What’s Growing in Austin: Community Gardens Program

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Presentation Overview

• Why Community Gardens?
• City of Austin Efforts and Current Status
• Garden Challenges and Successes: Finding Land, Utility Conflicts
• Community Agriculture Example: Festival Beach Food Forest
• Future Opportunities

North Austin Community Garden
What is a Community Garden?

A community garden is "any piece of land gardened by a group of people" -American Community Gardening Association
Benefits of Community Gardens

● Re-engage people with their food

● Provide spaces for people to learn to grow food, created BY the community, enhancing community stewardship and pride

● Nature therapy! Connecting to nature and the soil

● Provide access to affordable, fresh, local, culturally appropriate, nutritious food

● Foster friendships and cooperation across racial, socioeconomic, and age groups

All this around food, food production, and health--common to all.
City of Austin Community Gardens Program

- Created by Austin City Council in 2009 to have a single point of contact and streamline the process for creating community gardens on City land (including school parkland!)
- Parks and Recreation staff can assist community members with land search, license agreements, water tap access, and permitting
- Community gardens and urban green spaces create community, which is a core mission for Parks and Recreation

Deep Eddy Community Garden
67 Community Gardens in Austin
Community Gardens in Austin

- 67 total gardens on City, County, State, church, school, and private land
- 23 community gardens are on City land (6 of these are senior community gardens at senior centers/recreation centers), 1 food forest, 1 community farm
- Gardens each have plots available for a seasonal or yearly fee (some have sliding fee scales), plot size varies from 4’ x 6’ to 10’ x 10’ or larger
Coalition of Austin Community Gardens & Website

Each garden has its own page with information on how to join:

For more information: communitygardensaustin.org
CACG Community Garden Trainings and Panels 2016-2018
Topics: Chickens, Bugs, Rainwater, and Selling Produce

Homewood Heights Community Garden
Annual Free Soil Testing for Gardeners

Testing for heavy metals and nutrient analysis for free – one soil sample per gardener.
Austin’s Community Garden
Challenges and Successes
Adelphi Acre Community Garden: Challenges

- City of Austin Public Works Dept. right of way turn lane – never developed
- Neighbors became inspired about potential to bring site to life as a community space
Adelphi Acre Community Garden: Success!

- Garden completed in 2015 with 80 plots
- Used Utility Coordination Committee to gain approval from 37 utility companies
- Funded using Neighborhood Partnering Program Grant, strong community partnerships, including with nearby nurseries, landscapers, arborists.
Cherry Creek Community Garden: Challenges

- Watershed land: City of Austin partnered with FEMA to buy out 31 homes in 100-year floodplain along Williamson Creek
- Houses were razed, ground was scraped – but multiple utility conflicts remained
- Neighbors concerned about crime in newly vacant area, loss of community inspired to create community garden
Cherry Creek Community Garden: Success!

- Community garden established 2015
- Partnership between City of Austin Watershed, Public Works, and Parks & Rec. Dept.
- Funded by Neighborhood Partnering Program
- 24 plots, fruit orchard, community table, and wildlife trail
Patterson Park Community Garden: Challenges

- Garden proposed in the middle of a busy park, stalled due to neighbor concerns
- Concern about water bill payments
- Concern about fencing off garden for exclusive use of few
- Concern about where gardeners would park
Patterson Park Community Garden: Success!

- Grand Opening May 2017 as part of neighborhood association Memorial Day party, over 65 plots offered
- Partnered with local artist to install sculpture at park
- Garden hosted Fall 2017 Harvest Festival with pumpkin patch for photos
Community Garden at a School: North Shoal Creek Community Garden at Pillow Elementary

Permitted Spring 2017, broke ground Fall 2017 with 22 plots (3 plots reserved for school use)
Site Context – Affordable Housing and Community Garden as Neighbors

- City of Austin Parks & Recreation Dept. land adjacent to existing Festival Beach Community Garden
- Underutilized property next to RBJ Residential Tower (affordable housing for seniors and people with disabilities)
- Mowed at city’s expense
Major Challenges

- First food forest to be established on City parkland: lack of existing permitting protocol
- Need for start-up funding
- Dirty stormwater runoff from RBJ Towers parking lot caused flooding and erosion
- Need for improved ADA accessibility, especially for RBJ Towers residents
- Need for community buy-in and gardener buy-in
Success: Festival Beach Food Forest Secures Neighborhood Buy-in and Funding

- Food Forest built on positive reputation of Community Garden
- Food Forest hosted meetups and community info sessions
- East Cesar Chavez Neighborhood Planning Team provided “enthusiastic endorsement”
- Treefolks (local nonprofit) donated fruit and nut trees
- American Forests Community Re-Leaf Grant
- City of Austin Public Works Neighborhood Partnering Program Grant
Festival Beach Food Forest in Full Bloom, Beginning Phase II

• The Food Forest now hosts free permaculture classes, lectures, design workshops, plant walks, potlucks
• For more information, visit their Facebook page and website www.festivalbeach.org
Future Opportunities

• Future Community Gardens
  • South Austin - Tahoe Trail land acquired by PARD for garden
  • South Austin - Heartwood Community Garden going in on 25-year floodplain buyout land along Williamson Creek
  • Far North Austin – Alderbrook Park community garden site
  • Southeast Austin – Onion Creek? Plenty of 100-year floodplain buyout land
  • More gardens at recreation centers/senior centers/libraries

• Redefining Community Agriculture
  • Definition is evolving through CodeNEXT to include community gardens and urban farms – what else?
  • Challenge of aligning civic definitions with what’s happening now and what citizens may want in the future
    • Agricultural entrepreneurship on City land?
    • Farm incubators for new and beginning farmers?

• Overall – community gardens and community agriculture will continue to create community and serve Austin citizens
Go forth and grow some food!

For more information:
communitygardensaustin.org

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Photo Credits: Sustainable Food Center staff, City staff, Adelphi Acre Community Garden, Cherry Creek Community Garden