experience of wilderness is unaffordable and inaccessible (Francis & Hester 206).

Gardens for Well-Being

It is important to our emotional well-being to have contact with nature. A 1992 study by Virginia Polytechnic University found that “contact with the natural environment is important to the psychological well-being of adults in five key areas: aesthetics, mental and emotional stimulation, self-expression and personalization, social interaction, and physical health” (Goldman & Mahler 81). It appears that most Americans respond to these psychological benefits. In a 1988 Gallup public opinion survey for the National Gardening Association, “88% of those surveyed believed that trees and flowers were important ‘beyond their beauty or pleasing appearance’” (Malakoff). In the words of University of Michigan psychologist Stephen Kaplan, the studies prove that “Nature is not just ‘nice’ . . . it is a vital ingredient in healthy human functioning” (Francis & Hester 19). His findings on the psychological benefits of gardening, plants and wilderness coalesce into a theory of garden as “restorative experience.” Kaplan’s theory is built on an empirical framework with three categories of
meaning that people experience from gardens. The first is the tangible benefits of gardening such as cutting food costs and harvesting. The second is what he calls “primary garden experiences”—the desire to work in the soil and see things grow. Finally, Kaplan suggests that “sustained interest” is part of the experience, including people seeing the garden as a valuable way to spend time and a diversion from routine (Francis & Hester 19).

Urban Ecology

There are traditionally two alternatives—town life and country life—but there exists “a third alternative, in which all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, may be secured in perfect combination” (Hess 119). Dunkin writes of his town “trying to preserve green space before urban sprawl takes it over. . . . We don’t want to see nothing but roof tops, we want greenspace” (34). Gardens provide a place where people may stroll for an hour, seeing, hearing, and feeling nothing of the bustle and jar of the streets, where they shall, in effect, find the city put far away from them.

Urban sociologists, such as Georg Simmel, have done extensive research on the ways people react to urban environments. Simmel found that the noise, movement, and visual complexity of the modern city, which results in narrowing the range of information taken in, often overwhelm people in the city. In turn this accounts for the blase attitude characteristic of many urban dwellers. In cities we are also further insulated and distanced from our natural environment. In curtained living rooms, air-conditioned cars, and windowless cubicles, humans are almost completely estranged from the instincts and impulses of nature. It is no wonder small gardens and pocket parks become oases; they
are quieter, simpler and calming environments. This is supported by the research of University of Michigan psychologist Rachel Kaplan who surveyed members of the American Horticultural Society in 1983: “over 80% ranked ‘peacefulness and tranquility’ as one of the top benefits of gardening” (Malakoff). One community gardener in Dorchester, Massachusetts described his green plot as “a little island in the madness” (Malakoff). These yearnings for a more friendly urban environment are the basis of a new kind of environmental ethic and urban renewal, termed “urban ecology”.

Research from Mary Honeyman of the University of Illinois documents that people shown urban scenes with vegetation recover more quickly from stress than people exposed to urban scenes without vegetation. In a conclusion that seems understated, Honeyman concluded that “the introduction of green vegetation into the urban landscape may be of important psychological benefit to humans” (Malakoff). Gardens are soothing retreats that provide a change of pace from work and hostility for all city dwellers. Swiss writer Minnie Aumonier once described perfectly this feeling: "When the world wearies and society ceases to satisfy, there is always the garden" (Goldman & Mahler 168). An active member of the Helena garden agrees that “nature provides the fatigued human mind with a ‘restorative’ change of pace. A visit to even a small garden, for example, can offer a person the feeling of ‘being away’ from a stressful setting” (Dolan).

Cities are often viewed as crowning achievements of man over nature, but an alternative voice suggests “cities are a part of nature and consequently, natural processes must be integrated with city design” (Shafer 42). Some advocates of this integration are landscape professionals, men and women who are very aware of conventional urban practices. One green advocate who has been very supportive of the Helena Community
Garden is Mike Hiel of Gardenwerks. Although he is unable to be directly involved with the garden, he has generously donated the drip system for the garden. The garden also calls into question the need for strict unity, harmony, and formal aesthetics applied to most urban open spaces and still taught in design schools. People clearly value the beauty of the gardens even though they often do not include formal principles of park design.

The Value of Different Greenspaces

To better understand the different uses of, and user attitudes toward traditional and alternative forms of open space, a comparative study was conducted of an adjacent community open space and public park in the downtown area of Sacramento, California. The purpose of the study was to determine the roles ‘garden’ and ‘park’ play in city life (Francis 101).

Some Conceptual Differences Between ‘Park’ and ‘Garden’ in the City (Francis 110)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Garden</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet/Relax</td>
<td>Activity/Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean/Neat</td>
<td>Messy but cared for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look at</td>
<td>To Participate in</td>
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<tr>
<td>Built/Designed</td>
<td>Natural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publicly Controlled</td>
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<td>Permanent</td>
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<td>Liked</td>
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These general attributes reveal distinct differences between parks and gardens. The activities differed considerably between the two open spaces, with the park having more passive activities such as sitting, eating, sunbathing, etc., as compared to the gardens where active uses (gardening, watering, harvesting, etc.) were observed most
frequently (Francis 104). This translates into a sense of caring, productivity, and stewardship for the landscape which went largely unnoticed in the park even though the parks were very well tended. The gardens also read as being ‘owned’ due to their personalized and productive qualities (Francis 110). This may have bearing on the fact the gardens were also rated higher for friendliness by users than was the park. Asked how users feel about the people who come to the open space, almost twice as many of the garden users described the people as ‘friendly’ than did park users (Francis 107). This may translate as well to perceptions of the safety of the spaces. “Park and garden users gave similar ratings to each place on safety dimensions, with one-third of park and garden users rating the places as ‘quite safe’ during the day. Some park users rated the park ‘unsafe,’ while none of the garden users categorized the gardens as ‘unsafe’” (Francis 108).

More important than friendliness or safety, Francis and others reveal that gardens exist very much inside people, in their minds and hearts. A garden people visited or used as children may remain a memory of a favorite place. It may also be a place with which people have an active relationship, a garden next to or near where they live. Francis’s research showed that gardens built and maintained by community residents “provide opportunities for neighborhood residents to develop and control part of their neighborhood, an advantage not afforded by traditional parks. Gardens are active places that people make themselves, use for work and socializing, and can ‘love’” (Francis 101). Gardens are places more likely to be loved for many reasons, but one of the most prevalent is they are places to care for and “the places to which we are most attached are literally fields of care, settings in which we have had a multiplicity of experiences and
which call forth an entire complex of affections and responses . . . There is, in fact, a complete commitment to that place, a commitment that is as profound as any that a person can make, for care taking is indeed the basis of man’s relation to the world” (Relph 38).

Gardens as a Solution to Fresh Produce Shortage

At a fundamental level, gardens address human nutrition and basic needs. Basic needs are minimally required to keep a person alive and healthy. They include food, clothing, drinking water and shelter. We live on an abundant Earth that fulfills these basic human needs; however, societies often create political and economic systems that allow the needs of a privileged few to be met. The capitalist system in the U.S. has developed to select a privileged group who have control of the majority of the means to fulfill humans’ needs. The revival of community gardening is directly linked to the growing gap between rich and poor, and the insufficiencies of government and private agencies to provide enough food (especially fresh produce) for the poor.

A glimpse at the status of Lewis and Clark county shows us “there are 6,664 people living below the federal poverty level, including 2,552 children under age eighteen” (Bauermeister 1). While the nation as a whole has thrived in the 1990s, poverty has actually increased in Montana. The average income in Montana and Lewis and Clark County is significantly below the national average. There are many employed low-income people struggling to feed their families as they meet their other obligations. A University of Montana study finds having enough food was questionable at some point
during a year, for 12 percent of Montana households surveyed. The survey also found sufficiency of the food supply more likely to be a problem in households with children, than in those without them. Hunger or risk of hunger was measured according to six questions developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (UM study…). In 1998 in an average month, 62,328 Montanans used food stamps. Of those, 29,656 were children (Food Research Action Center cited in the Independent Record 2). In addition to food stamps, food banks have become more taxed. “In 1998 Food Share provided bread, produce and dairy products to 17,832 drop in visitors and distributed another 89,133 pounds of food to other social service organizations. Three-day food box distribution has grown from 4,626 in 1994 to 9,541” (Bauermeister 1).

Another problem is that Food Share is seldom able to offer high quality fresh produce. The produce donations the food bank receives from local supermarkets are often well past their prime, with deteriorating palatability and loss of nutrients. Vegetables supply essential vitamins, minerals and dietary fiber. Vegetables contain no cholesterol or saturated fat and are low in calories. Eating vegetables reduces the risk of several kinds of cancer, and helps prevent heart disease. Nutritionists recommend at least three to five servings per day. However, a study by the USDA Agriculture Research Service found that Americans are not getting enough vegetables. Less than half the people surveyed eat 3 or more servings per day. Children, especially, are not getting enough vegetables: only twenty-four percent of two to five year olds eat three or more servings per day (Bauermeister 1). People do want more fresh produce. One community gardener discovered, “the fresh vegetables and fruit are tasty” and he “will decide to eat and grow more of them.” Not only will this change in diet be good for his health, but he
is representative of a consumer demand that is a revolution in food retailing: instead of mega markets, farmer's markets; instead of microwaveable frozen packages, food that tastes as good as it did in our grandparents' day. Unfortunately, although fresh food may be desired, it is not necessarily available. Montanans lag behind the nation in vegetable consumption; only twenty percent eat three or more servings each day (Bauermeister 1).

The Helena Community Gardens has provided some much needed fresh produce and distributed it through Food Share and the WIC (Women Infants Children) Program. Greg Hood from Food Share is thankful for the produce the garden does supply. He said the fresh produce is popular and it goes quickly.

Local Food Systems

The aforementioned Alice Waters, the owner of a gourmet organic restaurant in Berkeley, Calif speaks with conviction about the social and ecological benefits of eating close to the land, supporting local growers, and preserving the family supper hour . . .

"Sure, it's easy now to get all kinds of produce at any time of the year," she explains, "but it requires a lot of energy to transport these foods" (Wolcott 13). According to USDA figures, the average distance between food in the field and the dining room where it is eaten is 1,500 miles. Refrigerating, transporting, and storing this food causes an expenditure of energy eight times greater than the value of the food itself. Put in terms of calories, it takes eight calories of energy to produce and deliver one calorie of food 1,500 miles (Halweil 4). Furthermore, there is the mad pursuit of uniformity. There is need among the food industry for absolute predictability among food. One example is the process of transforming a potato into fast-food French fries. "The Idaho spud gets shot through a gun knife and cooled by ammonia gas. Fries-in-training get the "excess" sugar
leached out in the spring and more sugar added in the fall. All so they will look and taste identical all year” (Goodman 4).

Furthermore, people living in an urban environment can be so alienated from the land they have no idea how their food is produced or where it comes from beyond the grocery store. Gardens help people connect with the Earth as the source of food through planting, tending and harvesting. “This sense of functional unity with the natural world is a basic condition, we may assume, of what is called a meaningful and stable life” (Weimer 325). What is eaten by the great majority of North Americans comes from a global everywhere, yet from nowhere they know in particular. The distance from which their food comes represents their separation from the knowledge of how and by whom what they consume is produced, processed, and transported (Kloppenburg 113). For virtually everyone, to eat is to participate in a truly global food system. In any supermarket in Helena, Montana one can find produce from New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, and Mexico. However, we cannot count on finding Montana-grown food. And it’s not because we do not produce anything in Montana; rather it is because the majority of it is shipped out to other states and countries and “over 90% of the produce we eat in Montana is shipped in from out of state” (Garden City Harvest). It’s about taking back the ability to produce food for ourselves. This compounds the poor condition of our economy because not only we do not connect to the food system, but our money goes out of the region.

Counterposed to the global food system in such analyses are self-reliant locally or regionally based food systems comprising diversified farms that use sustainable practices to supply fresher, more nutritious foodstuffs to small-scale processors and consumers to
whom producers are linked by the bonds of community as well as economy (Kloppenburg 113). Among consumers themselves, buying clubs, community gardens, and changing patterns of food purchase reflect growing concerns with the social, economic, ethical, environmental, health, and cultural implications of how they eat (Kloppenburg 115). There are glimmerings of this in Helena, and the garden plays a small part to encourage local consumption of locally produced food. The garden also provides space for those would-be gardeners who have no plot of ground to call their own, to plan, dig, sow seeds, and nurture.

**Sustainable Agriculture**

From Jefferson forward, U.S. agriculture has been imbued with a set of values including a strong work ethic and care for the environment. Because it supported these values, agriculture early on became more than a business; it is widely perceived as comprising a way of life. As the philosopher Confucius said, "The best fertilizer on any farm is the footsteps of the owner" (Kline 38).

The Helena garden produce is grown using many sustainable practices. To recycle the nutrients taken out of the soil each growing season, every spring and fall we apply a layer of this compost and mulch from local ranches. The compost made in the garden bins is comprised of garden materials, leaves from yards of the neighborhood, straw from a local farm, and kitchen scraps from the houses of neighboring college students. We use only organic fertilizers and no pesticides or herbicides. Instead we encourage ladybugs and other natural predators and plant flowers such as Marigolds to help keep pests at bay. The layout of the plants in the garden is sensitive to crop rotation and companion plants. The garden has been given a “drip system” which
is an irrigation system which sprays water in a localized area. This system works on a
timer and can be set to water at times when evaporation is least likely to occur. We find
this to be far more resource-efficient than traditional garden sprinklers which use large
amounts of water to cover a large undefined area. Wise use of water for garden and lawn
watering not only helps protect the environment, but saves money and provides for
optimum growing conditions.

Reflections

Gardens respond to our ancient need to be connected with the living, growing,
blooming world around us. When we have a healthy relationship with the Earth our
relationships with ourselves and with other humans are better. They bring us to a place
of contemplation about our relationship with the environment as a whole and place us in
a stewardship model of care for the environment. Gardens provide essential greenspace
to improve urban ecology and play an important role in our community food systems.
Fresh produce grown in the gardens helps the nutritional status of both the volunteers and
the poor.
Chapter 6 Gardens in Communities

It takes serious commitment and endless hours of hard work just to get the garbage off the lot. What is astounding is how quickly these lots are transformed into visions of beauty, which become pivotal meeting places in communities. The hard work creates a domino effect, with additional sites being reclaimed by the community and turned into still more attractive open spaces.

—Rose Murphy, Green-Up Times (New York Botanical Garden)

Community gardening acts as a community and neighborhood organizational tool. By investing our time into a common space we are simultaneously brought together and given a sense of ownership of a place which is vital for a “landless” urban population. Community gardens are often built over trash-filled vacant lots. The revitalization a garden brings to a community is substantial: they reduce crime, raise property values, provide job opportunities and give the community a renewed sense of pride, empowerment and control.

Garden Providing a Sense of Place

A benefit of community gardens less tangible than those discussed previously is the sense of place they offer the urban landless. Being landless can mean being without a place to live, having no place with which to identify: in effect homeless, without roots in both cases. A person has a home where there exists between place and person a strong and profound bond like the tie between farmer and property expressed by the dirt farmer in John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath:

If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it’s part of him, and it’s like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn’t doing well and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and in some way he’s bigger because he owns it. (55)

While attachment to “home area” is somewhat related to the length of residence and ownership of land, attachment can also be based on interaction with other people. “A
place is essentially its people, the human contacts on which feelings of commitment and identity are built are most likely to occur among people sharing the same piece of ground” (Relph 33). The strength of the relationship between community and place is indeed a powerful one because each reinforces the identity of the other. The landscape is very much an expression of communally held beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvements. Community gardens provide common experiences; this in turn develops a sense of belonging. This is because “in both our communal and our personal experience of places there is often a close attachment, a familiarity that is part of knowing and being known here, in this particular place. It is this attachment that constitutes our roots in places; and the familiarity that this involves is not just a detailed knowledge, but sense of deep care and concern for that place” (Relph 37).

Becoming native to a place implies contributing to that place as well as receiving strength and renewal from it. (Flora and Flora 224). This cycle of giving and receiving can be achieved by drawing neighbors together as a community, lessening stress, crime, vandalism and flight, and stimulating public involvement, self-governance and altruistic behavior (Hynes 114). One example of this is given by ethnobotnist Gary Paul Nabhan who has observed that the success of certain Native American groups in conserving wild plants for centuries lies in the unity of their agriculture with human culture. Native American farming, passed on to children by their elders, is “grounded within a community fixed in place.” A similar harmony between plant cultivation and human habitation can occur in community gardens.
A place to own

One of the most significant benefits of community gardening is providing a piece of land for people to call their own for at least a season. It is estimated that “more than 20 percent of U.S. land is held by corporations, much of it around cities and suburbs where the need for gardening space is acute. For landless Americans, community gardening can be the first step toward self-sufficiency--providing land to garden, a place to call ‘mine,’ and the opportunity to grow and produce things of value” (Ishwarbhai C. Patel cited in Hynes 88). Gardeners consistently value the sense of ownership of their gardens, and by investing energy in the garden their sense of ownership slowly takes place.

Permanent ownership of the land by others, however has always been the rock that smashed American urban garden projects. Even though gardeners might organize for mutual aid, unless they could get a lease or title to their plots, the land would soon be taken from them (Bass Warner 16). A city-wide program in New York City, funded by Federal and state community block grants, has helped 600 community groups gain interim access to city-owned properties between demolition and redevelopment states.

Gardens Providing Hope

A garden is also very much a place of one's own to shape, to give to individuals a sense of personal achievement and accomplishment, and to communities the hope to rebuild neighborhoods they had nearly lost. Both individuals and communities have a renewed sense of hope, community, friendship and pride. There are numerous stories of the rejuvenating effects of gardens.

Community harvest celebration.
Plants have a magical capacity to help us “improve our environment, make a strange one our own, even, if you will, exert some control over a situation in which we feel helpless” (McDonald 27). One example is the garden of residents of a depressed area in Portland, Oregon who began their “Green Fingers” project. The spirit in the community generated a feeling of respect for the gardens, which had given a new life and hope to the community (McDonald 133). Inner-city gardeners can discover new, life-enhancing values in their work. The beauty and order inherent in growing plants and vegetables suggests the possibility of, and patterns for, beauty and order in other parts of one’s life. “Plants are indeed a source of great hope for our time and for the many people who are disturbed, frustrated, and concerned about the future” (McDonald 80). Growing food for oneself and one’s kin also contributes to self-esteem and self-worth.

Garden societies can be the way to restore a sense of control and to heal wounds in neighborhoods. Another example is a community garden in Los Angeles that brings a sense of hope and renewal to a neighborhood that had been in despair. “We have been astonished by the way the transformation of a vacant lot into a garden changes that whole atmosphere of a neighborhood. This is a powerful tool for cities that want to do something simple, yet tangible, to rebuild a sense of renewal” (Pottharst 56). By transforming a vacant lot into a place of beauty, art, and activity for children, the neighbors who had been so shattered by violence have regained a feeling of power, direction and common purpose. Garden groups work to ensure those involved have some sense of empowerment in four very basic ways: a sense of self-efficacy where people effect their surroundings.
and life; create a group consciousness through a heightened sense of interdependence; reduce guilt and self-blame through positive action to help others; and produce a sense of responsibility for social change. The simple but profound difference that a garden makes in a neighborhood is based on an old-fashioned idea: neighborliness.

Another example of gardens' potential for unifying neighborhoods comes from New York's Operation Green Thumb. Edie Keen tells of an extraordinary program that has created almost eight hundred community gardens on fifteen hundred acres of empty land. Edie believes that gardening and beautification are contagious. Once people have the feeling that they can really change their environment for the better, their relationship to their community changes (Goldman & Mahler 49). “People get to know each other again and are out on the streets again. Fear, busy schedules, and even air conditioning keep people isolated and inside, leaving the streets to criminals” (Pottharst 57). Gardens may also be an effective part of the effort to combat crime. For example the Community Greening for Urban Revitalization discovered “in one Philly neighborhood, when residents get involved in community greening, it was the catalyst for a 90% reduction in neighborhood crime. And in the Mission District of San Francisco, residents documented a 28% drop in crime after the first year of their garden project” (Malakoff).

Reducing Urban Vacant Lot Problems

In most U.S. cities, one of the biggest issues facing urban neighborhoods is illegal dumping on vacant lands. These lots represent a burden to the city and in most inner-city communities they become “no-one’s” land, i.e. under no one’s responsibility. They become a social blight in the neighborhood rather than a benefit to the community. As Wilson and Kelling’s article “Broken Windows” demonstrates, neglect begets neglect
and dumping begets dumping. The significant number of vacant lots in cities in the United States also presents a formidable problem. In New York City alone there are “11,000 city-owned vacant lots and of these, only 500 are community gardens” (“There oughta be a law”). Without being addressed, this problem continues to grow in a community, and abandoned lands often become the most visible sign of neighborhood deterioration. “Community Greening can address this issue by turning ‘abandoned’ property into ‘community owned’ property through the adoption of vacant lands by local residents for their use as community gardens, parks, and cultural gardens. Once urban lands ‘‘look’ like they are being used and cared-for, dumping on them stops and littering is greatly reduced” (Community Greening for Urban Revitalization). In this way, gardening can be one of the most effective and sustainable urban sanitation strategies available, because it reduces dumping year after year, and even helps to change people’s fundamental attitudes about urban lands and community responsibility.

“Greenlining”

Research by Marti Ross Bjornson, a graduate student at Northwestern University suggests that similar to what occurs in networking, initial conversations can eventually lead to bigger things; an empowerment process she calls “greenlining.” After studying community gardening projects in inner-city Chicago, Bjornson coined the term “greenlining” to provide “a stark contrast to ‘redlining’, the term used to describe how banks and insurance agents often withhold services to low-income neighborhoods” (Malakoff).

Bjornson insists that while redlining serves only to isolate the residents of these communities from the services provided by their business and government leaders,
greenlining provides a new access route. By working together with greening advocates and their neighbors, formerly marginalized and isolated residents can be introduced into a world rich with social interaction, economic and political resources and access to public policy. Involvement with gardens can be empowering in other ways as well:

The pathways to power can be relatively modest. Simply attending a community meeting on a garden project, for example, can introduce residents to non-profit and government officials they might never have known about and vice versa. The simple act of starting a garden can teach previously powerless people how to get access to city hall, and it can change the perception of the people with power who are looking into the community for the first time. (Malakoff)

Greenlining also brings together two groups that might once have passed in the night: political activists and gardeners. “There are people who have political savvy, but don’t see gardening as a valuable forum for social change. Then there are gardeners who don’t really see a need for political activism until their garden is threatened” (Malakoff).

Building Networks

Community gardening brings people out of their homes in situations where they interact with their neighbors, and in many cases can help break down race and age barriers between communities. Research by Jill Roper, a graduate student at Rutgers University, confirms that community gardens do get people talking to each other. Roper’s interviews with participants in New Jersey Community Gardening Program revealed:

Having a garden significantly increased the frequency of interaction among the gardeners, even outside of the gardening season. Such interactions create a common ground on which neighbors, often isolated by walls or outlook, can build a shared feeling that they have power over their lives. A community activity such as gardening can be used to break the isolation, creating a sense of neighborliness among residents. Until this happens, there is no community, but rather separate people who happen to live in the same place. (168)
Community greening is a positive, unifying activity, with visual results, in neighborhoods where few other unifying forces exist. Many other urban issues such as economic development, and education are controversial; often sides break down by class, gender or race. But when residents come together to complete a common greening project, even a simple one, working side by side, differences usually begin to fade.

*Gardens Providing Job Training and Employment*

Urban community gardens can provide a variety of training and employment opportunities. These employment skills and opportunities are not just about planting gardens, but they include development in a variety of unskilled and professional areas such as: basic landscaping and construction skills, basic job readiness skills, technical arboricultural and horticultural skills, and marketing. In East New York, local organizations worked together to develop “ENY Farms! a community farmers’ market ad garden assistance program designed to help resident-gardeners grow fresh, nutritious food and sell what they produce at a neighborhood market” (Kao and Schneider 6).

*Economic Value of Gardens*

Many community gardeners are forced to try to show the economic value of their gardens for those who want to try to make a larger profit from the space. However, trying to prove the economic value of community gardens is often difficult because ‘the work of community gardening is generally not counted in the economy because such work is unpaid and not market-based’” (Hynes 155). Kretzmann claims that despite their transitory nature, the community gardens produce $1 million in produce each year (263). In order to determine dollar amounts like this, there is a formula from the USDA which
roughly gives a value to the land. This formula converts garden area, length of growing season, quality of produce, and distance between rows into the dollar value of production (Hynes 89) and the relative value of the Helena Community Garden is given in the figures on the second line:

\[
\text{Dollar value of production} = \text{Area (sq. ft.)} \times \text{Crop intensity (distance between rows)}^1 \times \text{Crop quality}^2 \times \text{Length of season}^3
\]

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\[
^1\text{Less than 1 ft.} = 1.2; \text{1 ft. to less than 2 ft} = 1.0
\]

\[
^2\text{Good} = .7; \text{Fair} = .4
\]

\[
^3200 \text{ or more} = 1.2; \text{less than 200} = 1
\]

Although the economic value of gardens is usually far less than the revenue accrued from other development, the areas surrounding gardens increase in value. Anyone who has retreated from the hot asphalt of a city street to the shade of a nearby tree understands the importance that plants can play in regulating environmental conditions. In a 1985 study of apartment dwellers, for example, Stephen Kaplan found that “the most important factors in neighborhood satisfaction were the availability of nearby trees, well-landscaped grounds, places for taking walks, and opportunities to grow plants. These were significantly related to the sense of community” (Malakoff). In light of such findings, it is no surprise that people are willing to pay more to have trees, parks and gardens surrounding their house. This occurred after the transformation of a block in Lower Washington Heights: “After the plot was developed as a community garden contractors purchased two of the adjacent houses and fixed them beautifully and are now in the process of selling them” (Kao and Schneider 3-4).
The Helena garden community confronts different problems than gardens in cities. People here do not have the same need for greenspace as in large cities, we do not have a high incidence of serious crime, and we have more space than we know what to do with; however, we do suffer from the weakness of community that comes with sprawl and as a less affluent northern state, we confront a high rate of malnutrition. Montana and rural America in general have long lagged behind urban America in income, highly skilled workers and well-paid employment, services, and other “objective” measures of quality of life (Hobbs 371). In fact, rural poverty rates have recently grown to levels exceeding those of inner cities, and lack of higher-skill demanding and higher-paying employment is contributing to continued population loss (Hobbs 371).

On the other hand, small towns and rural areas have advantages for community development by virtue of their rurality. There is a particular rural mystique attributed to small towns and rural areas with virtues of a strong sense of family, friendliness, a commitment to community, responsible citizenry, and resourcefulness. These virtues can be compromised in communities highly dependent upon cars and by the presence of a retail sector dominated by national chains. This can be counterbalanced by the number of organizations which strive to build community. In fact, “much of rural America could be described as over-organized but underrepresented...by ‘over-organization,’ we mean the greater actual number of organizations (e.g. churches, interest groups, local governments) per capita in rural localities than in urban . . . As one indication of under-representation, we cite the absence of rural development as a policy priority at either state or national levels, despite continued deterioration of rural conditions relative to the rest of the
nation" (Hobbs 372). Rural interests are seldom in the public eye and are easily overlooked.

Although all of the problems that community gardening can address are not the needs that the Helena Community Garden meets, one can see the positive power of prevention that community gardens can provide. As Helena grows, it will be forced to address problems such as crime, racial and ethnic tensions and poverty, and hopefully community developers will consider community gardens as partial preventive solutions.

Reflections

Supporters of community gardening build their hopes for the future upon neighborhood redevelopment, especially on the control of land. They see community gardening as an alternative that arose in the face of neglected trash-filled lots. And for the people who work in them, they provide a sense of rootedness to a place and control of the neighborhood land for a landless people. The inner-city community garden restores nature banished from the industrial city, and offers a degree of self-sufficiency and neighborhood security. The small town community garden can help overcome the scattering of community that comes with sprawl and help alleviate the lack of employment opportunities in rural America today.
Epilogue

The community garden movement has helped many communities and has the potential to help many more if these gardens come to be seen as a permanent part of a neighborhood. The key ingredient for successful management of gardens is a strong partnership among three primary groups: the garden organizers, non-profits that provide support to the gardening groups and land trusts that acquire titles to the properties, thus protecting them from the immediate pressures of development.

A technique to help gardeners hold onto their gardens, a non-profit land trust, through which land is permanently owned and held in trust for public use, "is a significant technique that it being used by Boston and Philadelphia and more recently by Chicago" (Kirschbaum 3). Other municipalities support formal programs through their "parks departments (New York City, Portland, and Seattle); Austin, Texas, gives grants through its parks department to incorporated, non-profit, tax-exempt groups that meet specific requirements (Austin Community Gardens). In most cases, though, lots have short term leases, one or two years, or subject to quick termination" (Kirschbaum 4).

Only with the positive involvement of local governments will the community garden movement flourish. In order for this to occur, more research indicating the value of community gardens must be presented. Non-profits have sponsored some research but it is apparently not enough. Or perhaps it is of the wrong nature: while highway builders and developers can produce reams of data that demonstrate the social and economic benefits of their projects, gardeners are often armed with little more than a heart-warming anecdote about cabbages sprouting amidst urban squalor. Unfortunately, arguments in favor of plants usually make little impression on financially-pressed local or state
governments, or on developers concerned with the bottom line. Politicians, faced with urgent problems such as homelessness or drugs, may dismiss gardens as unwarranted luxuries, not realizing gardens can be tools to fight these problems.

The American Community Garden Association is a strong umbrella group that can bring gardeners into conversation about these vital issues. Their grants, fellowships and meetings prove to be helpful. One area they might branch out to include is a library of research dedicated to the topic which can be used as fuel for the gardening debate.

As I leave Helena after graduation this May, I know I leave the Helena Garden in the hands of capable organizers. The group has plans for a partnering program with WIC families and another session of Garden Works with children from the community school. As the garden becomes a more permanent fixture in the community, more groups will consider it a possibility for a service project or a want to become involved. AERO has been very supportive of the garden project and will probably continue their support. The soil in the beds is built up for a productive season. The greatest variable is if Carroll College will let the garden remain on its grounds or if the land will be taken over for another project. This thesis stands as evidence to the college that the community garden is a meaningful, and valuable part of the community. But even if the garden is sacrificed for a housing development or a parking lot…
We've left something of ourselves here.  
When you've planted a garden, you've left  
something permanent.  
They can't take that away from you—  
no matter what,  
short of digging up the land.  
But other than that  
the land which remains here,  
even if nobody tended this garden for years,  
something would remain here,  
something would still be growing here  
that we had something to do with.  
And you could come back here  
and look at it and smile,  
—Evelyn McMahon
Works Cited


Bauermeister, Jim. Personal Interview. 3 November 1999.


Henderson, Mike. Personal Interview. 18 December 2000.


Appendix A

Community Garden Questionnaire

I. Biographical Information

Age _____ Sex ____

Religious Affiliation ___________________ Ethnic Affiliation____________________

Economic Bracket
$20,000 or less $20 to 40,000 $40-60,000 $60,000 or more

Education (highest level completed)
Middle School High School College Masters PhD

Where do you currently live?
Helena Helena Valley Townsend MT City East Helena

Other____________________

For the majority of your childhood, did you grow up in:
Rural Area (>10,000) Small City (10-100,000) City (100,000-million)
Large City (<1 mil)

II. Garden Questions

Do you have any past experience with gardening?
very much a lot moderate some very little

How often have you been to the garden?
never 1-2 times 3-4 times 5-6 times 6 or more

Approximately how long did you stay per visit?
passing through 5-10 minutes 10-20 minutes 30 minutes or more

Why did you come? (circle all that apply)
curious/check it out to harvest for charity to harvest for self to work
(weed/water/build) to spend time with family/friends to reflect/think
to enjoy nature to teach gardening to learn

Did you generally come alone or with others?
alone with others

If you were at the garden with others, were they:
friends your children your parents strangers/new friends
If you have children, have you brought them to learn about gardening?
   yes  no

Do you have a garden at home?
   yes  no

How often do you frequent Helena’s parks?
   every day  couple of times a week  couple of times a month  couple of times a year

Which type of green space do you enjoy the most?
   trimmed grass parks  wilderness parks (Mt. Helena)  community gardens

If you have participated in garden events (planting, summer pot-luck/weed-pulls, harvest)? If so, how would you describe them?

The community garden can be important in many ways, which aspects do you think are the most important? That is, where should our energy be directed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a community service opportunity</td>
<td>10 9 8 7</td>
<td>6 5 4 3</td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To teach environmental stewardship</td>
<td>10 9 8 7</td>
<td>6 5 4 3</td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link groups of the community</td>
<td>10 9 8 7</td>
<td>6 5 4 3</td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution to fresh produce shortage</td>
<td>10 9 8 7</td>
<td>6 5 4 3</td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education about organic gardening</td>
<td>10 9 8 7</td>
<td>6 5 4 3</td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide inter-generational contact</td>
<td>10 9 8 7</td>
<td>6 5 4 3</td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening as exercise</td>
<td>10 9 8 7</td>
<td>6 5 4 3</td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening as healing</td>
<td>10 9 8 7</td>
<td>6 5 4 3</td>
<td>2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Ideas:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In what ways would you like the garden to be used? by which groups?

Do you consider the garden an open atmosphere where all people are welcome?
Do you think the garden has a good location?

Thank you for your thoughts and time, if you are willing please include your name and number below so that if necessary, I could interview you in-depth.
Name:____________________
Phone: ____________________
Appendix B

The Helena Community Garden as an Effective Community Building Tool

For my Honors Thesis at Carroll College, I am trying to determine how the community garden (and a community garden in general) is effective as community building tools. The following survey will provide the valuable experiential information of those who are closely involved with the project. Thus, you are a valuable resource and I would appreciate your help with this survey. Any information quoted from this survey in the thesis will remain anonymous. I would appreciate their completion and return by December 31, 2000. You may return the answers via e-mail at: kwilliam@ascc.carroll.edu or by snail mail at:

Kendra Williams
Saints' Central 250104
1601 N. Benton Ave.
Helena, MT 59625

You may direct any questions about the survey to my e-mail address.

I. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Age _____ Sex _____

Religious Affiliation ___________________

II. YOUR EXPERIENCE OF THE GARDEN

Do you view the garden as an effective tool for community building? Why or why not?

Has your experience with the garden been empowering? Do you think it is empowering for others?

Do you consider the Helena Community Garden to be an expression of your culture?

Do you think the people associated with the garden foster an ethic of altruism?

What do you perceive are the assets the following groups bring to the community garden?:

Youth
Children

Elderly

Welfare recipients

Local artists

Schools

Local businesses

Do you think the garden is a place which fosters an ethic of interrelatedness between the good of people and our environment?

Do you think it is important to support locally grown food systems? Why or why not?

Do you think it is important to grow fruit and vegetables organically? Why or why not?

III. YOUR ROLE AS A VOLUNTEER

Do you feel responsible for the good of your community?

How long have you been actively involved in doing service work?
Is there a particular event or person in your past which/who has influenced/inspired you to help others?

What is your attraction to gardening?

Why do you consider it important to be involved in your community?

Do you prefer to see the direct results of your service or is this unimportant to you?

Would you feel differently about growing food for people if you knew they were Americans of a race/ethnicity other than your own? What about non-Americans in Helena?

IV. YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY

Do you feel a need to be rooted in your community?

Through which social groups are you primarily engaged in community?

Neighborhood__ Family__ Church__ Fraternal/sororital societies__
Political groups__ Work place__ Cyber space__ Mailing list associations__

How do you define yourself through the above community associations?

Do you think our community is experiencing moral shifts in a better or worse direction?
V. CHILDREN IN THE GARDEN

Do you consider strong communities (outside of the family) important to the physical, psychological and moral well being of children?

In your experience, has the garden taught the children about more than the fundamentals of gardening?

Which virtues has the garden experience instilled in the children who come to the garden?

VI. THE ROLE OF CHURCHES

What roles should churches fill in working to solve social problems (such as hunger)?

Has your moral/religious life been a factor in your civic engagement?

VII. THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Do you think the city of Helena is well planned to meet the basic needs of all people?

Do the layout and design of the city promote the formation of community?

What do you think of the city of Helena’s management of open space/vacant lots?

Is there a sufficient amount of green space in the city?
Do you think the city of Helena should be more actively involved in combating hunger issues?

Should the local government have a role in building the relationships between the social services oriented public, private and non-profit sectors of our community?

Thank you for participating in the research for my thesis. I will be presenting my thesis in April of 2001 at Carroll College. If you are interested in attending my presentation, please write your contact information below and I will send you an invitation.