

gardens growing healthy communities

a research partnership of:
Colorado School of Public Health & Denver Urban Gardens

an ecological place

to grow food, be active and enjoy nature in an urban setting



a social place

to work together to improve the quality of individual and community lives



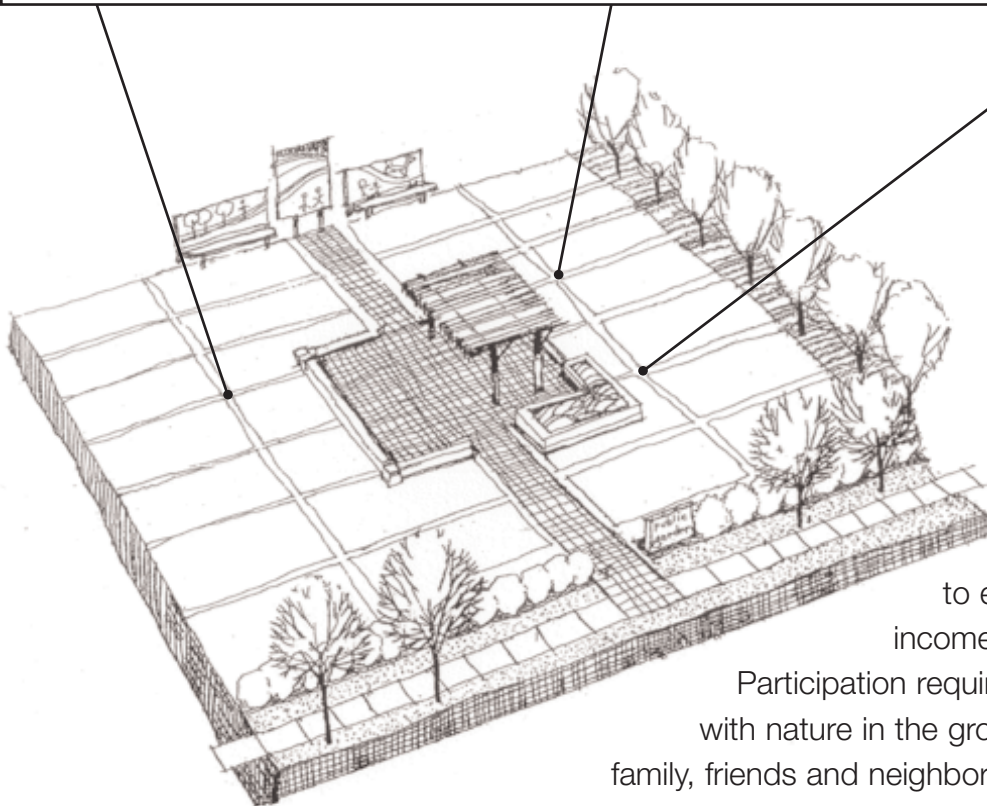
a cultural place

to develop and express place-based aesthetic, spiritual and environmental experiences and values



an individual place

where participants are empowered to cultivate relationships: engaging in meaningful activities together, learning from each other, and giving back to others



a healthy place

An example of an everyday neighborhood landscape, community gardens are affordable and accessible to everyone, regardless of age, income, education or background.

Participation requires active engagement both with nature in the growing of fresh food and with family, friends and neighbors through social interaction.

Thus, community gardens embody natural, highly valued places that strengthen neighborhoods and promote healing, health and wellness.

Background: The Healthy People 2010 Initiative, a national framework for public health prevention, suggests that individual health is almost inseparable from the health of the larger community. Understanding and improving this larger community – the places people live, work and recreate – will go a long way to promoting health and strengthening neighborhoods. Since 2004 Denver Urban Gardens and the Colorado School of Public Health have worked together, through the “Gardens for Growing Healthy Communities” community-based research initiative, to explore how gardens, as neighborhood places, support healthy living. (Funded by the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Health Protection Research Initiative* and extended by additional funding from the *Colorado Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute* and the *J.R. Albert Foundation*.)

Key Findings**:

- 100% of community gardeners stated that their main reasons for gardening were to be ***outside in nature*** and to ***get their hands dirty***. Almost 80% of them gardened as children.
- More than 50% of community gardeners ***meet national guidelines for fruit and vegetable intake***, compared to 25% of non-gardeners.
- As well as eating better and being more active, gardeners are ***more involved in social activities***, view their neighborhoods as ***more beautiful***, and have ***stronger ties to their neighborhoods***.
- 95% of community gardeners ***give away some of the produce they grow*** to friends, family and people in need; 60% specifically donate to food assistance programs.
- In addition to ***more positive ratings of physical and mental health***, gardeners see the world differently... emotionally, spiritually and culturally, as well as socially and environmentally.
- ***Community gardens promote stronger neighborhood leadership, outreach, and volunteerism.***
- ***88% of people who do not garden want to see gardens in their neighborhood.***

Rx for Healthy Place-Making: This research highlights the importance of intentionally supporting neighborhood environments and social processes that give way to a strong sense of community, also referred to as “healthy place-making”, and that healthy places are especially important when they embody a diverse range of ecological, social and cultural attributes. Community gardens demonstrate one very viable strategy to achieve healthy place-making and foster improved health when the:

Ecological attributes of gardens reflect a place:

- to be outside in nature and to get hands dirty
- to grow plants – flowers, herbs and food crops
- that can be used for multiple purposes
- that is central, visible and accessible
- that serves as a local destination
- that promotes interactions with nature, people and environmental values

Social attributes of gardens reflect a place:

- to socialize and get to know your neighbors
- to build trust and develop pride
- to receive and offer encouragement
- to share stories, successes and food
- to foster respect for others and bridge generations
- to build a stronger sense of community

Cultural attributes of gardens reflect a place:

- to develop emotional and spiritual connections
- to express heritage and traditions
- to develop a worldview
- to develop unique community identity
- for participants and neighborhood residents to experience beauty

Conclusion: When a neighborhood place embodies these ecological, social and cultural attributes, it becomes a place that naturally promotes wellness. ***Thus, a community garden is more than a good idea among a select group of people; it is a community model for healthy living.***

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For more information about the research, including companion manuscripts, please visit www.dug.org/GGHC

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