Gardening the Garden State
Exploring the Diversity of New Jersey’s Community Gardens

Laura Lawson, Ph.D.
Luke Drake
With Arianna de Vries, Chantae Moore, Maria Torres, and Frances Turner

Department of Landscape Architecture
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Across New Jersey, like much of the U.S., interest in community gardening and urban agriculture is increasing. Through such sites, people are building community while producing food and undertaking environmental stewardship. Little is known, however, about the comprehensive status of such activities in the state. This publication marks the first step in a state-wide assessment of community gardening and urban agricultural efforts in New Jersey. This project, called “Culture and Context of Community Gardening and Urban Agriculture in New Jersey,” is based at the Department of Landscape Architecture, School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, and is led by Laura J. Lawson, Ph.D. The project has three goals: document the extent and practices of community gardens and urban agriculture in New Jersey; identify the reasons people become engaged in these efforts; and develop a public forum to share ideas and information on community gardens and urban agriculture in New Jersey. We are using a range of mixed methods, from interviews and visual methods to geographic information systems.

For the initial phase of this study, we have identified 13 community gardens from the northern, central, and southern areas of the state. Through site plans and land use mapping, we develop exploratory case studies through which to proceed with subsequent data collection. These case studies highlight the diverse nature of New Jersey’s community gardens. From the design aspects of the gardening plots to the contexts of garden sites, it is evident that there is a wide range of social, spatial, and environmental characteristics of community gardening across the state.

The next step in this project will be conducting in-depth interviews with key actors in order to explain this diversity and identify those aspects that might be common throughout such efforts. Subsequently, a larger sample of community gardens and urban agriculture sites will be developed so that we may complete this systematic investigation and develop a forum to exchange knowledge between various stakeholders.
Across New Jersey, community gardens come in many shapes and sizes. Individual, family, and group gardening plots... raised beds, in-ground...

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Diversity of geographical contexts, as evident in the following land use maps surrounding the community gardens.

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