



COMMUNITY GARDENS FOR YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

by Bob Randall, Ph.D.

Readers here know the pleasures of gardening and its many benefits. So you may have been surprised that so many people with land don't use it well. Why is that? Well of course people are busy. But all of us know that isn't the real reason. In my 21 years co-leading our area's community gardening effort, I met many people who said:

"I just don't have a green thumb."

To that I sometimes said,

*"Well, I have visited maternity wards on three continents,
and have never yet seen a baby with a green thumb!"*

Many people unfortunately are **horticulturally illiterate** for the same reason that many people are book illiterates: they didn't have good teachers and good schools, so never got excited about learning how.

Why they didn't get taught to garden? The reason I think is ancestors of many urban people fled low-income hard-work farms. They wanted something "better" for their kids. So we have an illiteracy problem.



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Whatever the reason, community and school gardens are one important way to counter this dynamic.

Basically, a community garden is a garden run for the good of a group. They have many purposes, but in all, people who are curious can be mentored and inspired until they possess good skills. A community garden group can be big or small. It need not be a formal or even non-profit. It is simply a group of people who decide to share what they know and the space where they grow according to some rules they agree on.

There are community gardens in parks, at schools (pre-k to university), at businesses, places of worship, at community action agencies, at agencies helping victims of abuse or without resources, at rehab, enabling, and treatment facilities, and at businesses and in vacant lots.

People can be taught to learn math or market farming in whatever language they prefer to speak.

If you want to do well with a plant, you need to know what it needs. The same is true with community gardens. Urban Harvest has experience with hundreds of them both successful and unsuccessful. Why not midwife one in your neighborhood by taking an Urban Harvest class (urbanharvest.org/classes-calendar)

where you explore possibilities to make your neighborhood grow?