A GARDEN FOR EVERYONE: TALES OF MARIN'S COMMUNITY GARDENS



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION, MARIN COUNTY 1682 NOVATO BLVD., SUITE 150B, NOVATO, CA 94947

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PREPARED BY:

- L. T. Klein, Community Garden Program Coordinator,
- J. Van Soelen Kim, North Bay Food Systems Advisor,
- D. J. Lewis, Director, and Watershed Management Advisor;

University of California Cooperative Extension. Novato, California.

Lay-out and design by Bonnie Nielsen.

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Stewart; Robert Tong; Patti Vance

MARIN'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

ommunity gardens and urban farms are growing in popularity across the nation, and for good reason. The positive social, economic and health benefits are being increasingly well-documented.1 Growing some of one's own food, whether at schools. centers of worship, senior homes, or in neighborhoods, helps alleviate foodinsecurity, build community, improve nutritional, mental and physical health, while increasing ecological awareness.

Marin County's community gardens have grown in both number and support. In 2010, there were 86 community gardens.² Now there are nearly 125! Overall, waitlists for plots have been reduced, and management capacity has increased. For example, many school gardens have broadened their summertime management capacity by sharing the bounty and upkeep with community families. And most Marin municipalities

now include community gardens as an integral part of their Climate Action Plans by encouraging the use of surplus town properties and prioritizing growing food over ornamental plants.

However, despite the growth in Marin's urbansuburban community food production and the growing awareness of the benefits that gardens bring to communities, there is still unanswered need Marin's neighborhood community gardens often have 2-4 year waitlists, several municipalities are without gardens at all, and it can still take 5-7 years to get all the permissions required to break ground on a garden. Continued streamlining of the community garden zoning and approval process would go a long way towards easing the creation of gardens. And then there is the cost of designing and building a garden. If a community garden committee is strong and numerous, costs can sometimes be mitigated by having the garden built by the community members

themselves. Clearly, this requires a good deal of donated expertise, resources, and volunteer time. For example, in 2011, with a donation of land, and access to water from the local golf course, San Geronimo Valley Community Garden was established in one year. But more often, once approvals are in place, fundraising further delays ground-breaking.

As the impacts of drought and climate change become palpable in Marin and elsewhere, food systems themselves can be severely challenged. Growing food locally becomes ever more important for environmental and equity reasons. Besides the health aspects of fresh, local food and the communitybuilding that growing food together engenders, community garden produce supplements family food budgets. Urban Agriculture and community and school gardens have become an important adaptation for many lower-income communities. This is in addition to the ecological literacy advantage that

goes hand-in-hand with these community gardening efforts. Thus, supporting community and school gardens is both ecologically and socially advantageous.

We hope you like reading these inspiring tales of Marin's Community Gardens. You can view Marin's community gardens through our interactive map available at http://ucanr.edu/community_gardens_map.

Enjoy these stories, then join us in this positive work for our beautiful county!

¹ http://ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/Research

² Marin County Community Garden Needs Assessment, 2010

THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GARDENS ARE MANY AND BROAD¹

Community building
Increases access to healthy food
Home values increased
Increases greenspace recreation
Provides outdoor and nature education
Helps social integration for immigrants, seniors
Saves food dollars
Helps alleviates food insecurity
Increases fruit and vegetable consumption
Increases physical activity
Improves mental health
Provides space for community events and family gatherings
Supplies surplus food for food banks or shelters

Absorbs carbon with more green vegetation

Uses less water than a lawn per square foot²

Supports pollinator insect populations

Builds community resiliency³

Fresh local food can be tastier

¹ http://ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/files/185846.pdf

² https://denverwatertap.org/2015/09/15/save-water-grow-vegetables-instead-of-grass

³ https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21222153

GARDEN STORIES FROM AROUND MARIN

ohny Ek, a Branson High School student, called the UCCE Marin Master Gardener Help Desk asking for advice setting up a garden in the parking lot of a non-profit where he tutored youth, 'Next Generation Scholars' (NGS) in San Rafael. He explained that although he had healthy fresh food at his school cafeteria, most of his neighborhood friends did not. He wanted to share his enthusiasm for growing fresh vegetables and eating them! The UCCE Marin Community Garden Program responded to his inspiring call immediately, suggesting a variety of effective gardening techniques, providing him with tomato starts, and then finding him a Master Gardener Mentor for further advice. Soon, his garden was thriving. Johny had a limited amount of time before heading off to college, but he found a younger student, Cristian Maldonado, to continue in his footsteps, providing garden guidance to other NGS students. A couple months later, a second call came asking advice regarding chicken coops. And, "Voila," three laying chickens were being tended by the group! They've expanded the Jardin de Justicia again, and it continues to benefit a community of very engaged young people. Cristian has now gone to college also, but even without them, Johny and Cristian's drive and passion continues to teach and give!



Johny Ek at Jardin de Justica, Next Generation Scholars, San Rafael

The Cedars of Marin serves people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their large San Rafael garden was created with education and job-training in mind. It is a beautiful, well-run vegetable and fruit garden lovingly cared for by their day-students.



Connie Pelissero, a long-time U.C. Marin Master Gardener, started the garden and Textile Center in 1981. Her involvement included initiating produce sales at the Ross Valley Farmers Market as well as using the bounty in the Center's kitchen, creating a full service program for this wonderful community!



Top & bottom photos: Cedars Textile Art Center Garden, San Rafael

ilo Rodriquez is the Head of Maintenance at West Marin Elementary School in Point Reyes Station, where a school garden was started some years ago. He soon realized that he likely knew more than the volunteers about growing food based on past farming experience. Gilo took over the garden, growing as much food as possible while teaching the students all he knew about vegetable gardening. If the garden needs mulch he just adds a bit to the maintenance order for the school. The garden is spotless, and the children follow after him like a pied piper! The school kitchen, with his wife Aracely as Head Cook, uses all the grown produce for the children's lunches and snacks. A win all around!



Gilo Rodriquez West Marin Elementary School Garden, Pt Reyes Station

hat a wonderful idea Marin City Community Services District's Terrie Green and June Farmer had to create a program tailor-made for their community. For the last few summers, Marin City children have been invited to plant, tend and harvest from container buckets for themselves and their families. June helps them prepare good healthy snacks from their containers, teaching them the basics of nutrition. At the end of the summer the children can carry their container home to put outside their door, on their back deck, or wherever it can continue to thrive, securing each youths' place in the family as the "Head Grower!" This is their introduction to what will soon be a year-round Intergenerational Garden farm with greenhouse!



Top & bottom photos: Marin City Community Services District's Children's Summer Container Garden



chool gardens are growing well in northern Marin with the support of Lori Davis of Sanzuma.org, Rita Kesler, San Rafael City Schools' (SRCS) Food Service Director, and Miguel Villarreal, Food and Nutrition Services Director of Novato Unified School District (NUSD). Miguel has been dedicated to healthy food for decades, leading NUSD in reducing salt and sugar in their cafeterias. He heartily supports NUSD's school gardens, with parent garden volunteers helping to increase the "tasty" factor in their many schools. Sanzuma's Lori Davis has been the Garden Educator at Davidson Middle School for several years and does nutrition and garden education at several other SRCS schools. She led the charge to convert SRCS's San Pedro school garden to a mini-farm that provides veggies to school salad bars on a weekly basis, and is developing two other school gardens to do same. Jointly, they're exploring a local farmer coalition to provide food to SRCS as well.



Lynwood School Garden, Novato



San Pedro School Garden Farm, San Rafael



Davidson Middle School Garden, San Rafael

oe Stewart is a high school biology teacher turned farmer in order to teach his students environmental stewardship and garden education. Through his Sustainable Agriculture classes at Redwood High School, he and his students acquired school land, planned, and broke ground on a school farm that was completed over the course of a couple of semesters in 2013. Part of their program takes their learning to other communities in Marin, helping to set up composting systems and generally using their knowledge in other school gardens. They sell their produce at the school farmstand, and recently built a chicken coop!



Redwood High School Sustainable Farm, Larkspur

atti Vance and Michael Durphy were instrumental in creating the Sleepy Hollow Presbyterian Church (SHPC) Garden and Farmstand in 2014. As a result of their successful garden experience, the church then became a sponsor of the Short Elementary School Garden Project in San Rafael. Both U.C. Marin's Community Garden Program and Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative provided garden advice and support in response to Patti's



Sleepy Hollow Presbyterian Church Garden

request. With part of the SHPC mission "to help the hungry and homeless" in mind, inspiration took over, and, with the full support of the entire church community and Reverend Beverly Brewster, the garden produced more than 1000 pounds of vegetables in the first year. All of it was donated



Sleepy Hollow Presbyterian Church Farm Stand

to the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank and other local hunger programs. The Farmstand now helps to keep the garden costs covered while SHPC continues to provide fresh local produce to Marin's hungry. In addition, SHPC is a model of garden sustainability through their use of a large rain tank that feeds some of the garden's water needs during the summer.

onscious Kitchen (CK) is a comprehensive, green, zero waste, fully organic non-GMO school nutrition and garden educational program involving garden educators, curriculum, parents, students, maintenance and kitchen staff. Conscious Kitchen started at Marin City's Bayside MLK Jr Academy in 2013, with the other



Sausalito/Marin City School District school, Willow Creek Academy, coming on board in 2015. Recently, Good Earth grocers' school lunch program adopted CK's criteria in their fifteen schools, and they are currently working to expand in the Bay Area and the State... The program includes scratch-cooked breakfasts, lunches and snacks prepared by a chef in a full service kitchen with food from local farmers and the gardens. Students become "Conscious Kitchen Ambassadors" in their community, encouraging a healthier lifestyle for all!



Top & bottom photos: Bayside Martin Luther King Junior Academy school garden, Marin City

The Dirt Club of Marin Oaks High School participates in keeping their school garden thriving. As the volunteer facilitator for over 9 years, Anita Jones Roehrick, provides the Club a much-loved weekly breakfast in the garden. The garden and the breakfasts teach these students about nutrition, gardening and community. The smiles follow!



Marin Oaks High School Garden Dirt Club, Novato

he Mill Valley Children's Garden at Edna Maguire Elementary School is a large model school garden with robust parent volunteer involvement and strong leadership in the form of Garden Educator Kristy McGuire, or "Kristy Kale," her nickname. The garden boasts a fruit tree orchard, hens, and a plot for growing produce for the SF-Marin Food Bank. What's more, she works with other southern Marin garden educators by holding monthly



meetings to share best practices. Many of them have been growing school gardens for years, so the expertise is broad and deep, and a fun group to boot!



The Mill Valley Children's Garden at Edna Maguire Elementary School, Mill Valley

nlike the 5+ years that some neighborhood community gardens can take to get going, the wonderful exception was San Geronimo Valley Community Garden. Having secured land and water from the San Geronimo Vallev Golf Course, a group of dedicated community members built a garden within a year, comprised of 27 plots, several fruit



trees, composting, and continued enthusiasm. Taking longer to establish, but equally lively, San Rafael's 90-plot Canal Community Garden continues to thrive providing much appreciated produce for its gardeners.



Top & bottom photos: Canal Neighborhood Community Garden, San Rafael

After two and a half decades, the Fairfax Community Garden on Fairfax Library land still has a waiting list, but was recently spruced up, making it a bit more secure from "gopher gardeners"! Marshall's community garden has no waitlist, but needs some loving care from willing locals -- Are you one? Marin's other longestablished community gardens in Marin City, Point Reyes Station, San Anselmo, Terra Linda and Larkspur continue to flourish, and a second



Robson-Harrington Neighborhood Community Garden, San Anselmo

community garden in Mill Valley is nearly complete!

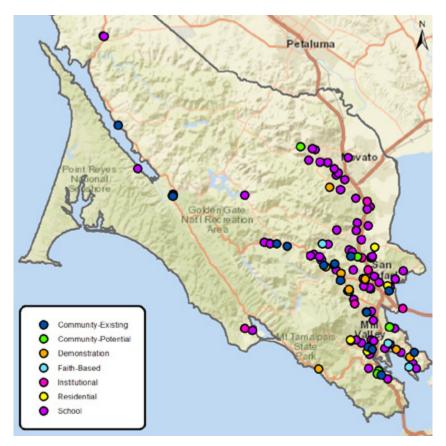


Larkspur Neighborhood Community Garden

COORDINATING WITH OUR PARTNERS



Canal Alliance College of Marin, Indian Valley Campus Community Development Agency of Marin Conscious Kitchen.org Conservation Corps North Bay ExtraFood.org Food Day.org Indian Valley Organic Farm and Garden Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative Larkspur-Corte Madera School District Marin City Community Services District Marin Community & School Garden Network Marin Community Foundation Marin Municipal Planners Marin Food Policy Council Marin Health and Human Services Marin Link Marin Municipal Water District Marin Office of Education Marin Open Garden Project Mill Valley Parks and Recreation Department Next Generation Scholars Novato Unified School District Food Service Novato Parks and Recreation Department San Rafael City Schools San Francisco/Marin Food Bank Sanzuma.org Southern Marin Garden Educators' Group U.C. Marin Master Gardeners Zero Waste Marin



The many types of community gardens are shown on an updatable, interactive map on Marin U.C. Cooperative Extension's website: http://ucanr.edu/community_gardens_map.

If YOU have an update, please send to: banielsen@ucanr.edu.



University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources

University of California Cooperative Extension, Marin County 1682 Novato Blvd, Suite 150B, Novato, CA 94947 Tel: (415) 473-4204, Fax: (415) 473-4209 cemarin.ucanr.edu | ucanr.edu/GrownInMarin www.facebook.com/UCCEMarin/