



## Community gardens have benefits beyond fresh foods

A century ago, about 90% of Americans were farmers. Today, that percentage has dropped to a mere 2%. That means the majority of fresh fruits and vegetables are imported from other states or other countries, which can strain the local food system.

Community gardens can help alleviate some of the issues that plague both urban and rural communities, including areas that are considered food deserts. Food deserts exist in all 50 states. A community garden, especially in a low-income area, allows residents greater access to fresh, nutritious food. Other benefits include strengthening community ties, reducing environmental hazards and creating a more sustainable system. In addition, greenspaces in cities have been linked to better physical, mental and social health.

This community effort can also help cut down on food miles, which can cause waste due to long transit times. Not only that, but a community garden provides a space for children and community members to meet and have fun in addition to the benefit of fresh, locally grown produce.

The addition of a community garden to areas where there is a strain on locally sourced food options increases proper nutrition and can help reduce obesity, both of which are problematic for some Oklahomans.

Just as physical health is important, social ties are also vital to the wellbeing of people in a community. Community gardens allow for the creation of social ties and build a greater feeling of community. In turn, these connections help reduce crime and empower residents while also making them feel safe in their neighborhoods.

Historically, gardens play an important role in many cultures. During WWII, victory gardens were an important source of food for many families.

Many cities and organizations provide opportunities for residents to become involved in community gardens. There are more than 29,000 recognized community gardens in the 100 largest cities in the country. These gardens have a positive effect on the people living in those areas, as well as the environment.

Research shows gardens help improve air and soil quality, increase biodiversity of plant and animals, reduce neighborhood waste through composting, replace impervious structures and improve water filtration and positively affect the urban micro-climate.

This can be a life-changing experience for individuals who have never seen how food grows. This experience can promote a sense of wonder and promote curiosity for the natural world.

Keep in mind a community garden isn't solely about edible. This could also be a place where friends and neighbors come together to plant flowers to help beautify an area.