

# IMPROVING FOOD ACCESS THROUGH COMMUNITY GARDENS



Community gardens have many benefits. They help clean up neighborhoods, foster a sense of community, increase access to healthy food and reduce hunger. By converting empty lots into community gardens you will not only be beautifying your city, but making a smart decision for the health and future of your citizens!



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## What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity is the inability to consistently get enough food to live an active and healthy life.<sup>1</sup>

**1 in 9  
Americans  
are food  
insecure**<sup>1</sup>



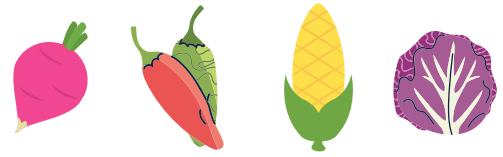
**In  
Minnesota,  
1 in 12  
people  
struggle  
with hunger**<sup>2</sup>

Food insecure people are forced to choose between buying food and paying for other expenses such as housing, utilities, and medical care.<sup>3</sup> They are also at a greater risk for diet related diseases like obesity, diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure.<sup>4</sup> For kids, food insecurity can also lead to problems in school and with growth and development.<sup>1</sup>

## How do community gardens combat food insecurity?

Community gardens have been widely promoted as a year intervention to contest the prevalence of food insecurity.<sup>5</sup> They are able to do so by:

- Enhancing food security through convenient access to nutritious foods
- Diverting money from food bills to other bills
- Providing a year round source of nutritious foods by the use of preservation
- Selling surplus produce<sup>5, 6</sup>



The ability of community gardens to combat food insecurity has been shown in both immigrant farm workers and community members in Illinois by providing economic relief and benefits to socioeconomic disadvantaged groups.<sup>5, 6</sup> The community garden in Illinois pays it forward by donating the excess grown food to local food pantries.<sup>6</sup>

### What do you need to start a community garden?

- A plot of land<sup>7</sup>
- Sunlight and access to water<sup>8</sup>
- Accessibility by walking or public transit<sup>8</sup>
- Regular maintenance (weeding, mowing, mulching)<sup>7</sup>
- Volunteers!<sup>7</sup>



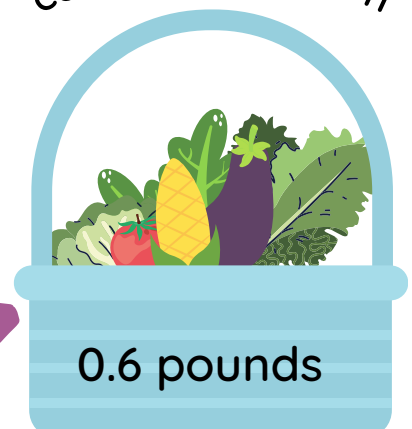
## How much food do community gardens produce?

Multiple studies on community gardens have found that community gardens are able to produce nearly 1.2 pounds of vegetables per square foot. That's **double the amount** when compared to the USDA's estimate of an average of 0.60 pounds of vegetables grown per square foot from conventional farming.<sup>9</sup>

community garden



conventional farm



## Community gardens reduce food costs.

Growing your own food costs less than buying food from a grocery store. Multiple studies have shown that community gardens **save gardeners about \$450** on produce grown themselves during a single growing season compared to buying that same amount of produce at a grocery store.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, being able to access food from a nearby garden reduces costs associated with traveling to a grocery store.<sup>11</sup>

## Community Garden Success Story

**Keep Growing Detroit** is solving hunger from the ground up.

Their mission is to promote a **food sovereign city** where most of the fruits in vegetables eaten by Detroiters are grown by Detroiters.<sup>12</sup> They support a network of 1,600 urban gardens and farms in Detroit.<sup>12</sup>



Photo Credit:  
Keep Growing Detroit Facebook

Their **Produce for Pantries** program allows any gardener to **donate their extra produce** to local emergency food providers, from shelters to food pantries.<sup>13</sup>

Through their **Grown in Detroit** program, **gardeners can supplement their income** by selling their produce at local markets. Gardeners keep 100% of the profits.<sup>14</sup>



Photo Credit: Keep Growing Detroit Facebook



Photo Credit: Keep Growing Detroit Facebook

***"I'm involved with gardening because it supplements my income plus I like a lot of vegetables. I eat a lot more vegetables because I have them right there, and I raise them, and I know how they're raised."***<sup>15</sup>

- Tommie, Keep Growing Detroit gardener

***"I may not have a dime in my pocket but I will never be hungry."***<sup>15</sup>

- Dwight, Keep Growing Detroit gardener





## How long can you garden in Minnesota?

Minnesota's typical growing season is from May to September, but it can change depending on the last spring freeze, and the first frost.

For gardening tips, check out the Minnesota Extension website at <https://extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden>



## Recommendations For City Board Members:

-  **Revise zoning** regulations to permit community gardens to be formed on vacant and abandoned lots.
-  **Take initiative** to establish community gardens in underserved areas at increased risk of food insecurity.
-  Create or expand **loan and grant programs** to help with the costs of starting new community gardens (soil testing, water access, composting, infrastructure).
-  Connect community gardeners with local University extension offices and garden based organizations to **educate community members** on gardening techniques, food preservation, and cooking with fresh produce.
-  Connect community gardens with food shelves and other **hunger-relief organizations** to help get excess produce grown in the gardens into the hands of other community members in need.
-  Encourage the **donation** of garden supplies, seeds, and other related materials from businesses and organizations to the community garden effort.





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