

# Current Trends: Community Garden Design in India

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** India is an agriculture based country and farming is linked to each one of us either in our childhood memories or as a hobby of gardening. Due to rising health issues in the city, the current trend today is to promote farming as an activity in cities by encouraging community gardens that act as healthy recreational spaces along with source of organic vegetables and assist in sustainable development of the city.

**Aim:** The aim of this paper is to explore the concepts of community gardens, its multi-dimensional benefits to the urban people, the issues and ways to promote community gardens in India.

**Approach:** The approach is to conduct an extensive literature study of gardens and community participation. The study shall help in understanding the benefits of such gardens in cities. Few case studies explore the elements and ways to organize the gardens and its feasibility in Indian context.

**Result:** The research helps us to understand the role of the community gardens, the elements and models to organize such gardens and the tangible and intangible benefits the community can achieve after successfully organizing such gardens in India.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

India is an agricultural land where the majority of people are in the villages. There has always been a concept of sharing the food amongst our family and community. As urbanization set in, people have been migrating to the cities for want of employment opportunities and education. More and more villagers are quitting the village ways and settling in cities. The cities are turning magnets to the youth who leave their agricultural fields and are attracted to the glitter of the city. The cities are growing on a mammoth scale and struggling for want of area. The result is a high density development with people restricted to apartments and living in polluted city environment. The lifestyle of the urban people has taken a down turn in terms of health and happiness.

The landscape architects and environmentalists are finding ways to mitigate the ill effect of the city and make the cities sustainable. Out of the various solutions to promote the wellbeing of individuals and the community alike, the concept of Community Gardens was introduced in the western countries. The concept has well been appreciated and benefitting the community. This paper is exploring the

elements and effects of the community garden on the resident and also tries to analyse its relevance in Indian context.

## 2. APPROACH AND METHOD

Before we begin our research, we need to understand the concept of the community gardens. Community gardens are common green areas in the vicinity of a community that are jointly used by all for growing of vegetables and flowers. These are publically functional in terms of finance, access and management. Community gardens are set up by local groups of people or welfare organizations that motivate people to contribute and participate in its functioning there by enjoying its material and intangible benefits. As per Comstock, "Community gardens are proven to reinforce ties to one's environment" [1]. It provides a community with a central location for social gathering, communal project participation, and healthy outcomes.



Fig. 1: (Community garden)

We look at various literature studies to understand the origin and the elements that go in making a community garden. Following this we look at case studies abroad and in India that show some semblance to community gardening.

**The Origin of Community Gardens:** The community gardens originated long back in 100 BC in the United

Kingdom and Celtic fields of Lands' End, Cornwall, which are still in use today. During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) the land attached to the tenant cottages was allotted to the Manorial or common man. These lands were enclosed and treated as community gardens. Later on the allotment Act of Parliament was established in 1908 to meet community demand for the gardens. [9] The concept further progressed ahead when there was food crisis during the World war and a need was felt to have locally grown food in the cities as well. Similarly in Australia, the development of community gardens was initiated in Victoria in the mid to late 1970s. As per Grayson, 2000 it began in the suburb of Nun wadding, and later with the development of the inner city Collingwood Children's Farm and the suburban Brunswick City Farm, community gardens were developed by state governments on a number of public housing estates. [13]

In India, the concept of community gardens was initiated in the villages for marginalized farmers who were unable to sustain on the fragmented small fields. This was done in 2001, by CYSD, an NGO, which began its intervention of promoting group farming in Tumajore. Group farming, alternatively known as community farming is a livelihood approach conceived by CYSD (Centre for Youth and Social Development). It consists of a group of small and marginal farmers, and landless poor in a village who work together to utilize the cultivable waste lands or under-utilized lands to earn their livelihoods. The participating farmers either take community or individual land on lease or pool land of individual farmers in a continuous patch for effective and profitable farming. With its effective impact, this initiative has now spread to other nearby villages as well. (Report by Seema Gupta and Ganesh Parida)

The Indian cities on the other hand have something called urban agriculture that predominantly has individuals growing for their own needs. Even though these are not on a community level scale, they do help out the urban poor and the migrant populations in providing them food. These is termed as urban agriculture and plays an important role for making a city more resilient and safe in term of not only food and economy but also improving standard of living of urban poor by increasing means of livelihood.

#### **Case Study of Philadelphia Green**

In 1995, with over 15,000 vacant lots and 27,000 vacant structures in the city, Philadelphia Green started encouraging associations with community development corporations in open space efforts. This resulted in the New Kensington Project open space management plan that incorporated several elements of vacant land management. By 1999 local residents had taken part in cleaning 370 parcels, building sixty-two community gardens, improving 158 side yards, developing a demonstration garden, and initiating various education programs. Today, Philadelphia's gardening future includes the ownership of twenty-one gardens through the Neighborhood Gardens Association/ A Philadelphia Land Trust. [17]

#### **Case Study of the Waterloo Community Gardens, Australia**

A Community Development Project (CDP) was first established on the Waterloo Housing Estate through a collaboration of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and the Department of Housing (DoH). The DoH first constructed the Waterloo community garden in 1997 in a dilapidated children's playground. This first community garden comprised 28 pie-shaped plots within the existing circular enclosure of the playground. Support for the project was also provided by the South Sydney City Council via a community grant and the involvement of Council's Community Gardens Officers. The Royal Botanic Gardens also supported the project by providing plants and expert horticultural advice. The project was a huge success and eagerly taken up by the adjoining tenants. Popularly called the Cook Garden, this garden lead to designing of two other community gardens. These have been developed on an individual allotment basis where individuals determine what to plant. Each of the three community gardens has its own water supply, a lockable tool box and composting bin, and is surrounded by a painted steel fence with masonry pillars with a keyed entry gate.

A qualitative research was done on people using these gardens and the results of their "research outcomes are presented in the report, "A Bountiful Harvest: Community Gardens and Neighbourhood Renewal in Waterloo" [2].

#### **Case study of New Delhi**

The research by Pranati Awasthi explains how the urban agricultural laborers have occupied the fertile banks of Yamuna and practice agriculture, however there resources are minimal and the flood threats loom over them. Due to development activities of the Delhi metro, the Yamuna banks areas have been used for infrastructure development. As a result such urban agricultural lands have reduced even more [1].

Apart for these workers, there is a substantial number of people who manage to have home grown fruits and vegetables in their backyard gardens in the city. However these cannot be termed as the community gardens because they do not help in providing the community level benefits.

A few developers have planned to launch few projects in Delhi area where they suggest to dedicate one tree to each resident who takes care of it. This new idea could be very well taken further by means of having community garden spaces in the residential complexes and jointly owning the maintenance of the same. This can promote the concept of community gardens and initiate building of a better neighborhood.

### 3. DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION

#### Understanding the Benefits of the Community Gardens

Community gardens have many benefits as listed below.

- a) There are various factors that influence the wellbeing of an individual, a family and a community. These factors are termed as determinants of health. "The 'determinants of health', were first referred to by Dahlgren and Whitehead in 1991 in their landmark paper "What can be done about inequalities in health"[12] The determinants of health are not just factors of wellbeing, like the environment or the landscape, but also personal and social setups. These social set up help in reducing the stress levels in the people. They promote a sense of security and comfort when people work in a team. As concluded by research having a garden of your own or a garden immediately adjacent to your apartment has a significantly positive impact on stress. With respect to stress reduction, having your own verdant garden seems to be more important than visiting urban open green spaces [15] Findings from several studies have converged in indicating that simply viewing certain types of nature and garden scenes significantly ameliorates stress within only five minutes or less. [16]. Research has proved that the health benefits are numerous for the gardeners. As well as eating better and being more active, gardeners are more involved in social activities, view their neighborhoods as more beautiful, and have stronger ties to their neighborhoods [12]. all community gardeners stated that their main reasons for gardening were to be outside in nature and to get their hands dirty. Most community gardeners give away some of the produce they grow to friends, family and people in need; 60 percent specifically donate to food assistance programs [12].
- b) Research have also proved that youth and the school kids also benefit for the community gardens by venting out their stress.
- c) Gardens provide food and shelter for birds and insects
- d) Help in preserving heirloom flowers and vegetables
- e) Organic farming practices - prevent introduction of chemicals into the system
- f) Compost (cycling outputs back into the system)
- g) Rainwater harvesting
- h) Ecological and Environmental Ethic
- i) Community gardens can result in greening of vacant lands in the city, the increased green cover may improve the sustainability of the city.
- j) The fresh fruits and vegetable grown by the individual help in understanding the worth of the farming sector

- k) Motivation to reduce food wastage.
- l) Promotion of terrace gardening as community gardens reduces the heat island effects.



Fig. 2: community terrace garden

#### Introducing Community Gardening in Indian Cities.

Having understood the benefits of the community garden we look at possibility to establish them in Indian cities. There is lot of potential to set them here in India.

- a) **Through Government incentives:** The city has lot of open waste government lands that turn into garbage dumps eventually. The government can promote the community gardens for the wellbeing of the citizens and also for promoting sustainability and food security. These government lands could be leased out to groups of interested citizens. Neighbors could be recruited to take ownership and help protect the investment. These local advocates serve as the eyes and ears of the neighborhood. They have the potential to most directly benefit from this project. The neighborhood gardeners, master gardeners, agricultural extension offices, and local botanical garden experts in the area could provide expertise, donate materials, or donate labor. Sponsors and others who can not only provide operating capital can also provide political support for the project (e.g., businesses that contribute to community beautification and highway adoption projects).
- b) **Through Resident Welfare Associations.** The concept can also be introduced as an option for the group housing residents who could use the common area for such activities. Organized by the resident welfare associations, the residents can all get to enjoy nature and its bounties.
- c) **Through Neighbourhood schools:** The local school can take the initiative to set up the community gardening areas and inculcate the respect fun and joy of farming.

The children can really benefit from such group activities as they start to reconnect with the nature. They learn and appreciate the various ecosystems that coexist with farming and help in the sustainable development of the city. Global issue of obesity in city kids can be tackled in a healthy way.

**d) Through Cooperative set ups and other organisations:**

The cooperative milk industry of Amul and many similar cooperative movements have been very successful in India. On similar lines, the community gardens could be established where the people with like mind interest form cooperatives that work on community gardens. Newspaper reports showcase achievements in this direction with community gardens and vegetable produces happening all over India including places like Rajarhat, Bangalore, Nagpur and Puducherry.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Studies have proved that these community garden spaces are essential for the physical social and mental health and hence appropriate directions and approach may be made during city planning and detailed planning to help the community to achieve a healthier lifestyle. These community gardens can help in city dweller to have access to organic fresh vegetables along with a great sense of pride and satisfaction to be a part of growing the same. The worth of food is understood and food wastage is reduced. The community gardens are an essential means to reconnect the people today with the nature. Landscape architects today should try to either allocate a land in their project or guide local people to understand the importance and help in the sustainable development of the city.

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