

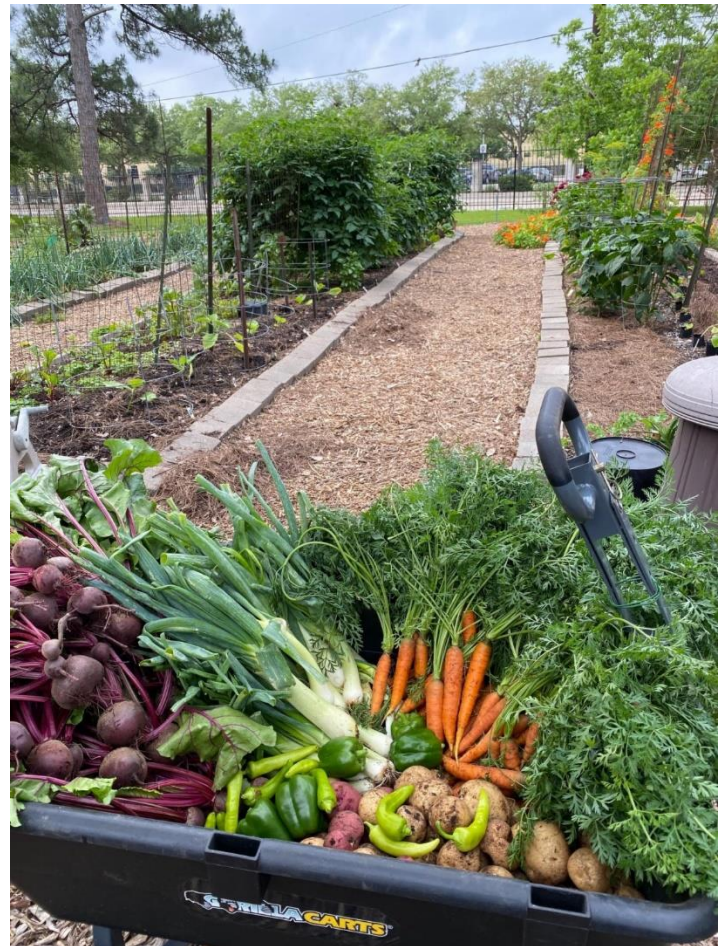
## 25 YEARS OF ORGANIC GARDENING & SO MUCH MORE

by SISTER HELOISE CRUZAT, O.P.  
**Dominican Sisters Community Garden**  
Photos by Pilar Hernandez

The Dominican Sisters' Ecology Committee had a dream in the fall of 1994 – that of using a small plot of the motherhouse grounds for a vegetable garden. This was to be a very special garden, one that would give witness to our commitment to live and act in an ecologically-responsible manner. (1992 Directional statement)

With study and labor, the dream came alive on Good Friday in April of 1995! Soil, sand, and seed blessing was done when the Dominican community was present in May-June of 1995. Garden goals are two-fold:

- Donation of organic garden produce to help those in need
- Education to assist others with the practice of organic gardening in their local areas.



NATURE'S WAY  
RESOURCES  
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From the initial garden planning in 1994-95, Sr. Clement Johnson consulted with Dr. Bob Randall of Urban Harvest as to layout and first steps, including the first irrigation system which was in place by May of 1996.



The garden has five beds, each 5 feet wide and 40 feet long, positioned for maximum sunlight. A smaller sixth bed is reserved for herbs and flowers, and a beautiful bird bath crafted by artist-gardener, [Isabelle Chapman](#). Two adjacent beds nourish flowers, butterflyweed and lilies.

Founding members of our Ecology Committee 1994-1998 are: Sr. Catherine Casey, Sr. Heloise Cruzat, Sr. Annette Dworsky, Sr. Opal Fruge, Sr. Mary Magdalen Hanel, Sr. Clement Johnson - Coordinator, Sr. Lauren Lindee, Sr. Lucia Schexnayder, Mary Jane Strauch, Sr. Mariana Wood.

Winter of 1996 brought a first freeze experience, and the spreading of hay over garden plants for insulation. The ice of January, 1997, was a less merciful garden event, as was snow in 2009! Our community garden has always received the support and devoted labor of volunteers, volunteer groups and garden lovers, some of whom are donors. The garden has hosted numerous student group visits.



# NATURE'S WAY RESOURCES

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On April 15, 1997, the Urban Harvest spring meeting was held at our site, as it was again in 2006. Both our garden and our gardeners have been honored at intervals by Urban Harvest over the years. In 2007, we received the Urban Harvest Donation Garden honor, and in 2012 the Nutgrass Roots Award, presented to community gardens that are as tenacious as nutgrass!

In 2005, two major needs were addressed: installation of a rabbit-proof fence, and the practice of covering the garden lanes with tree mulch to allow gardening even after major rain events. Student service groups have enabled us to be faithful to this practice: students from Post Oak School in 2012, from YesPrep East in 2013, from 2016 and ongoing from Cristo Rey Jesuit, also at the end of February, 2020 from Rice University MBA students – we are SO grateful!



To our sorrow, Sr. Clement Johnson passed away rather suddenly in December of 2004. Her spirit lingers with us in the garden area that she loved so much! Debbie Leflar, an energetic and faithful gardener, served as Garden Leader from 2005 through 2012. In addition to regular garden-tending and planning, helpful additions were undertaken with her leadership such as extended trellises and an expanded compost area. Currently, this re-designed area with its two compost-turning barrels is managed by Sr. Mary V Hugger.



Pilar Hernandez began serving as Garden Leader in 2013. Pilar carefully prepares each seasonal planting and watches over the harvest, tending, analyzing and improving for more abundance. Annual produce, which has routinely averaged 1,000 pounds or more, reached 1,300 pounds in 2018 and 2019!

Our weather adventures continue – wind and hail damage in April of 2013 to be followed by a serious two-day January freeze in 2014, Hurricane Harvey on August 25, 2017, snow on December 8, and then January 16, 2018 – a big and lasting ice-cover freeze!

In January of 2019, Urban Harvest chose our garden site for its honor to veteran gardener Garland Kerr as she left the Urban Harvest board. We appreciate the benefit of two beautiful rose bushes and a super garden cart!

The Dominican Sisters' Community Garden is a donation garden. Manna House, a nearby Third Ward social service cooperative, regularly received our donations from the beginning. Later we also began donating to Star of Hope, another nearby location.

And in 2020, we happily celebrate twenty-five years of organic gardening, and anticipate much more both by way of adventure, and of excellent produce. Ours is a story of gratitude for all the interest, the help, and the enthusiasm that we regularly experience. Ours is also a story of being kind to the Monarch butterflies and of enjoying our serene and beautiful space regularly!

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