AG + Landscape

The Community Behind the Garden

Rutgers University
Ag In the City
When people think of gardening and farming, I would assume they would picture big fields, open areas, lots of space, and land that appears suitable for producing crops. This is how it started out. The less populated our land was, the more space we had to farm and garden, to be able to produce our own fruits and vegetables. That time was many years ago though. Now, in America, and many other parts of the world, certain areas have become extremely populated. The main areas with a dense population are the urban areas, like cities. Urban areas attract many people, because they can be a cheaper way to live if money is an issue (and unfortunately it is for many). In urban areas, homes and stores are close to each other, so everything can be in walking distance, which means people can save money by not owning a car. There are benefits from living in urban areas. But there are also issues that come with living in these areas.

A large issue in urban areas is the state of health that its residences are in. Being in tight, dense, over populated areas means it is difficult to find land to be able to produce fresh fruits and vegetables for the masses. As a result, these people suffer because they resort to whatever is nearby to get cheap food. This food can be very unhealthy, being high in salts, sugars, and fats, most likely being processed food. People are beginning to see the consequences of their eating habits, and are now beginning to demand for change. In urban areas, if people want change in what they eat, they must change parts of the cities. Change from within to spread it throughout.
Community gardens need sun, water, plants, and people. The people are the blood, the glue, and the backbone of urban agriculture. Each garden has its own character, meaning, and function. It is the people that bring the community to the garden.
Located in central New Jersey, East Brunswick Township houses a population of about 45,000 people, about half that of Trenton, NJ. (The land area is more than double the size of Trenton, too). A diverse community with a variety of businesses located throughout, property sizes here are much larger than a city’s home property. It is easier to simply make a garden at home, rather than joining a community garden in the city. So why is there a community garden in East Brunswick?

When we asked that question to one of the garden’s founders, Liti Haramaty, she quoted the famous line from the movie “Field of Dreams” — “if you build it, they will come.” She explained that a group of people had a vision of a community garden, and together they got enough people to believe in the garden they saw. Together they formed The Friends of the East Brunswick Environmental Commission, which organizes and manages the garden. There was a large farm in East Brunswick where a portion had been left fallow by the farmer. The Friends of the EBEC thought it would be the perfect spot for a community garden. And it was. With the soil in good shape because it had been previously farmed, gardeners could plant straight into the earth with no need for raised beds (which saves a significant amount of money). So in 2009, East Brunswick opened its first community garden. The garden started out with 80 plots for up to 80 members, but quickly expanded to 160 plots (with a size of 10 feet by 10 feet each). Haramaty said the garden was in high demand, and there was enough room to expand, so they did. It was different not seeing a community garden hidden within a crowded city. This garden is in walking distance for some, but driving distance for most. It shows that a community garden can not only survive in a city scene, but in a suburban scene as well.

Jackie Park Albaum, the coordinator for Elizabeth’s city beautification movement “Come Grow With Us”, took us to two gardens in Elizabeth. Come Grow with Us! is a community garden project established by Assemblywoman Annette Quijano under the nonprofit organization Groundwork Elizabeth. Urban regeneration is a common bond between these initiatives. The first garden was at the Elizabeth Housing Authority Projects at Leonard Towers. This garden consisted of a small area of 8 raised beds that Come Grow With Us! maintained. A lot of the seniors that live there are also active in taking care of the plants. Jackie and Christine, her assistant, encouraged us to participate in working the beds. We removed some tomato and eggplants from the previous growing season and then planted garlic bulbs in their places. They always rotate and change up the crops grown there from season to season. Bordering this garden, there are benches, open green spaces, giant chess boards, and outdoor grills to encourage the seniors who live there to be outside and enjoy the benefits of hanging out in the garden.

One of the final things that we covered with Jackie, is probably one of the first you would ask — who gets to eat the foods that they grow? Come Grow With Us! splits the garden yields up into thirds. One third of the crops goes to the people who take care of the gardens, another third goes to the people who are in need and do not have access to fresh produce, and the final third is sold at places such as farmer’s markets.

Crops are regularly rotated and changed from season to season.
P.E.A.C.E Garden

P.E.A.C.E. Garden is located at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. Co-founder, Carrie Ellmore-Tallitsch was present for an interview at the time of my visit. Sponsored by St. Paul’s Center of Caring and Sustainable Jersey City as a supporting partner. P.E.A.C.E. is an acronym for permaculture, environment, abundance, community, and empathy.

The Garden is dedicated to sustainable urban organic farming practices in permaculture and composting. Eighty-five percent of the food grown is donated to the food pantry adjacent to the garden which is called The Sharing Place. P.E.A.C.E. Garden is unique—many planters are labeled with positive supporting words like “love, spirit, and action.” In the practice of positive labeling, the plants will take on that very essence.

In attempts to enrich the soil and reduce waste within the local community, the garden has started two compost exchange programs for Bokashi and Traditional compost systems.

PE.A.C.E. Garden is one project vision of Big sky Project. Big Sky Project is a grassroots community fellowship. Gathering community and all of the resources and skills available for barter, thus creating commerce, self-sufficiency, and art with in a village. One project and location at a time, Big Sky’s mission is to initiate the healing of the environment in which we all live, through imaginative, innovative, experimental, artistic, and inspired philosophy.

Ogden’s End community garden is located at the Janet More Park at the end of Ogden’s End. The Ogden’s End Garden is an Adopt a Lot garden. The lot had recently been cleared as it had been mostly forest land. Some of the garden had been an auto repair shop so the soil is potentially hazardous. For that reason head gardener and team decide to build raise beds filled with 2-3 inches of gravel to separate the beds from the ground. The overall garden is about 80 ft. x 50ft. Although the garden has only recently been created, the group of volunteers are feeling optimistic about its future. They are planning to use straw bales to line the 10 raised beds to grow vegetables and develop soil through composting the straw bales at the end of each season. This fall, Ogden’s End garden was awarded best start up garden by Adopt a Lot. Water is not located on site but a nearby park will allow volunteers to run a hose from the tap to the garden because both the garden and the park belong to the city. Ogden’s End Community Garden received generous donations from the local community since fall of last year. This was able to give the garden the opportunity to plant in 6 of 10 raise beds. In addition the raise beds there are now 4 general planting beds full with perennial flowers. Jersey City has developed a program this season for the adopt a lots to receive top soil, storage shed with tools and coordination with local fire houses to provide water to rain barrels and water storage units. The Garden finally looks like a garden and gaining more volunteers on a weekly basis.

Ogden’s End is a great example of how to establish a garden in soil conditions that are potentially hazardous.
Riverview Community garden at 285 Ogden Avenue, Jersey City is an Adopt a Lot garden which is open to members of the community similar to the ward system in New Brunswick. The garden covers about 2400 square feet. There is a waiting list to belong. Food grown is usually brought home by gardeners or distributed to visitors, though the garden has never measured the total amount of produce grown. The garden leaves donation money buckets at the entrance if you wish to take home vegetables. Stones mark community plots versus individual or children's plots. The garden was founded in 1995 and is made up of an advisory board and is in the business of building government partnerships, lobbying, and building community advocacy.

The Judith L. Shipley Urban Environmental Center greeted us with a big arched entry gate. As we walked into the garden, we walked out of the city into another world. There were colorful flowers everywhere, fruit and vegetables sprouting, and the sound of water. Our guide, Justin Allen of the Greater Newark Conservancy (GNC), showed us around the garden. We toured a greenhouse for raising plants and demonstration, a garden for the five senses, outdoor garden classrooms, and a native plants garden. Justin had a lot of passion about his work. He explained that GNC works with many other organizations, as well as the state to accomplish their mission. Prudential, a large company whose headquarters are in Newark, donated money towards the Urban Environmental Center’s causes, and sent volunteers from their company to assist in building gardens. They also work with the Prisoner Re-Entry Program, Clean and Green, that provides practical skills to ex-offenders including transitional job training in horticulture and gardening. The Adopt-A-Lot program run by the City of Newark, provides many of the garden sites, including the Urban Environmental Center’s own site.
SWAG Project (South Ward Agricultural Garden) is an “Urban Farm, Food Justice, and Community Building project located in the South Ward of Newark” started three years ago by Emilio Panasci from Planting Seeds of Hope and Alexandra Payne from Amplify Consulting. With the help of a local farmer, Vincent, and numerous other volunteers and contributors, the garden has grown and prospered. The farm produces a large variety of locally grown fruits and vegetables available to the local community. Half the space for the garden was donated by the First Tabernacle, an active Hebrew organization, and the other half is an adopted city lot. In three years they have completed much. Since it started, the farm had many community members pitch in. Most of the farm work is volunteer-based. SWAG Project is always looking for new connections and partners. Two current partners are both local schools—Peshine Avenue School and TEAM Charter, as well as many other local non-profit organizations, businesses, and university teams. Another major contribution has been that the farm has fostered collaboration and stronger ties among diverse people.

The SWAG Project is located at the First Tabernacle Church at 343 Meeker Avenue. There are two farms (one next to the church, the other around the corner), the church itself, and a small back yard. Other farm amenities include a beehive, a small greenhouse, a compost bin and a colorful mural. Many of the volunteers are locals, but some people come from different parts of the state to help out, too. Regulars at the farm include Alexandra, Emilio, Vincent and others. Along with these three, we met an intern named Cameron, a woman named Angel and others who contribute regularly.

SWAG Project’s goals are to provide available fresh locally grown produce to the community, to educate the community and local school children about food and nutrition, and to strengthen ties in the surrounding community. Besides growing produce, they also provide cooking lessons and education to children and adults. Much of their budget comes from grants and donors. At the beginning of 2014, they raised $4,300 dollars from donors through ioby.org, an online crowd-funding source. They also run a fund-raising dinner in the Fall, and seek small grants to fill out the small budget needed to sustain the farm.

The Court Street Urban Farm is located on the grounds of the Krueger-Scott Mansion, a 19th Century Victorian mansion built by the American beer connoisseur Gottfried Krueger. The property changed hands multiple times before its acquisition by the City of Newark in 1982. The vacant lot sat uncultivated and neglected for years before the Greater Newark Conservancy took over the property in 2009. Today the Court Street Farm supplies 7,000 pounds of produce to be sold at the Conservancy’s farmstand at its Court Street location. Under the supervision of Director of Community Greening, Justin Allen, ex-offenders are trained in horticulture and gardening at the Court Street Location. The Clean and Green Team, the Conservancy’s vocational program, provides transitional job training, interview skills, workplace conduct, and other marketable skills to recently released prisoners. This city-funded program provides a second-chance for recent offenders to get back on their feet during the eight week course. During the program, many find work, pride, and pick up a new trade shortly after their release from state prison. Former participants currently serve in supervisory roles at the Conservancy and serve as an inspiration to Green Team participants.
Many of the crops that the Court St. Farm grows are non-traditional in nature (ground cherries, chili peppers, and yellow watermelon) or are sought-after greens in Newark such as; collard greens, okra, and kale. Though this season Farmer Justin and his Green Team harvested 7,000 pounds of produce, organic farming methods pose a threat to yield when nasty pests invade crops year after year. For this reason Justin hopes to magnify crop yield by planting seeds at different times during the growing season in order to harvest throughout the late summer and fall. He also uses crop rotation methods to reduce the likelihood that pests will invade familiar crops.

The challenge Farmer Justin has working with people with little horticulture knowledge is that they need a lot of supervision and sometimes more supervision than he is able to provide. Sometimes volunteers step on crops or drag hoses over them, potentially ripping up the root system. He values the virtue of patience and knows that the groups he works with sometime require more of it.

The Philip's Academy Charter School's rooftop garden is a unique learning environment and an integral part of the education offered here. Students of all grades were tasked with maintaining the garden several days a week and learned all kinds of skills that many of the students take home with them. Students were extremely knowledgeable about their multiple crops and proud to say they purchase the same foods when they shop with their parents. Of course, every student was excited to get out of the classroom; however, it was easy to see the bond each child shared with that garden. One of the major goals of the program is to build a strong relationship between students and their food.

The garden was only half the program. Soon after gathering the fresh produce, children headed straight to the kitchen to prepare and eat what they had just harvested. Creating this instant bond from picking what they have been growing for weeks, perhaps months, and enjoying the fruits of their labor reinforced the understanding of how important fresh food is. Students understood that the garden, or soil, was the foundation of the food-growing cycle, and the satisfaction of eating the produce is the reward. They were graded on their personal plots and even sold some of the foods they made at a school farm stand.
The students connect gardening their own food with healthy eating and cooking skills.

Greater Newark Charter School garden started about two years ago, and yet it has grown into a prosperous community-enriching project. With the help of Alexander Marcoulides, Central Ward Councilman Darrin Sharif, and of course, students at the Greater Newark Charter School. The garden has gathered many different people within the community with the one purpose of creating a garden. For a long period of time, the site was subject to illegal dumping. It was only recently that they had the dumping stopped, creating light and hope for the small space. In the back of the site, a neighbor opened their home and helped the garden in many ways.

Currently, the greenhouse is under construction so that lessons can be taught and crops can still be raised in cooler months. It was built by the neighbor himself; however, help is still required to improve and fortify the greenhouse. Recently, this school garden received an award for Best Environmental Education Award. On the 18th of October 2013, they held a tree planting ceremony to commemorate the occasion. There are now around a dozen plum trees to be planted in a grove in the garden.

Since 2013, the Greater Newark Charter school has closed, and now the garden is underneath the non-profit Green Revolution and is open to the public. Any and all residents are welcomed to grow fresh organic produce in the garden. Anyone interested can request a key from Alexander Marcoulides and can get their own gardening bed. Follow Alexander on Twitter @ KaptainCompost and visit the website www.greenrevolutionusa.com to learn more about the garden!
NEW BRUNSWICK COMMUNITY FARMERS MARKET

The New Brunswick Community Farmers Market is located on Jones Avenue in New Brunswick. It is a partnership between Rutgers Cooperative extension, Johnson and Johnson and the City of New Brunswick. The farm sits on an approximate one acre lot on Rutgers University property. The New Brunswick Community Farmers Market has several aspects which allows for the community to get involved. The market itself is currently in its sixth season, the community garden is in its fourth season, while the urban farm and Children’s Educational Garden are in their second seasons. The site boasts two hoophouses, a greenhouse (donated by Rutgers Entomology department) and 36 raised garden beds which are open to members of the community for $15 per season. Additionally, plans are in process to raise chickens as well as create raised beds on top of the black top on site to increase garden space. The surrounding community is largely Hispanic, and the fruits and vegetables that are grown in the community plots reflect this heritage. Each year, the hoophouses grow marigolds which are sold for Dia de los Muertos celebrations, and the greenhouses also grow spices, herbs and other plants which are used in Spanish and Hispanic cooking that are difficult to find in supermarkets. Classes are held outdoors and in the greenhouse for people of all ages.

NEW BRUNSWICK CHRIST CHURCH

At 5 Paterson Street, New Brunswick, NJ, the Christ Church is on a mission. Many churches try to play an active role in their town or city’s community, offering assistance to those in need—donations for the needy, or providing a place for people to get together to solve local problems. Christ Church does all of this and more. Being located in New Brunswick, they recognized that hunger, healthy eating, and the cost of feeding a family are important concerns. Christ Church acted on this problem by opening the food pantry, which began in the late 1990’s and expanded to its present size in 2006. Parishioners, the State of New Jersey, and the general public provide food donations to this pantry for New Brunswick’s families in need. But this was just the start. Christ Church decided to go one step further. Seeing how most food donations are mostly “shelved food,” and non perishables, Christ Church thought there could be a healthier way to feed the ones in need. In May of 2013, Christ Church joined the Community Garden Coalition of New Brunswick and added 8 new raised garden beds to the church’s property. The dimensions of the beds are 4’x8’x20.” The beds are manned and maintained by church mentors.

The beds grow a variety of common vegetables, like basil, tomatoes, peppers, kale, collard greens, lettuce, and others that most people enjoy. The church invites anyone who is interested in learning how to garden properly to their eight locations so that gardening knowledge and goodness can spread throughout the city. In the short amount of time that the gardens have been active, they have added more local vegetables to local families’ tables through the church’s association with the food pantry. The garden beds were funded by a grant from Princeton Bank, and private donations. With their food pantry helping to feed at least 1,000 people a month, we would say it was a great investment.
**A LOT TO GROW**

A Lot to Grow, Inc. a volunteer driven community garden organization designed to provide 100% of its organic vegetables and herbs for distribution to local food pantries, soup kitchens, and subsidized senior housing facilities in suburban Essex County. It was established in 2010 by Patrice Kelly. This organization currently maintains six gardens constructed on vacant lots within the towns of Glen Ridge, Montclair, and Nutley. To date, A Lot to Grow has donated over 5,000 lbs. of fresh produce.

These gardens are designed to create awareness about the increased demand for food donations in New Jersey suburbs, and to educate volunteers and supporters about the benefits of growing food locally. A Lot to Grow is a 501(c)3 charitable organization maintained through both private donations and gifts in kind from the local business community.

Location selection is based on the potential for sustainability of these gardens. A designated site director for each garden coordinates maintenance and harvesting of vegetables, utilizing volunteers from local civic groups, corporate outreach programs, religious organizations, and primary, secondary and college level students. These vegetables and herbs are grown in raised cedar beds to eliminate environmental concerns associated with prior use of vacant lots. Plants are primarily grown from seed during three cycles; Early Spring, Summer, and Autumn. We accept seedling donations from reliable sources like the Master Gardeners of Essex County. All of their sites are equipped with drip line watering systems and rain sensors, and enclosed by deer and rodent fencing. For more information go to aloottogrow.org.

**GROW IT GREEN**

Grow it Green Morristown’s Urban Farm is a 1-acre agricultural teaching garden behind the Layette Learning Center in Morristown, NJ started by Grow it Green Morristown. Grow it Green Morristown was started in 2009 to advocate for sustainability through capital improvement projects, education and legislative advocacy. The Urban Farm is the largest school garden in New Jersey. This living classroom is located in a diverse neighborhood where Farmer Shaun manages the operation, bringing the community together through educational volunteer opportunities for school children, scouting troops, church groups and interested community members. Each year, ninety percent of the crops are planted by students and volunteers! 30% of the harvest gets offered back to the community through the farm stand, and 70% of the harvest is donated to local charities like The Community Soup Kitchen, Interfaith Food Pantry and Table of Hope. During the academic year Grow it Green Morristown provides fresh produce to the cafeteria at the Morristown High School. Grow it Green Morristown is a registered non-profit, so much of their support comes from grants, events, and fundraising. Half of the garden started with the help of community sponsorships by Kings Super Market’s Act against Hunger program. With this partnership The Urban Farm doubled the amount donated to local charities. Hampshire Real Estate Companies also help sponsor a portion of the farm with the learning Garden program. The Urban Farm can now expand the number of schools and students that can use the farm as an educational initiative. The Urban Farm practices sustainable agriculture which includes organic growing methods without the use of any sprays or synthetic fertilizers. Additionally, the garden features a small CSA membership which allows for direct input from members. Grow it Green would like to continue to spread knowledge of do-it-yourself food production while sustaining a lively venue for community involvement.
The Early Street Community Garden was founded in 2008 when a previously abandoned junkyard in a redevelopment zone adjacent to the senior housing complex was turned into a community garden. After establishing the community garden they began to draw community in with several activities like monthly potluck dinners, movie nights, and plant sales, all of which continue today. They rent out their plots for $35 a year, overlooking the fee for senior citizens. Grow It Green Morristown worked with The Trust for Public Land, the Town of Morristown and Green Acres for funding to buy the property in 2013. They are just wrapping up their fifth growing season and are planning to expand. With the now purchased land, they plan to offer more garden beds for the community by extending the plots to the back of the site and incorporating a rain garden towards the center. A small public park will be located along the road, as a place for the community to gather. The growing community interaction has created a need for a larger space, and potentially another garden in the near future so people can continue coming together around the growing of healthy foods.

Located at 406 Tompkins Street in Orange, New Jersey the Garden State Urban Farms hydroponic garden is surrounded by an urban community. Lorraine Gibbons, along with employees and interns, maintains the garden. The garden grows microgreens, such as microlettuce, kale, collards and a wide variety of other greens. Rather than topsoil, the garden uses oasis pads, made of inorganic material, and propagation trays. This method of growing plants allows water to stay in the system and be reused by means of a holding tank. The water is pumped from the holding tank into each tube, allowing each row access to water. There is a catch pipe in the back that leads back to the holding tank. The only water loss resulting from this system is root uptake by the plants and a small amount of evaporation, making it very sustainable. Ideally, water would be cycled out once a week or sooner so that new water and nutrients can be put into the tank. This is a controlled system in which no nutrient pollution is released into the environment. Through the use of natural pest control methods, such as the use of ladybugs and other natural approaches, the garden is organic-certified and makes no use of chemicals. Using this gardening technique provides stable and high yields. The cultivation period is much shorter than other growing methods (3 weeks), growing produce more quickly and year-round, resulting in more produce per pound. This makes it an attractive alternative for restaurants to buy from.

The garden grows microgreens, such as microlettuce, kale, collards and a wide variety of other greens.
The Bethany House of Hospitality is located at 426 Hamilton Ave in Trenton. The garden is located behind the house and is open to the public. The residents of the house take care of the garden along with some volunteers from the church. The house and accompanying garden were created and supported by three Presbyterian Churches in the greater Trenton area; Westminster, Covenant, and Lawrence Road. The garden has many different people and groups who helped to create it, including the church, Isles, and others.

This garden is located in the backyard of the Bethany House. This garden is a new garden only being built back in May of 2012. The garden is very beautiful, clean, and well thought out. The garden consists of raised planters, a hoop planter, a pergola with vine plants growing on it and a table underneath, two compost bins, and rain garden. The space is very nice and is open to the public even though it is behind the house. This garden is a great example of how to balance a backyard between being family functional and a garden space. It really shows a great juxtaposition between the two spaces and intertwines them well.

In Trenton, New Jersey, our class visited an organization that is making a difference within its city. Isles is a community developed and environmental organization. Their website, www.isles.org, states a few of their missions as an organization:

- Revitalizes communities by developing green affordable homes, parks and community agriculture.
- Trains and educates youth and adults through a vocational school and green job training center.
- Builds wealth by supporting social enterprises and other financial and credit building services.
- Stimulates green, healthy living by cleaning up environmental hazards, fostering energy efficiency and promoting healthy lifestyles.

Upon visiting their headquarters, we learned about how they operate. With a history of over 30 years, they currently provide technical and organizational assistance to over 50 urban gardens in the Isles Garden Support Network (IGSN). They work with the City of Trenton and other community partners to support gardening and related education. One example is working with the NJ Department of Correction’s Jones Farm, where inmates in the horticulture training program grow seedlings for the school and community gardens that Isles supports. People support Isles, because Isles supports its people. If there is an abandoned lot somewhere, citizens interested in starting a community garden can reach out to Isles for assistance. Isles facilitates donations of plants and seeds to share with gardens in their network to produce more fruits and vegetables. With these fruits and vegetables growing throughout the city, community gardeners donate the food to local food pantries as a way to give back to the community. It is a wonderful organization that needs to be recognized more, so other urban areas can begin to make the same transformation Trenton is doing.
Isles has a garden of their own on the grounds of the headquarters. Here, Isles grows all sorts of interesting vegetables that people interested in starting an urban garden can come and see how they function.

Jim Simon of Isles talks to the Ag + Landscape Class about community gardens in Trenton.

“You learn something new everyday!” - Clarence

The class goes out to meet the members of the Trenton community who work in the Garden of Three Points.
During our trip to Isles we visited one community garden in the heart of Trenton. This garden, which contains a plethora of different fruits and vegetables, provides many local residents with food each night. Not only is this a source of food for many but it is also an escape from the busy, chaotic streets of Trenton. In this garden each “farmer” is given a plot of land that they can use to plant anything they wish. After visiting the garden we were given an opportunity to talk to two farmers about their experience at this community garden.

The men shared with us stories from over 25 years of gardening at this location. They explained how much their families enjoyed the fresh produce and how buses bring children each spring to learn about what they do. The woman who founded the garden used to cook for the children who visited, but sadly she passed away. They shared with us how Isles helped provide new seed but it was up to them to grow and take care of their own plants. This garden was extremely healthy and showed the pride in which people take in their food. I think the tie between community and garden is evidently strong and is something that has been a part of their past and likely part of their future.

The gardeners enjoy bringing their produce to their families and friends.

Bethany House Garden grows many kinds of fruits and vegetables, even hops!

The Bethany House is a great example of how small spaces can produce a lot!
This county property was transformed into this garden due to the strong desire by the community to do so. Led solely by 12 residents with one lead gardener, the garden is supported and maintained by the residents with their own income. Maintaining any garden takes commitment, enthusiasm and is hard work! The vegetables that constitute this garden are taken home by the occupants and used to feed their friends and families fresh, organic produce. This lively green garden has a special way of bringing those involved together. This allows the neighborhood to develop a more intimate connection with each other and with the environment. This can be evidenced by the area surrounding the garden, which is clean and free of felonious behavior. The garden seems to be a symbolic representation of the community and is respected as such.

Close to one acre, consisting of twelve lots, this garden is run by Asian and Dominican immigrants who reside in or near the area. Started over ten years ago, the garden, placed amongst the city of Trenton and surrounded by buildings and concrete, stands out for its green composure. The city provides the garden with water through a city permit that allows residents to water and maintain their garden. Other than that, excluding seed donations and having their soil tilled by Isles, all other resources are obtained by those working the garden from their own pockets. Due to the absence of chemical use in the allotment, the cost to keep this garden flourishing is significantly decreased.

This newly created garden was started due to inspiration and now is an inspiration itself to others in the neighborhood, teachers, staff, parents and students who witness its growth! The produce that results from this garden is served during school events and activities. For example, in the 5th grade end of the school year dance, the students had an opportunity to prepare a salad from the garden. This food is also used to serve students, parents and staff during school celebrations. Children are able to try and experience new foods throughout the year because of this garden through samples and in cooked meals, something that would not have been possible otherwise. Students are also exposed to various new animals that come by to enjoy the beautiful garden as well. Not only have they seen finches, butterflies, insects, and other birds, the children were even involved in a wonderful unexpected science experiment when Mrs. Monard found a cocoon in the garden. Students named it and watched as it developed into a stunning butterfly right in front of their eyes. Even after letting the butterfly free, it still lingered with them in the garden for a bit longer. Just as the butterfly remained, so will the learning experiences that this garden has made possible for these children even after their time in Christopher Columbus Elementary School comes to an end.
The Escher sRo Project, located at 50 Escher Street is one of Trenton’s single-room occupancy buildings offering on-site services for those in need of rehabilitation. Through the sRo’s multiple affiliations, residents are provided with rehabilitative services such as the nearby Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, a community garden, hoop house, and goldfish pond. Although social services support is provided on-site, gardening provides the sRo residents with a secondary support system.

Isles provides all the tools and knowledge necessary to support a community garden. At the SRO each participating resident is loaned their own raised bed in which they can plant, maintain, and harvest their own crops. SRO manager Frank Stilwell spoke on behalf of his residents and their excitement about their up-and-coming sustainable fish pond. He finds his residents are proud of their plots and feel a sense of guardianship over their crops.

The Hedgepeth-Williams School garden was started six years ago when the vice principal at the time asked Mrs. Scully, a current teacher at the school, if she would be interested in taking part in this project. It began with Isles providing the wood to help enclose some October daisies and begonia flowers that are now encompassing the front of the school. The larger garden, located behind the school, grows tomatoes, zucchini, eggplants, peppers, lettuce, various herbs, and strawberry patches. Not only do Mrs. Scully’s students directly help with maintaining and growing the garden, but other teachers also partake in the wonderful outdoor space with the wood tables and benches that were built around the garden to teach students. The food that this garden produces is used in the classroom and a large part is given to the Trenton soup kitchen. Located in the garden are compost bins where students can place their banana peels and other foods into the bins, rather than throwing it away. This allows for very rich soil to be formed that can be put back into the garden. Soon, the American Heart Association will provide the garden with a grant including materials to add raised beds to the garden.
Walking to the area of the garden, I wasn’t sure when we would come up to it, because all I saw were row homes. Then, out of nowhere, we were there. Right in between row home, a beautiful, thriving garden. This was just an abandoned lot, but someone saw potential there and decided to make it into a garden. It was so colorful and lively. It had a nice variety of what was growing there, between flowers, vegetables, and other plants. Around the border of the garden, the walls were being covered in inspiring graffiti. The biggest graffiti was a picture of Gandhi and his famous quote, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” For that reason, this garden was titled, the Gandhi Garden. I thought this quote was very appropriate, because putting a garden in a populated, and (at some parts) run down city, is a huge, positive change that someone wanted to contribute. This garden is getting positive feedback within its community. The Gandhi Garden hosts volunteer days to show people how to garden, and to help maintain the garden. They also host free mini concerts and barbecues throughout the year to spread the goodness of what this place is doing.

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”
- Mahatma Ghandi
This garden is managed by a Costa Rican immigrant named Marvin. Marvin has maintained this garden for the past 5 years now, and plans to continue doing so for quite some time. For the most part, the garden is run by Marvin and a select few other people that work with him. Marvin’s biggest crop that he grows is beans. He grows about 150 pounds of beans per season, and they are mostly distributed to his friends and family. He also gives some of his yields to his neighbors in the area, but he says they are mostly apathetic about it and do not appreciate it as much as he would like them to. Other crops that he grows there include collard greens, squash, cucumbers, basil, peppers, and even peaches. Some of the peppers he had were hot peppers, sweet peppers, cubanelles, and more. He had two pretty big peach trees, which he’s had for a while now and had to transplant them into the garden when he first started it. He is not always lucky with the peaches though, because animals such as squirrels often get to them first. Marvin is pretty enthusiastic and passionate about his gardening and likes to share his yield with others. He hosts children from a nearby day care each spring for a tour and food. He even gave a butternut squash to Chris, our tour guide that works with Isles. One thing that Marvin is unhappy about with his garden is that the community is not as involved in taking interest in the garden as he hopes. This may be due to its poor location and tall, metal fence that surrounds the garden; with only one entrance and it being a gate that is locked when no one is working the garden. The garden started out as an empty lot that Marvin transformed into a garden. Marvin and his workers made the “field” out of raised beds filled with soil that they till by hand.

Roberto Clemente Park is a small, green sanctuary located at the end of Academy St. in Trenton NJ. Isles, Inc. led the development of the garden in partnership with the City of Trenton by turning a neglected patch of asphalt into a thriving, productive space. The area is a small, but valuable ecological sanctuary within the community, featuring habitat for songbirds and beneficial insects in contrast with the surrounding urban expanse. Currently, the park features raised beds for various vegetables, perennial flower and herb beds, wildflower mini-meadow, a bamboo maze, sitting gazebos and a composting area for garden waste. The park is designed for children’s recreation and education but is open for public use during daylight hours. Educational tours for school groups are welcome here, and new socials and events to be held at the park are being planned for the future.

Roberto Clemente Park has trouble attracting visitors, which could be attributed to its location. The park isn’t seen by many people passing by, because it is tucked away at the dead end of Academy St. More publicity could greatly benefit the park, which could be achieved through the scheduling of more tours and socials that highlight the beauty of this urban gem.
Shards Garden is approximately 10,000 square feet and is maintained by the locals. A Romanian man with a trade in landscaping has helped this garden by bringing in many resources from work. These include peach trees, crape myrtle, and fig trees which are seen through the garden. The locals use a hierarchy system to distribute the land between all the farmers. The size of your plot is determined by the length of time involved and your experience. This gives the garden a unique system of maintenance where the gardeners keep their plots in proper shape in order to not disrupt the experience of others. Next to the vegetable portion of the garden is a beautiful trail referred to as “Paradise in Spring” due to the fact through the spring months of March through May, a variety of flowering shrubs and trees such as hydrangeas, crape myrtles, and roses take bloom.

The LIFE St. Francis Life Senior Center is located at 1435 Liberty Street in Trenton. Their garden is located on the side of their building on a concrete patio adjacent to the parking lot. The patients help to work in the garden but some of the workers garden as well. Isles helped them by building their planters and giving them plants.

The garden is new, having only been built a year ago. The planters are all raised, some of them even are on wheels and are high enough for a wheelchair-bound person to access them. The others have a nice bench to sit on so the patients can easily sit and access the plants to work or relax. This area is really enjoyed by the clients and helps to increase their quality of life. Many of the patients don’t have access, the ability, or a safe means of enjoying any green space, and this garden provides them an opportunity to. This garden is also an excellent example of how to incorporate a garden into a small paved area. The patio itself is not very large and is more of a corridor then a space, but the planters and plants really help make the space work and be a comfortable place to be.
The STARS Garden is tucked away on a small road that lies near Parker Elementary school. The garden is managed by members of the South Trenton Area Residents Society, known as STARS. The location makes you feel as if though you are out of the urban city and in a more country setting; a beautiful escape within the city. The garden contains 9 long beds and 2 round flower beds that lie over what used to be an area for the locals to park and work on their cars. There was resistance at first but the civic association was able to make it happen. It undoubtedly has become a much more aesthetically pleasing use of the space which includes a large five panel mural towards the back corner of the garden.

There is also untapped potential at the Stars Garden that can be used to greatly expand its use. A few feet away from the garden lies an unmaintained park and not too far from there lies a pool. At first glance you wouldn’t even consider it a park with the shrubbery being out of control. Fixing up the park by maintaining the shrubbery and adding plants and small trees could expand this garden into a beautiful community hangout.

The Washington Elementary School is located in the Chambersburg section of Trenton. The garden is located behind the school, next to the asphalt play area. The students are the ones who do most of the planting work and the teachers and volunteers give advice and teach them how to work with the plants. Isles helped to build the garden 5 years ago building raised beds after covering the asphalt area with a deep layer of wood chips.

Westminster Presbyterian Church on 1140 Greenwood Ave in Trenton, NJ was started five years ago by members of the congregation led by David and Linda. David is certified Landscape Architect and is very enthusiastic about gardening. The garden has a gravel pathway which consists of a weed barriers with mulch on top. Without the use of herbicides, this garden relies on corn gluten to decrease the effects of weeds. With raised bed kits and two composting units, the garden is able to flourish. Spring planting in early April yields red & green cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, and a wide variety of different types of onions. In early May, they plant warm season crops, including various types of tomatoes. The garden relies greatly on seeds and seedlings provided through the Isles Garden Support Network. The garden serves the members of the church and their friends and family.
On the corner of a busy intersection is Trenton’s Grant Elementary School, which is a special school with some extraordinary teachers that make the magic possible. Grant Elementary School Garden is one of the fifty community gardens that Isles supports. The Grant Garden is made possible through assistance from Isles, who works with teachers to relate gardening to the school curriculum. This initiative invites public elementary schools throughout the city to grow green with Isles’ donated materials and assistance.

Educators find fun ways to incorporate organic growing methods into their classroom. Each fall, Grant school students pop the corn they harvest from the garden. Popping corn is so novel to most of these students who have only seen popcorn in a bag labeled “Extra Butter.” Students look forward to working with Isles in the garden. For many of these kids the garden is an integral part of their school day. It’s the garden they pull up to in the morning when they are dropped off in the morning, and the garden they play next to on the playground. Though the seasons and the years bring change for many Trenton youth, the garden is always there, always growing.

The Union Township’s Fire Department Station 3 is located at 1221 Morris Ave Union, NJ 07083. The community garden is located to the left of the building and consists of fifteen 2x12 beds.

The garden is partnered with Come Grow With Us which helped set up and helps to maintain the garden. The garden is 100% funded by the fire department and is mostly maintained by them as well. Some of the cultivation consists of collards, beans, peanuts, yellow pear tomatoes, marigolds, bell peppers, basil, 10 varieties of tomatoes, and much more. Not much maintenance is needed because the raised beds reduce the amount of weeds. They rely on rain and a hose to water the garden.

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