

Homegrown vegetables: opportunities for public gardens In an age of agricultural disconnect

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Abstract: Food gardening, a skill essential to survival for much of our history, has been making a comeback in recent years. Concerns about the environment, health and well-being, and the economy have all contributed to its popularity. Many businesses and organizations have been joining in to support the movement, including public horticulture institutions. This research aimed to ascertain the interest and involvement of the public horticulture community in this topic, to identify the educational needs of food gardeners, and to develop recommendations for public gardens considering a role for food gardening in their mission. Targeted electronic surveys, selected case studies, and interviews with professionals yielded pertinent data for this research. Surveys indicated that most gardens were already offering or interested in offering food gardening resources to their audience. Food gardeners are equally interested in taking advantage of those resources. However, while public gardens offered the classic display garden and lecture-style classes, food gardeners were additionally interested in online resources, demonstrations, and networking opportunities with other gardeners. The case studies represented a wide array of successful food gardening efforts that responded to their particular community's needs. Benefits of such efforts included increased community interest, increased diversity of audience, and increased publicity. Common challenges included harvesting, distribution of crops, increased garden maintenance requirements, and pest control. Among the recommendations developed for other institutions considering food gardening were building awareness for the value of strategic planning and mission relatedness, educational goals and physical site goals.

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