

Sustainable Food System Education & Training: A Growing Mission of America's Public Gardens

Highlights from "Food-Related Programming in Public Gardens," A Report by the American Public Gardens Association Benveniste Consulting (June 2016)

Gardens Offer Food-Related Programming

Food programs are increasingly part of public garden identity. **Eighty-three out of 104 public gardens (80%) that responded to a recent survey by the American Public Gardens Association offer food-related programming.** Survey and interview data show a strong growth trajectory for food programs. Visitors gravitate to food-related exhibits, and gardens recognize the social, educational and community-building rewards of these programs and activities.

Food Programs Serve Multiple Goals

Gardens recognize that their food programs serve multiple institutional goals, including:

- Reconnecting people to plants and the land
- Educating about general food gardening and sustainable production practices
- Improving nutrition and increasing food access
- Teaching transferable skills that support at-risk youth
- Strengthening employability
- Empowering underserved communities



Photo courtesy of Naples Botanical Garden

Teaching people how to grow and prepare fresh fruits and vegetables, and increasing access to healthy foods and job skills training are important outcomes of food programs at public gardens.

Food-Related Activities

Activities offered by surveyed gardens through food-related programs	# of gardens offering activity	%*
Garden displays	69	83%
Classes	59	71%
Lectures	47	57%
Exhibits	41	49%
Culinary programs	39	47%
Crop collections / seed banks	32	39%
Other (specified below)	27	33%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have community gardens (7) • Charitable food distribution (4) • Sell harvested food at markets (4) • Offer community outreach and education activities (7) • Produce food for processing, sale, and onsite consumption (3) • Unspecified (2) <p>(#) indicates the number of gardens that self-identified the activity</p>		
Training programs	26	31%
Research	18	22%

*Percent of the 83 gardens with food-related programming offering activity



Fruit & Vegetable Organic Demonstration Gardens
Photo courtesy of Chicago Botanic Garden

Examples of Food-Related Programs

Veterans-to-farmers programs

Integrates horticultural therapy into an urban agriculture training program for veterans with combat-related trauma

Culinary arts training for high school youth

Teaches students to identify, source and prepare locally grown produce

Training disadvantaged youth & adults

Teaches entrepreneurial and soft job skills through the production, processing and marketing of food crops

Water conservation & pollinator education

Highlights ecosystem service relationships and climate appropriate production through food garden displays

Urban master farmer certification

Developing a master gardener program that focuses on urban agriculture

Transforming vacant lots to community gardens

Working with city and local government agencies to repurpose vacant lots and enrich the foodshed

Domestic and international crop research

Working with university partners to develop high-yield cultivars of vegetable, grain and fruit crops for changing climate conditions

Creation of satellite food hubs

Collaborating with local government, foundations and health organizations to support improved community health through food production and healthy eating



Photo courtesy of Queens Botanical Garden

Food-related programs positively impact the diversity of garden audiences, fundraising goals, sustainability operations, and media coverage, and they have a strong effect on expanding relationships with outside organizations.

Important Food-Program Collaborators

Garden food programs are highly collaborative and are often offered through partnerships with outside organizations. This is especially true for programs at off-site locations like schools, community gardens, and youth centers.

Gardens identified the following collaborators as important:

- Local farmers' markets
- Local chefs and restaurants/food service
- PK-12 school systems
- Community colleges & universities
- Local governmental agencies
- Health organizations and hospitals
- Community gardening associations
- Local youth organizations
- Veteran-serving agencies
- Mental health clinics
- Low/mixed-income housing developers
- National Center for Appropriate Technology
- USDA, USAID
- International crop research/relief NGO's

Funding Opportunities

- Develop and share food program, agriculture, and research best practices
- Develop affordable and effective evaluation strategies that enable gardens to track food program impacts over time
- Foster collaboration opportunities
- Support career training in local food production
- Support gardens' efforts to build workforce diversity