

Cultivating Community: Integrating Gardens into Lake Country's Parks

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Scope of the Problem:

Community gardens are a common form of urban agriculture that not only provide an affordable option for local residents to access healthy produce,¹⁻³ but can also provide several environmental, social, and economic benefits to increase the sustainability and resilience of local communities. Despite noted benefits, community gardens are lacking in the District of Lake Country. Currently, there is only one, located in the Woodsdale neighbourhood. Consequently, access to the garden is only convenient for residents living nearby. More community gardens could help residents outside of Woodsdale enjoy this activity and can also support Lake Country's policy goals by addressing some of the challenges it is facing going forward.⁴ Reasons for why this is important to address include:

- 1.) Demand for community gardens will likely increase as Lake Country's population increases.⁵ However, the community garden in Woodsdale only has 40 plots available to rent annually.⁶
- 2.) Community gardens are considered critical spaces for people living in tenement buildings,⁷ which are expected to increase in number to accommodate an increasing population.⁴
- 3.) Installing more community gardens throughout Lake Country could help its ageing population easily access an age-friendly option for physical and social recreation.^{4,8,9}
- 4.) Food insecurity is expected to increase going forward due to climate change.^{10,11} Increased urbanization often results in increased reliance on imported food,^{2,12} increasing their susceptibility to food insecurity and higher food prices.³
- 5.) More community gardens could help protect and enhance the agricultural sector in Lake Country,⁴ while also connecting its urban residents to local food systems.^{2,12}

Research Results:

Where can they be placed?

- 1.) City parks, schoolyards, and private land.¹³
- 2.) Close to residences: Gardeners and experts have stressed that having a community garden close to residents is necessary to enable participation and guarantee the long-term success of the garden.^{14,15}
 - a.) Ex: A case study in Cleveland OH, found that over half of surveyed community gardeners walked to their community garden, and two thirds of

respondents could get to their garden within 10 minutes or less (**Table 1**).¹⁶

Table 1: The method and time of travel for 124 surveyed community gardeners in Cleveland Ohio.¹⁶

Method of Travel to Garden	Respondents (%)
Walk	53
Car	41
Bike	4
Public Transportation	2
Travel Time to Garden (minutes)	Respondents (%)
Less Than 5	41
5 to 9	25
10 to 14	16
15-19	8
20 and more	10

Cost of starting a community garden:

Estimates suggest that the average cost of starting a community garden ranges from \$5,000 to \$10,000 (CAD).^{17,18} However, the exact cost can vary depending on what materials and services are needed, along with where materials are sourced from.¹⁸

How Large?

The exact size of the community garden will be dependent on the amount of space available, but 100-300 square feet of space is considered sufficient for most households.¹⁹ It is recommended that plots should be no more than 4 ft wide and between 8-12 ft in length.¹⁹

Social Benefits:

Community gardens are largely known for their social benefits and have been shown in studies to be the most common types of benefits reported by community gardeners (**Figure 1**).²⁰ Additional social benefits include:

- 1.) Improved diet, health, and higher quality of life.^{2,21-24}
- 2.) Community building across age, education, and stereotype differences.²⁵
- 3.) Decreased social isolation.^{23,25}
- 4.) Opportunities to exchange gardening skills and new recipes.^{25,26}

5.) Allows physical exercise at one's own pace.²⁵

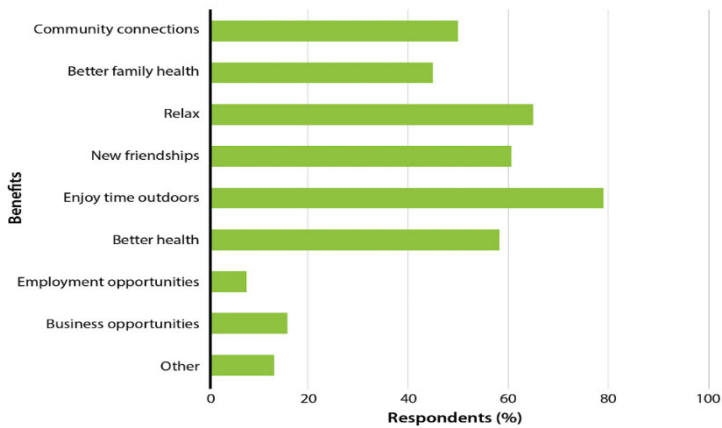


Figure 1: This graph shows the types of benefits that were most commonly reported from surveying 120 community gardeners within the Greater San Diego Area, along with the percentage of respondents that mentioned each type of benefit.²⁰

Economic Benefits:

- 1.) Affordable: Membership under the Central Okanagan Community Gardens = \$40.00 annually + a one time \$5.00 storage key fee.¹
- 2.) Decreased food insecurity.²⁷
- 3.) Decreased grocery costs.³

Environmental Benefits:

- 1.) Reduced CO₂ emissions associated with transportation and more carbon-intensive activities.²⁸
- 2.) Increased water regulation.^{29,30}
- 3.) Increased biodiversity.^{31,32}

Challenges:

- 1.) Access to sunlight, water and electricity.¹⁴
- 2.) Access to storage sheds, toilets, fertilizer, mulch, and compost.¹⁴
- 3.) Maintaining commitment and long-term location security.^{2,3,7,14,25}
- 4.) Maintaining consistent funding and support for the gardens.¹⁴
- 5.) Disease and pest vulnerability: Community gardens are often based on organic practices.^{1,3}
- 6.) Lack of knowledge, training, skills, and education amongst participants.¹⁴

Policy Options:

- 1.) Support of local governments is one of the most often mentioned enabling factors for establishing community gardens.¹⁴
- 2.) Funding, maintenance, and support does not have to fall on the city alone. For example, the community garden in the City of Armstrong receives support from the city, Home Hardware, Associated Ready Mix (concrete), BC

Hydro, The Union of BC Municipalities, and North Okanagan Fencing. Lake Country's community garden in Woodsdale receives support from Rotary and Central Okanagan Community Gardens.⁶

- 3.) Most cities have underused or unused park space that could be converted into community gardens.³³
- 4.) Placing community gardens in parks can give them: long-term protection, access to water, electricity, and washrooms.^{33,34}
- 5.) Placing community gardens in parks could allow citizens to engage in park planning and governance.³⁴
- 6.) Placing community gardens in city parks could also help meet Lake Country's Parks and Recreation Goals outlined in its Official Community Plan.⁴
- 7.) Apex Playground and Park, Swalwell Park, and Okanagan Centre Park could be suitable locations for future community gardens.
 - a.) All three locations are far enough away from the Winfield community garden in Woodsdale and are within walking and short driving distances of several residences. They also all have flat areas with adequate sunlight exposure.
 - b.) Both Swalwell and Okanagan Centre Park have parking lots and access to washrooms.^{35,36}
 - c.) While Apex Park does not have these amenities,³⁷ there is room for parking nearby. Limited parking could also encourage people to walk, and nearby Shoreline Park has washrooms available if needed.³⁸

Final Recommendations:

- 1.) Consult Lake Country schools, community clubs, and local businesses to identify collaboration opportunities for funding, supplies, and support.
- 2.) Consult Central Okanagan Community Gardens to identify what resources they need to support and manage additional gardens in Lake Country.
- 3.) Identify opportunities to integrate community gardens into public programs and community engagement.
- 4.) Update Lake Country's OCP policy to include proposing community gardens as a method to help meet the city's outlined parks and recreation goals.⁴
- 5.) Promote education around training, gardening skills, and the benefits of community gardens to individuals and the community.
- 6.) Prioritize the social benefits of community gardens, with a specific focus toward seniors and residents living in multi-unit residences.
- 7.) Survey residents in the Lakes, Town Centre, and Okanagan Centre neighbourhoods to determine how interested residents are in participating in a nearby community garden.
- 8.) Survey the Apex, Swalwell, and Okanagan Centre Parks to determine whether they are suitable locations and have adequate access to utilities needed for community gardens to function.

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