



Food. Beauty. Community.



COMMUNITY GARDENING

The magazine of the
American Community Gardening Association

EDITING AND DESIGN

Don Boekelheide

Editorial staff:

Vicki Garrett and Anna Boekelheide

Subscriptions to Community Gardening magazine and ACGA's newsletter are a benefit of ACGA membership. Join us!

ACGA accepts **display ads** from supporting organizations. Please contact Alyssa McKim:

alyssa.mckim@
communitygarden.org

We welcome **submissions** to our magazine and newsletter on topics of interest to the community gardening movement. Send proposals to:

info@
communitygarden.org

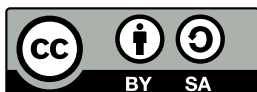
PUBLISHER

ACGA

American Community
Gardening Association
1441 Woodmont Ln NW
Suite 1400

Atlanta, GA 30318, USA
www.communitygarden.org
info@communitygarden.org

COPYRIGHT 2023 ACGA
under Creative Commons 4.0



All rights reserved. We allow non-profit, educational, and research use to benefit community gardening. Please credit ACGA and content creators.

2023

Vol 26 #1

ISSN 2836-7170

[replaces 2021 edition, delayed due to COVID]

Formerly:

The Journal of Community Gardening
1982-1990
ISSN 0738-632X

and
The Community Greening Review
1991-2019
ISSN 1559-1492

ACGA



AMERICAN
COMMUNITY
GARDENING
ASSOCIATION

ABOUT US

Founded in 1979, the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA) is American's oldest and most respected advocacy organization working on behalf of community gardening and related green initiatives in urban, suburban, and rural communities across the United States and Canada. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit membership organization.

OUR VISION, MISSION, AND CORE VALUES

ACGA's vision is a sustainable community in every garden.

Our mission is to increase and enhance community gardening and other green initiatives across the United States and Canada.

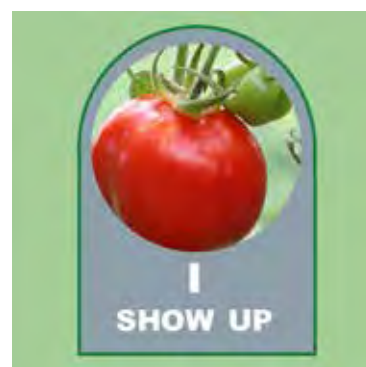
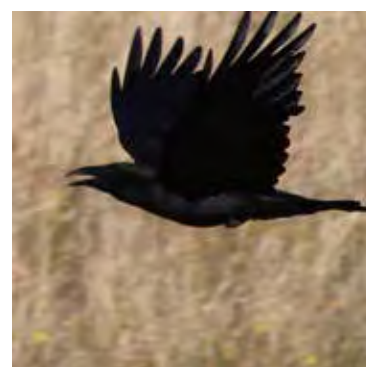
We are a proactively inclusive and proudly diverse organization. Based on its record of success dating back more than a century in North America, we know that community gardening increases quality of life in many ways, among them by being a catalyst for beneficial neighborhood and community development; stimulating positive social interactions across generations and cultural differences; encouraging self-reliance; beautifying neighborhoods; producing nutritious food; reducing family food budgets; conserving resources; safeguarding the environment, biodiversity, soil and water; and creating healthful low cost opportunities for outdoor recreation, exercise, therapy, and education.

OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cathy Walker, President, College Park, Georgia
Cordalie Benoit, Vice President, New Haven, Connecticut
Fred Conrad, Treasurer, Decatur, Georgia

Kay Bell, Waco, Texas; Don Boekelheide, Charlotte, North Carolina; Michael Brown, Greenville, South Carolina; Terri Carter, Marietta, Georgia; Lara Fahnestock, Denver, Colorado; Vicki Garrett, Columbus, Ohio; Steven Holley, Anchorage, Alaska; Sara Loftus, Huntington, West Virginia; Marilu Lopez-Fretts, Ithaca, New York; JP Maestre, Austin, Texas; Meghan Martin, Middlesex, New Jersey; Carlos Martinez, New York, New York; Bill Maynard, Sacramento, California; Alyssa McKim, Greensboro, North Carolina; Charlie Monroe, Marietta, Georgia; Kim Perry, Houston, Texas; Deidre Schuetz, Portland, Oregon.

President's message	4
ACGA Executive Board	
From the Editor	5
Don Boekelheide	
Growing lettuce in a changing climate	6
Pam Dawling	
Pollinators for community gardens	11
Alyssa McKim	
Guide for bee-ginning beekeepers	15
Donald Loggins	
Coping with pests in urban food gardens	20
Rob Bennington, Alda Pires, Roger Baldwin	
Food growing tips for CGs	24
Don Boekelheide	
Book Review: Bringing Nature Home	29
By Douglas Tallamy	
Reviewed by Cordalie Benoit and Don Boekelheide	
ACGA Hampton 2021 conference and virtual conference reports	31
Last Word	35



Photos (from top:) Lettuce harvest at Twin Oaks; Attracting pollinators; Dealing with pests; Food growing tips; ACGA Hampton conference with keynote speaker Ira Wallace of Southern Exposure Seed Exchange.



CATHY WALKER, PRESIDENT

*You can't
garden by
simply surfing
the Internet.*

The healing power of simple gardening

ACGA's President, Cathy Walker, is currently recovering from a serious illness. No one has worked harder on behalf of community gardening than Cathy, and we all wish her a speedy return to full health and active involvement. For this issue, she has asked Cordalie Benoit and Fred Conrad to share a few words on her behalf:

This issue is about hands-on gardening, as in planting crunchy lettuce or growing a beautiful wildflower garden to encourage pollinators. Community gardening's benefits go beyond "simple gardening," it's true. Community gardens bring people together, improve the environment, teach grassroots leadership, bridge generations and cultures, encourage better nutrition and healthful exercise, even fight crime. That said, access to the simple joys of gardening has a place on this inspiring list as well.

Not everyone has a place to grow a patch of food or flowers, with friends or on their own. Maybe they don't have a yard, or live where it's too shady. Yet, the simple act of gardening is one of the most healing and satisfying of human activities. Gardeners get up close and personal with nature, working directly with Earth's life support system. To succeed with homegrown tomatoes or bright sunflowers, gardeners must work in partnership with the soil, the rain, the sun, and the seasons. You can't garden by simply surfing the Internet.

OK, there are challenges (in this issue, read about critters who think you planted those tomatoes for them!) Successfully overcoming challenges, with persistence, patience, and (when possible) good humor is, however, one of the most important life skills a person can develop, and there's no better professor to teach this lesson than a garden. Everyone deserves a little place in the sun for a garden. That, too, is what our movement is about.

As Cathy recovers, we point to her as an example. She is no "arm-chair expert." As a gardener and farmer, she knows what it's like to spend all day planting, weeding, or harvesting. That isn't easy, but nothing is more satisfying. We look forward to having her beside us again, both organizing and out in the collard patch.

Guest message writers Cordalie Benoit and Fred Conrad work with President Cathy Walker on ACGA's guiding Executive Committee. Benoit is ACGA's Vice President and Conrad serves as the organization's Treasurer.

The “gardening” part

The gardening part of community gardening covers a lot of ground. In this issue, we explore everything from how to grow crunchy lettuce to how to create a “national park” in every community garden. Turns out that the word “gardening” is just as multifaceted as our other signature word, “community.”

For a lot of us, “gardening” means growing crops. We learn about growing lettuce from a person who knows what she’s talking about, Pam Dawling, who grows lettuce and other veggies to feed Twin Oaks, a large intentional community in Virginia. ACGA also shares some fundamental food growing tips, complete with a reference sheet on pesticides (advice? Avoid them.) Nobody likes pests, though, and Rob Bennington offers some research-based strategies to keep the critters from making off with your hard-earned harvest.

Gardening also has other meanings in this scary age of global warming and mass extinctions. Community gardens can become sanctuaries for pollinators if we select the right plants and consider ecology in our garden designs, as Alyssa McKim points out. Dr. Doug Tallamy, in his inspiring book *Bringing Nature Home*, calls on all of us to create “homegrown national parks” in our yards (and ACGA adds, community gardens) to restore habitat for the natural communities that support life on Earth. This can happen even in New York City, as Brooklyn bee maven Donald Loggins shows us in his guide to urban beekeeping.

ACGA had a busy year in 2021, as gardens and communities began to emerge from the onslaught of COVID-19. This issue shares news about our first in-person conference after COVID restrictions were lifted, as well as a report on the virtual conference we also organized to reach gardeners and garden supporters around the country. Coming next month will be our final “COVID” edition of our magazine, focused on organizing and research, and reviewing our 2022 conference in New Orleans. Speaking of conferences, hope to see you in September 2023 for our national conference in Houston. In the meantime, happy spring and good gardening!



DON BOEKELHEIDE, EDITOR

We explore everything from how to grow crunchy lettuce to how to create a “national park” in every community garden.

Don Boekelheide, Editor of Community Gardening, lives and gardens (Reedy Creek Community Garden) in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Growing lettuce in a changing climate

PAM DAWLING

*All lettuce
is not alike.*

At Twin Oaks Community, we eat lettuce year-round. We have worked hard to find the varieties and planting dates that do best here in Central Virginia, as well as how to get the best results in each season. Based on that experience, I want to share a number of suggestions about how to grow lettuce. These should prove helpful on any scale, from commercial small farmers to plots in community and school gardens.

All lettuce is not alike. Some varieties have excellent cold resis-





tance, while others can stand the heat without bolting. Some lettuce grows very quickly, while other types take their time. It would take an encyclopedia to list all the available varieties of lettuce.

CHOOSE APPROPRIATE VARIETIES FOR EACH TIME OF YEAR

Community gardeners are wise to start with the basics: Read the seed packet for information, and check with reliable seed companies (such as Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, and others) for more about variety preferences. Just as important – ask other gardeners and small farmers in your area, and carefully observe how lettuces perform in your plot season-to-season.

Recent changes to our lettuce varieties list at Twin Oaks include switching over from “early spring” varieties to “spring” varieties at the end of February rather than late March. This means we only make three sowings of the early spring varieties! We now sow spring varieties from February 28 to April 22. We used to sow these until May 15. We’re still making five sowings of those, but the dates have moved earlier.

On April 23, we switch over to our heat-tolerant summer varieties, which we sow 20 times, until August 14. We then switch to nine sowings of Fall varieties, until September 7. From September 8 to the

Pam Dawling is one of the most highly skilled small-scale vegetable growers in North America. Her reliable spot-on recommendations come from 25 years of experience managing vegetable production at Twin Oaks Community in central Virginia, feeding 100 people from 3.5 acres. Her insights are invaluable to small farmers in the SE Piedmont, and ACGA is honored to now share them with community gardeners as well.



Photos courtesy Pam Dawling, showing the many varieties of lettuce at Twin Oaks during their continuous production cycle, and her fellow gardeners who turn good advice into positive results.

end of September we use cold-hardy varieties. These nine sowings include those for the greenhouse and hoophouse, which will feed us all winter.

In winter, in our hoophouse, we also grow baby lettuce mix. We harvest the baby mix at 3–4 inches (7.5–10 cm) tall, cutting 1 inch (2.5 cm) above the soil. We harvest leaves from the big lettuces the rest of the time. Baby lettuce mix is very pretty, but I actually prefer the juiciness and crunch of big lettuce.

SOW SEVERAL VARIETIES EACH TIME

To spread the harvest season and improve germination, sow several varieties each time. I like to use something fast, something slow; at least one red; a romaine, a bibb and a couple of leaf types for every planting, regardless of season.

Consider multileaf lettuces too, Salanova and Eazyleaf brands. They are bred for uniformly small leaves, with more texture, loft and flavor than baby mixes, and easier harvesting. Growing multileaf heads takes 55 days (30 days for baby lettuce). Transplanted 6–8 inches (15–20 cm) apart, multileaf produce 40% more than baby leaf mixes. The full-size plant can be harvested as a head, providing a bowlful of bite-sized leaves. Or cut just the outer leaves of the plant and leave the rest to regrow for future harvests.

USE SUCCESSION CROP PLANTING

To have a continuous lettuce supply, it is important to use succession planting. That's the practice of planting frequently, at intervals adapted to the time of year. The gap between one sowing and the next gets smaller as the year progresses, as does the gap between one transplanting and the next. The number of days to transplanting dips to 19 days in the summer, then lengthens as fall draws in.

We made a lettuce succession crops graph using our records for sowing date and harvest start date. From this we determined the sowing dates to provide us with a fresh patch to harvest every single week. We made a lettuce log with planned sowing, transplanting and harvest dates.

Recently I fine-tuned these guiding documents in light of recent experience. We had been led astray by an unrealistic spreadsheet date calculator that was based on 30 day months in a 360-day year! We also made mistakes when we were unable to transplant on time and repeated the delayed dates the next year. The takeaways: Never stop observing and recording your notes, and be ready to change and correct as you learn from experience. This principle applies to many aspects of community gardening and growing for market beyond lettuce!



*Transplanting
gives a head
start on weed
control.*

TIPS FOR GROWING TOP QUALITY LETTUCE

I recommend transplanting lettuce at four to six true leaves (three to six weeks old.) Learn good transplanting skills, so plants thrive, even if transplanted in mid-summer.

Water new transplants daily for the first three days, then every four to seven days after that. Lettuce needs deep weekly watering equivalent to 1 inch (2.5 cm) of rain, not frequent superficial irrigation. Roots will grow deeper, giving the plant greater drought-resistance.

To make best use of space and time, plant lettuces 10-12 inches (25-30 cm) apart, in a hexagonal (six-sided) pattern. If you plant too closely, you limit the size of the lettuce. If you plant with more space than needed, you waste time weeding!

Transplanting gives a head start on weed control. I generally find that if I hoe once, a couple of weeks after transplanting, that is all the weed control I need at the fast-growing time of year. Don't waste time hoeing lettuce you will be harvesting next week. We like the stirrup or scuffle hoes – some call them “hula hoes” – which are safer in the hands of novices than sharp-cornered hoes.

For those who like to direct sow lettuce, you can prepare the bed, let it rest for a week (watering it), then flame or lightly hoe the sur-

Twin Oaks is located in the Piedmont Ecoregion, in USDA Zone 7A, a moderate four season climate with hot summers and cold winters, so Pam's suggestions are easily adjusted for gardens north and south.



face to remove a flush of weeds before sowing.

Bolting and/or bitterness are more likely with under-watering, long days, mature plants, poor soil, crowding, high temperatures, and vernalization (when plants suffer 2 weeks of temperatures below 50°F (10°C) followed by a rapid warm-up, once the stems are thicker than ¼ inch (6 mm.)

OBSERVE AND ADAPT

Recently I revised our lettuce schedules once again to take account of hotter weather arriving earlier in the year and to even out the harvest dates. In your community gardens, be alert for the impacts of rising global temperatures, on lettuce and other vegetable crops. Heat effects may be especially pronounced in urban centers. This may open opportunities for extending the growing seasons, but may also mean that habitual old-time favorite varieties may not do as well. Always learn from your plants.



*Always learn
from your
plants.*





Pollinators for the community garden

ALYSSA MCKIM



Do you know just how important pollinators are to the vitality of our food system?

Pollinators are essential to the survival of many flowering plants. In agriculture, they are crucial to the productivity of over 85% of our food and fiber producing crops. Think of coffee, almonds, apples and blueberries. All these crops rely on our pollinator friends to produce food. The vitality of native pollinator species directly affects our food supply, as well as the health of our native ecosystems.

Alyssa McKim of Greensboro, North Carolina, has led North Carolina Community Garden Partners and served as statewide community gardening coordinator for North Carolina Cooperative Extension at NCAT University in Greensboro. A committed Permaculturist, she now works in food security for Guilford County NC. Alyssa chairs ACGA Board's Development Committee.



What are the benefits? Oh, let me count the ways...

- *Increased food production*
- *Healthier natural habitat*
- *Habitat protection and restoration*
- *Providing habitat for other essential organisms in ecosystems, such as toads, spiders, and birds*
- *Creating shelter for over-wintering and foraging*
 - *A location for real life biology/ecology education for students young and old*
- *Yearlong beauty*

Despite their importance, many key pollinator species are in decline due to urban sprawl, overuse of pesticides, climate chaos, loss of natural habitat, and disease. Fortunately, community gardens are in a unique position to help restore and protect native pollinators and their habitats. Officially inviting pollinators into our communal gardens by designing spaces for them both enhances our gardens and helps to restore native habitats.

Community gardens are perfectly positioned to act as “way stations” or “safe havens” for native pollinator species. According to the Trust for Public Land, “today there are more than 29,000 garden plots in city parks in just the 100 largest U.S. Cities.” That is a lot of space and a lot of leverage, and it doesn’t even include gardens at faith communities, non-profits, businesses, private land, and those in smaller cities, suburban communities, and rural areas!

Planting pollinator gardens, borders, and patches is a great way to add a diversity of colorful flowers to your garden that bloom throughout the growing season. Those flowers will also attract insects, birds and butterflies to your garden. They help spread pollen from one plant to another, increasing food production. Designing the pollinator space is a fun activity that you can do with your garden group, children, and other community organizations. It is an opportunity to be creative and create a story with the landscape. It is important to post a sign so that folks know that the area is for pollinators.

So, how can you get started? There’s lots of help available from your local Cooperative Extension Service Agent and CES Master Gardener Volunteers. The non-profit Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation (<https://xerces.org>) is a reliable source of science-based information, and books by entomologist/activist Doug Tallamy are filled with practical garden suggestions, including the use of native plants. Another government agency with expert knowledge and excellent resources is The Natural Resource Conservation Service. NRCS has these suggestions for planting a pollinator habitat in a community garden:

- Partner with other groups to design, plant, and care for the pollinator garden.
- Choose a location (or two) for the pollinator garden. Property borders work well if you want to maximize growing space.
- Consider soil characteristics, site drainage, sunlight, and other factors when selecting plants.
- Create a centrally located pollinator island to provide forage and habitat so pollinators have central access to the entire garden.



Community gardens are the perfect place to establish common ground for beneficial organisms.

- Observe the natural habitat and whenever possible, choose native plants which may be better adapted to your soil type, climate, precipitation, and local pollinators.
- Provide a variety of flower colors and shapes that bloom to attract different pollinators. Plant in clumps, rather than single plants.
- Choose plants that flower at different times of the year to provide nectar and pollen sources throughout the growing season.
- Avoid pesticides and practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to reduce damage to your plants and to protect pollinators.
- Pollinators need water too. You can provide water for pollinators with a shallow dish, bowl, or birdbath with half-submerged stones for perches.

Community gardens are the perfect place to establish common ground, not only for neighborhoods but for the beneficial organisms and natural ecosystems we rely on for healthy communities. Lots of community gardens “grow a row for the hungry.” In this spirit, let’s all grow a beautiful garden (or two, or three...) for our pollinators, too.

LINKS FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Moore, Justin “Growing a Pollinator Garden” <https://homegrown.extension.ncsu.edu/2019/08/growing-a-pollinator-garden/>
- The Importance of Pollinators | NRCS Pennsylvania , https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/pa/plantsanimals/?cid=nrc-s142p2_018171
- https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/plantsanimals/pollinate/gardeners/?cid=nrcsdev11_001102

Photos by Alyssa McKim: p11, fly on yarrow; p13 bee on monarda.



A guide for bee-ginner beekeepers

DONALD LOGGINS

*Beekeeping
is rewarding,
friendly to
ecology, and, of
course, you get
honey.*

[Note: This article is based on excerpts from Donald Loggins' complete guide to urban beekeeping, which will be made available on ACGA's website's Resources page, www.communitygarden.org/resources]

Humanity's attraction to sweetness led us to ignore the pain of bee stings so that we might have honey. Cave paintings show people taking honey from wild hives, surrounded by angry bees.

PLACING THE HIVE

Choosing the proper place in the community garden to set up your beehive is a factor that should be considered well in advance to the arrival of the bees. Once the bees are established and "mark the spot," they will not tolerate having the hive moved. Bees do not remember the hive but rather the spot where the hive is located relative to fixed landmarks.

A place most desirable for the bees should offer light shade of deciduous trees to help keep the hive cool in the summer time and still allow the sun to warm it in the winter, early spring and late fall. If the hive location is chosen in the winter or early spring, allowance must be made for the effects of having leaves on the trees and a higher sun angle. Heavy shade interferes with navigation from the sun and doesn't allow the sun to warm the hive as early in the morning or as late in the evening. If in direct sunlight, the bees will spend too much time and energy trying to keep the hive cool on hot summer days. In this area (New York City), whenever possible, the entrance of the hive should face south to help in their orientation of the sun, to warm the entrance, and to minimize the effects of having wind, rain and snow blowing into the hive.

Picking a location with a minimum of traffic in front of the hive is very important. Bees can be rather intolerant to people, cars or animals passing back and forth in front of their entrance. It is especially

Donald Loggins has been an active gardener at the Liz Christy Community Garden in Manhattan since 1973 and still volunteers there. He has been active in beekeeping for almost 50 years.



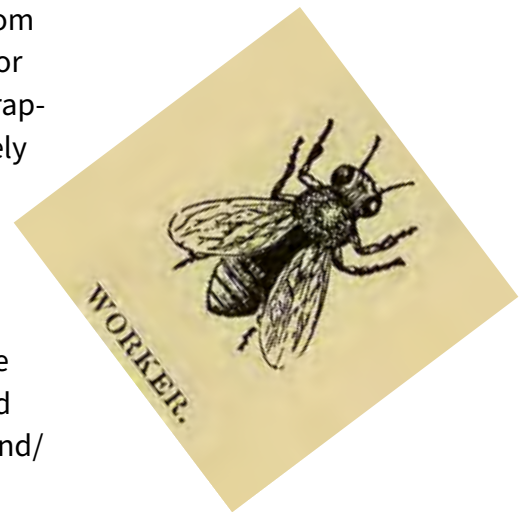
annoying for a tired bee, returning from the field, to have to try to maneuver around moving objects. Also, on take off they need room to gain altitude without having to avoid moving objects. A fence or hedge five to ten feet in front of the hives will encourage a more rapid ascent and make areas in front of the hedge or fence more freely usable.

BUYING YOUR BEES

Buying your bees is as important a task as buying a good animal, such as a dog or horse: A reliable breeder is one's best bet. Advice from an experienced beekeeper in selecting a hive of bees will aid the new beekeeper in avoiding getting sickly or neglected bees and/or poor equipment.

SPRING INTO ACTION

Early spring is the best time to get started in beekeeping because, as the year progresses, the flowers will come into bloom and the bees will have a chance to collect nectar. However, it can also be a bad time if it is a cold, wet spring with few flowers. To insure the survival of a new hive during the first month, when so much of the hive's energy and consequently its food supply is used in drawing out new



Photos: p15 Kaitlyn Cawthorn. A winner in NC Pollinator Photo contest, showing honey bee on Queen Anne's lace. Additional photos and graphics courtesy Wikimedia Commons and FLICKR.



QUEEN.



WORKER.



WORKER.



WORKER.



DRONE.

comb and raising brood, a solution of sugar water is fed to the new hive to supplement their needs.

FLOWERS NEARBY

Bees should have materials for making honey as close to the hive as possible. Flowers are the major concern since bees can produce honey only from the nectar of flowers. The more vegetation the better the chance of flowers. Maple and basswood produce flowers in the spring but they can also shade out other plants than might supply flowers at other times of the year. A good variety of plants will do a lot to assure some blooms at most times throughout the different honey seasons. Frequently observing the number of bees flying in and out of the entrance can tell a lot about the condition of the hive, but the surest check is to actually open the hive and looking at the amount of nectar being processed, honey being made, and the size of the brood chamber.

WATER IS ESSENTIAL

Water is an essential item for bees since they use it to dilute the honey to feed to the brood. In hot weather, they bring the water back to the hive and evaporate it to cool the hive. Good clean water, free of chemicals, bacteria or parasites that may harm the bees, is essential to maintaining a healthy, productive hive. Having the water as close to the hives as possible is important since they waste less time and energy in getting the water and are more likely to use it than another source, such as a swimming pool in your public park or a neighbor's yard. People stepping on bees around their pools can be a major source of trouble.





To survive and be productive, bees must have the materials to make the honey as close as possible.

KEEP IN TOUCH

A new hive should not be disturbed too much for the first two weeks, until the bees feel at home in the hive. After that, bees cannot be left unattended. Would you buy a dog or a cat, bring it home, then decide to not feed it? The bees and hive must be inspected regularly every two weeks to a month, especially in the beginning, so that the new beekeeper becomes fully familiar with the bees, their condition, and behavior. Some times of the year, such as the honey harvest, require a heavier time commitment.

ROLES IN THE HIVE

A honeybee hive is perennial. Although quite inactive during the winter, honeybees survive the winter months by clustering for warmth. By self-regulating the internal temperature of the cluster, the bees maintain 93 degrees Fahrenheit in the center of the winter cluster regardless of the outside temperature. The queen bee can live for several years. Worker bees live for six weeks during the busy summer, and for four to nine months during the winter months. The hive represents a highly organized society, with various bees having very specific roles during their lifetime – nurses, guards, grocers,





Please read Donald Loggins' entire guide, available on the ACGA website, www.communitygarden.org, on the Resources Page. It makes fascinating reading and is truly a labor of love.

ACGA Vice President Cordalie Benoit agrees with bees:

"Consider working with local beekeepers to place two or three of their hives in your garden. We have had two in our William Street garden for many, many years in Connecticut. It might be a good way to observe bees and learn about them without taking on the full responsibility from the start."

housekeepers, construction workers, royal attendants, undertakers, foragers, etc. Honeybees are not native to the USA, though they are now naturalized here. They are European in origin, brought to North America by the early settlers, along with carrots, lettuce, broccoli, and many other community garden staples.

WHAT ABOUT STINGS?

Honeybees are not aggressive by nature, and will not sting unless they are protecting their hive from an intruder or unduly provoked. The first step in treatment following a honey bee sting is removal of the stinger itself. The stinger should be removed as quickly as possible without regard to method: a study has shown the amount of venom delivered does not differ whether the sting is pinched or scraped off and even a delay of a few seconds leads to more venom being injected. Once the stinger is removed, pain and swelling should be reduced with a cold compress. A topical anesthetic containing benzocaine will kill pain quickly and menthol is an effective anti-itch treatment.

BEE ALL THAT YOU CAN BEE...

Bee keeping is rewarding, friendly to ecology, and, of course, you get honey. However, it is not for everyone. While no one enjoys being stung, not overreacting to the first few bee stings is an important part of bee keeping. If one is found to be sensitive to stings, then more caution must be given to proper dress, but if you want a beehive in your community garden, bee stings do not excuse you from proper care of the bees, an active process that requires showing up regularly and frequently throughout the year.





Coping with pests in urban food gardens

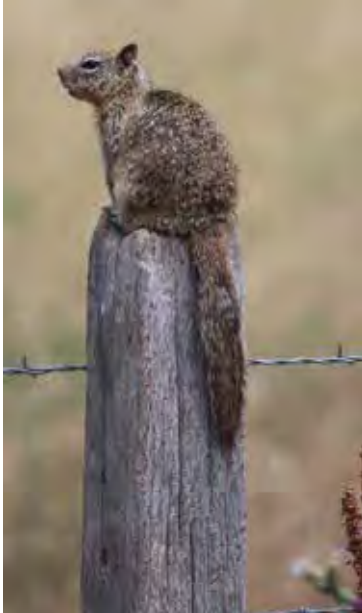
ROB BENNATON, ALDA PIRES, ROGER BALDWIN



Rats, mice, and other rodent and vertebrate pests are annoying interlopers in community gardens. They transmit serious diseases, destroy crops, and damage garden infrastructure. Controlling them is a challenge every urban garden or farm must face.

They may have different names as you move around the country – according to Penn State, “woodchucks” (*Marmota monax*) are also known as groundhogs, whistle pigs, marmots, and grass rats – but gardeners in all regions refer to them using similar epithets not suitable for a family publication.

Rob Bennaton is an invaluable ACGA “supervolunteer”. A transplanted New Yorker, Rob has served as Urban Agriculture & Food Systems Advisor for UC Cooperative Extension Service in Alameda County, near San Francisco. Alda Pires and Roger Baldwin are Rob’s colleagues at UC CES.



Uninvited rodent garden crashers do more than simply upset gardeners (and your funders, and the neighbors...). They may also carry dangerous food-borne and zoonotic (transmitted from animals to people) pathogens and diseases, including Salmonella, Leptospira, coliform bacteria, rat bite fever, and even bubonic plague.

In urban areas, community gardens and city farms are often near other land uses that harbor rats, mice, and related pests, such as dumpsters and neglected properties. The problem doesn't just come from outside the garden, however. Especially at harvest times, gardens and farms are lush with ripe fruits, tasty leafy greens, and chunky underground root crops dense with nutrients. In community gardens, gardeners sometimes pick too late or forget to pick at all. Instead of ending up on kitchen tables, neglected ripe and overly ripe tomatoes, beets, and cukes in the garden end up as a feast for rodents and other pests.

Even compost can be an issue. Gardeners love compost, with good reason, but as growers transition from summer to fall crops, compost piles get bigger but less tended. Sometimes gardeners go on vacation before the school year starts, or they might simply forget to turn the garden's compost pile. Coupled with infrequently picked up garbage and food waste trash close to the garden, infrequently turned compost bins become perfect hideouts for rats, mice, voles, ground squirrels, and more.

Faced with these realities, pro-active rodent management is a requirement in many successful community gardens. Fortunately, research-based strategies can help manage this problem effectively.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Identifying your particular vertebrate pests correctly is a key first step. Different parts of the country host different pests – gophers in California, voles and cotton rats in North Carolina, woodchucks in Wisconsin, and even non-rodents such as armadillos and moles in some places. While many lump rats and mice together as rodent pests, the two have different behavior patterns (not to mention the size difference!). Rats such as Norway and roof rats, for example, are cautious, opportunistic, and cover a larger geographic range. Knowing each pest and its habits and food preferences goes a long way toward finding effective control strategies. Be particularly vigilant about ground squirrels. Although often viewed as “not really a rat” or even “cute,” ground squirrels can carry the plague, as well as seriously damage food producing and ornamental plants. They may sometimes chew on irrigation lines for water, and their burrowed holes can damage garden spaces and structures while also causing trip hazards to growers.



ELIMINATE FOOD AND WATER

Food and water are pest magnets. Getting rid of these is simply common sense. Reducing rodents in urban food growing sites is harder because many are near food sources, such as along rail lines or transit corridors where trash is dumped, in parking lots and the countless other places where residents discard fast food containers, and between buildings where rodent populations already reside.

Consistent access to food over time, including unharvested produce in community gardens, is an open invitation for rodents to thrive, and may attract other insect and bird pests as well. Make regular harvesting a required expectation for gardeners. Excess can be donated to the hungry, not left to lure pests. With the growing popularity of urban small livestock, spilled feed can also be an issue. Feed chickens, rabbits and other urban farm animals only the amounts of food they will consume at one time, and retrieve uneaten food to prevent it from attracting rodents.

KEEP GARDENS CLEAN AND PESTS OUT.

Access to water and food supplies can be through entry into barns, greenhouses, high tunnels, and cold frames, where they also find shelter from stormy weather and winter cold. Minimize or seal cracks or openings in these structures, as well in compost bins, animal cages, and planter boxes.

If needed, build beds with galvanized steel mesh underneath. This prevents rats and mice from having family litters under your food growing beds, where they have abundant food sources such as plants' roots with little risk of predator or human disturbance.

Keep garden trash and debris contained as much as possible with tight, clean lids. Reduce vegetation which can be habitat by pruning trees, shrubs, and hedges, and by keeping overgrown and weedy areas from becoming impenetrable and impossible to monitor easily.

Food and water are pest magnets. Getting rid of these is simply common sense.

Photos: p19: *Rattus norvegicus*. Dunpharlain, Wikimedia.org. p20: From top; crow, ground squirrel, desert cottontail. p21 Niamh and Ryan of UC Extension. Photos courtesy Rob Bennaton, UC CES. p22: Clean garden with scarecrow. Kiadoh, Flickr.

CONSIDER TRAPS

Eliminating food, water, and burrowing opportunities, and closing access to spaces where rodents can hide and reproduce will go a long way toward solving garden problems. Traps and bait stations are best viewed as a last resort, not the automatic first response. Sustainable control requires managing all factors, such as food, water, and habitat. Traps alone won't accomplish the job.

In some tough situations, however, baited traps may still be the best solution. Populations of ground squirrels, gophers, rats, mice, voles, and moles can all be diminished by correct use of traps and bait stations. Look for runs where rodents are active. Once found, place traps or bait stations along rodent paths every 25-50 feet around the perimeter of farm or garden structures, and along routes in crevices where they may migrate less visibly.

Consult an Extension specialist or other experienced person for advice on how to set up and manage traps and bait. This is particularly true since toxic baits pose a threat to pets, children, and non-target animals. Always read and follow instructions exactly.

MAKE A PLAN AND STICK TO IT

Overall, sustainable and effective community garden critter control requires a thoughtful action plan to eliminate food and water access

for pests, block ways rodents may gain entry, and remove habitat for shelter and reproduction. An effective plan means more than using wire mesh to block rodent runs, turning the compost, and cutting tall weeds. Gardens also need clear rules for gardeners requiring regular harvesting and keeping plots and beds neat and rodent-free. If your garden can organize a community-wide clean up, all the better for everybody (except the rats).



Food growing tips for community gardens

DON BOEKELHEIDE

ACGA has member gardens from Alaska to the Florida Keys, and hundreds of places in between, and food gardening in all those gardens is completely different. Community gardens do many things beyond growing food, granted, and it's much easier to make broad suggestions about non-profit management or community organizing than about actual gardening techniques. At the same time, people usually join community gardens to grow vegetables and flowers, and they are hungry for specific gardening advice. In that spirit, here are ten food gardening fundamentals for community gardeners, with comments from community gardening leaders across North America.

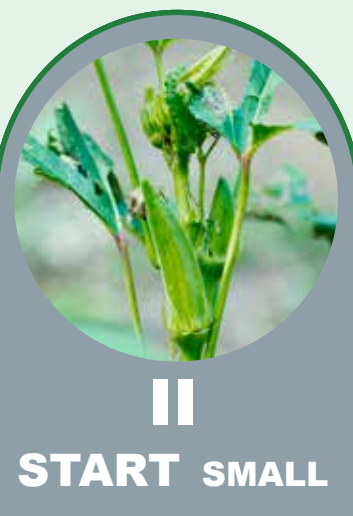
I. SHOW UP

No matter where we garden, gardeners must show up or our gardens won't thrive. Gardens sustain us with a bounty of food, and in turn we have to sustain them with regular care – watering, weeding, tending, and harvesting. Gardeners must understand this from the start. Someone can build a Taj Mahal “raised bed” of expensive cedar and galvanized fittings and fill it with boutique organic soil mix, but if that gardener doesn't show up regularly, plants will die and weeds and pests will come.

“Get your hands into the dirt and try,” says Chanelle Crosby of Portland Community Gardens, in Portland, Oregon. “Know that trying requires both effort and patience; the land really does most of the work, so sit back and watch in awe as it all unfolds.”

II. THINK BIG: START SMALL

Gardeners arrive full of big dreams, and that's a wonderful thing. However, there's a learning curve with gardening, as with most everything worth doing. Encourage gardeners to start small, especially new gardeners.



Editor's note: Thanks to our resource sharers: Cordalie Benoit, Connecticut (favorite crop: asparagus), Chanelle Crosby, Oregon (sugar snap peas), Barbara Masoner, Colorado (okra), Bill Maynard, California, and Thomas Neil, Nebraska (Bill and Thomas like 'em all).
– Don Boekelheide, North Carolina (kohlrabi).



III

GROW WHERE YOU ARE

“Don’t plant more than you can manage your first time out,” cautions Thomas Neil, Executive Director of The Big Garden in Omaha, Nebraska. “Even container gardens produce a wonderful harvest!”

III. GROW WHERE YOU ARE

The best source for local gardening information is NOT the Internet. Instead, step outside your door. See the landscape of your community, the soil, the sky, the trees, even the pavement? That’s where gardeners must start, right where we are. Take stock of your ecological realities. What crops grow well where you are? What are your natural plant communities? What soils are characteristic for your area? What’s your rainfall pattern, how much do you get? What river basin are you in (the closest thing we have to an “ecological address”)? What’s your last frost date in the spring? The first in the fall?

“Don’t get too eager to get your plants outside, wait until last frost to ensure a good crop”, Neal reminds us.



IV

FULL SUN

IV. FULL SUN

Generally speaking, vegetable gardens in the US and Canada do best in full sun (as much as a few gardeners and sponsors wish it were otherwise). Full sun means least eight hours. True, some crops are more tolerant of part-sun than others, and maximum commercial yields are not essential in community gardens. That said, food crops are like solarx-powered food factories. You don’t put solar panels in the shade. For best results, veggie crops need sun.

V. HEALTHY SOIL

Healthy vegetables grow best in healthy soil. Sometimes community gardens luck out with excellent soil, but that’s not always the case. The good news is that many if not most soils, even in urban areas, can be restored to health with good management (including adding organic matter such as compost).

If your garden has “raised beds”, encourage best practices: Fill them to 3 cm (1 inch) from the top, or at least 20-25 cm (8-10 inches) deep with the safest soil mix you can find (there is no legal definition of “topsoil” products, so be careful). Do not fill boxes with pure compost.

Whenever you can, try to think “outside the box.” Work to improve the soil you have using traditional techniques such as “double digging.” Set aside areas of native unboxed soil for pollinator gardens.

Soil correlates with fertility. Healthy soils make it easier for plants to take up the nutrients they need, and many veggies are big feeders. Consider a fertilization plan, using pre-plant and sidedressing.



V

HEALTHY SOIL



Photos:

(right) At Reedy Creek Park Community Garden in Charlotte, NC, members are encouraged to always harvest on time, and to share the bounty with others. (Photo Don Boekelheide.)

“Ten Commandment” vegetable photos courtesy of Flickr: Tomato, Paul Woods; okra, Joi Ito; asparagus, Yamanaka Tamaki; beets, Satrina; broccoli, adaemm; carrots, Ziggy Liloia; kohlrabi, claudia nicoleta; peppers, Ethan Trewhitt; sugar snap peas and summer squash, Joan.

Check with Extension or other trusted resources for guidance. There are many organic options so you do not have to use “chemical” fertilizer such as 10-10-10, but wise fertilization boosts production.

(Safety note: In urban areas, conduct a soil safety test before launching a community garden. Sometimes, a community garden isn’t the best use of a promising lot because of contaminated soil.)

VI. RELIABLE WATER

Vegetable gardens require reliable water, especially after seeding or transplanting. For many urban gardens, a water tap is the easiest solution. Rain collection as the sole water source is a tough challenge in most places. Nevertheless, innovative ways to utilize rainfall are a very good idea for all gardens.

VII. PICK THE RIGHT CROPS

Wise crop selection is key to successful gardening. Grow things you like to eat, and plant what grows best in your particular area, taking your seasons into account. Some experienced gardeners focus on crops they can’t find in the market or at a decent price, or for maximum nutrition, or to avoid buying the “dirty dozen” most-sprayed crops (which currently includes spinach, kale and collard greens, green and hot peppers, and tomatoes).



VI
RELIABLE WATER



VII
RIGHT CROPS



Another factor to consider is the “neighborliness” factor of some veggies. Sweet corn, sunchokes (and sunflowers), okra, and even trellised tomatoes can tower high enough to block sun from plots next door. Others, notoriously the squash family, can ramble over paths and even invade the neighbors.

“With proper placement, most tall plants can be planted most anywhere,” says Bill Maynard, past President of ACGA, in Sacramento, California. “However, a ‘wall’ of corn, sunflowers, or other tall plants needs to be properly placed, usually with rows in a east-west direction. North-south rows are often preferred for most crops, but tall crops can create morning shade for one neighbor and afternoon shade for the other. This, of course, depends on the size of the plots and if pathways are placed around each plot.”

VIII. ECOLOGY, YES: TOXINS, NO

Gardeners hate pests. I understand — I’m a gardener. As part of learning to garden sustainably, however, we all have to spit out the Kool-Aid that dopes us into believing we can solve all problems by nuking bugs and weeds with toxic sprays from the store or online. The environmental consequences are dire and obvious, going back to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Community gardens must set sensible ground rules and explain them to gardeners. Even better, we can educate gardeners on effective alternatives. Part of this is to remind gardeners that all of us experience garden failure sometimes. There is no magic spray or potion to avoid this gardening reality.

“Know that making mistakes is inevitable and that there’s some pain in helplessly seeing plants die because of said mistakes,” says Chanelle Crosby in Portland. “Compost the plants (and your feelings of grief or frustration!), and begin again.”



IX. HARVESTING COUNTS

It’s funny, but many gardeners forget that harvesting is part of gardening (see the “Critter” article on page 19). One joy of having a food garden is picking veggies at optimum ripeness, without that long (and fossil-fuel powered) chain from a field in California or Chile. It’s just straight from the soil to the plate. Gardeners may need instruction on identifying ripe crops. Also, harvesting produces “holes.” A productive food garden often looks like a seven-year-old’s gap-toothed grin. That’s OK! My favorite response to those harvest holes is to toss in a cover crop (buckwheat is my go-to choice in the summer).



X. CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

Diversity is a beneficial aspect of many ecosystems, including food

gardens. Set aside areas for beneficial and pollinator habitat, including native species; pay attention to rotating crops so you don't keep growing the same things in the same places; and make room for cover crops and living mulches to build soils and add resiliency.

Taking a lesson from ecology, there are other kinds of "diversity" that are valuable in community gardens. For starters, there is no "one right way" to garden in community. Some community gardens are group projects, others are organized as individual plots, and there are plenty of hybrids. All can work beautifully.

Many gardens hold to an underlying philosophy, such as "we are all organic" or "this is a Permaculture project." That's fine. The less doctrinaire we can be, however, the more open we remain to the diversity of good ideas. Being inclusive also lowers the risk of labeling, "us" (good guys, who "get it") vs. "them" (bad guys, who don't).

Let gardeners know that the garden path they choose is up to them, within a few sensible environmentally-informed guidelines. Encourage gardeners to observe, learn from others, and share experiences.

"Every year provides me with a lesson in the garden. No two years are the same. Every time I'm in the garden with another gardener, I learn something. It may be a new recipe, a pest control method, or a new variety that does well in our zone," shares Barbara Masoner, Co-Director of Grow Local Colorado in Denver. "So the more time you share in a garden the more you're going to get out of it. Pretty soon you'll be the one that other gardeners look to for advice."

SUMMING UP

Everybody everywhere gardens differently all at once. Maybe the most important gardening advice overall, besides "show up," is to be patient and kind to your plants, each other, and yourself. In our gardens, community and gardening are as intertwined as oak roots and mycorrhiza. Got questions? Ask the veteran gardener in the next plot next over (as well as our friends at Cooperative Extension, who do have mostly reliable websites...).

ACGA Vice-President Cordalie Benoit, who (amazingly) gardens at community gardens in TWO different states, Connecticut and Rhode Island, puts it this way: "When it comes to advice about gardening, my first thought is about how nice gardeners are. I believe that is because gardening teaches patience, humility, attentiveness, generosity, love of beauty, wonderment and many other great human qualities. It weeds out the mean and the self-centered. There are no narcissistic gardeners!"

A PESTICIDE CRIB SHEET

- The words "Caution," "Warning," and "Danger" appear by law on pesticide labels. Determined by the EPA, these are legal standards, not marketing terms.
- Organic farmers are limited to materials listed by USDA's National Organics Program (NOP.) Some have EPA designations, others do not. An independent organization, OMRI, reviews products and grants a compliance notice.
- One sensible rule is to permit only pesticides and products with a "Caution" label, and to ban "Warning" and "Danger" products altogether. Note that some "Caution" pesticides, such as Sevin and glyphosate (Roundup,) are not allowed under USDA organic rules.
- For gardens that wish to be organic, an alternative is to require that products be OMRI labeled or on the NOP list.
- Educate gardeners and insist that ALL products be applied properly and safely. Even "organic" products can be deadly to pollinators and beneficials, or have highly undesirable impacts on soil.

A PRACTICAL CHALLENGE:

So, do you throw out "Ms. Gardener" for using Sevin dust (rated Caution) as her grandmother did? Or, should you use glyphosate to control invasive exotic weeds? Each garden community must make its own call on these kinds of questions. In my opinion, flexibility is best, coupled with education. Show gardeners viable alternatives and encourage them to change, but the most important goal is giving everyone a place to garden. Healthy plants, not poisons, are the key to successful gardens, and the best way to learn that lesson is through gardening.



A national park in every community garden?

CORDALIE BENOIT AND DON BOEKELHEIDE

Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens

BY DOUGLAS W. TALLAMY

Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home*, is the T. A. Baker Professor of Agriculture in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, where he taught insect-related courses for 41 years and published over 100 academic articles. His other popular books include *The Living Landscape*: (with Rick Darke); *Nature's Best Hope* (with a separate addition for young readers); and *The Nature of Oaks*. His books have won numerous awards, and his in-person talks are very popular with audiences. He and his wife live on a restored property in Pennsylvania.

Reviewer Cordalie Benoit is the Vice-President of ACGA. Don Boekelheide is Editor of ACGA's Community Gardening magazine.

Doug Tallamy isn't your average bug scientist. Instead of sticking pins in dead beetles, he is needling every gardener in America with a sharp question: What are you doing in your own yard (or community garden) to protect the environment, welcome songbirds, and support biodiversity? Lately, he has even co-founded a movement calling on gardeners to create our own mini- "Homegrown National Parks" in home and community landscapes. It's a bit like crowdfunding but applied to our shared environment, saving the world one backyard – or community garden, or balcony flowerpot – at a time.

This review focuses on Tallamy's first general audience book, *Bringing Nature Home*. Tallamy's book list keeps expanding, and his newer books are just as valuable.

There have been gardening advocates for native plants at least since 1929, when Edith A. Roberts and Elsa Rehmann wrote *American Plants for American Gardens*. Almost a century later, this rock star entomologist Tallamy ramped things up again. *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens* encourages us to include native plants in home landscaping, not simply for their botanical virtues but also because of their unique ability to support native wildlife. Tallamy's book is eminently readable and has engendered a movement so influential that (book publisher) Darrel G. Morrison has reissued the Roberts and Rehmann book.

As a scholar, Tallamy lays out how essential native plants are for the caterpillars that are both larvae that transform into beautiful butterflies, and an indispensable food source for songbirds and other wild creatures we all love. Most of us know that monarch butterflies cannot live without milkweeds (*Asclepias spp.*) to feed their caterpillars. Tallamy reminds us that similar indispensable relationships also exists for oaks, willows, black cherry trees and other native plants. Those caterpillars are vital food for hatchling robins,



Why not create a “homegrown national park” in every community garden? Shown here is the late Adam Honigman’s garden near Times Square in New York City, with a photoshopped national park sign. (In fact, there is already a community garden within the National Park Service, at Fort Dupont National Park in Washington, DC.) Original photo: Ellen Zachos.

cardinals, and other songbirds: No bugs – no birds. Tallamy is a witty and dynamic writer and speaker who has made himself available to a very wide audience both on Zoom and in person. If you get a chance to hear him and want to be educated as well as entertained, do, you won’t regret it.

Tallamy coined the phrase “Homegrown National Park” and, with Michelle Alfandari, has launched a website (<https://homegrownnationalpark.org>) and organization to support the concept. According to the website, this is “the largest cooperative conservation project ever conceived or attempted.” Their initial goal is 20 million acres of native plantings in the U.S, representing roughly half the current area of turf grass lawns on privately-owned properties. The location of this vast holding? Individual back (and front) yards (and community gardens, and school yards, and church lots, and the list goes on) right where people live, including in urban centers.

“Our National Parks, no matter how grand in scale, are too small and separated from one another to preserve species to the levels needed,” the website states. “Thus, the concept for Homegrown National Park, a bottom-up call-to-action to restore habitat where we live and work, and to a lesser extent where we farm and graze, extending national parks to our yards and communities.”

Alfandari adds, “We want to make it as easy as possible, to have a great deal of fun in the process, and to celebrate the creation of new ecological networks.”

What community gardener would dispute these big-picture green goals? (Besides, being “against native plants” makes it sound like you also oppose apple pie, motherhood, and the red, white, and blue or the maple leaf.) But chanting slogans is one thing, and breaking deeply rooted gardening habits is quite another – habits and decisions that are reinforced by relentless pesticide marketing

*Knowledge
generates
interest,
and interest
generates
compassion.*

*Doug Tallamy
Bringing
Nature Home*



Most vegetables are not “native plants,” but a few are. From the top: Blueberries, sweet corn, green beans, and butternut squash are all native to North America. Photos from Wikimedia commons: Corwinhee; Löwe 48; wanko from Japan; Lightspeed7.

and clueless but powerful HOAs and public regulations. Getting gardeners to plant unfamiliar plants, including native ones, won’t be easy.

Dr. Jeff Gillman, Director of the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, Botanical Gardens, and author of *The Truth About Organic Gardening* and *The Truth About Garden Remedies* (both highly recommended), cautions against simply “going native”.

“The biggest problem with Tallamy’s work is that readers often get the false impression that planting in your backyard is a simple case of native plants = good, and exotic plants = bad,” Gillman says. “This is a false dichotomy which can have serious consequences for a backyard ecosystem. To be honest, I don’t think this is a dichotomy that Tallamy believes in himself. Nonetheless it’s what many of his readers leave his writings believing. As a professional horticulturist, I can plant a backyard full of nothing but natives that doesn’t feed a single caterpillar, and I can plant a backyard full of exotics that feed an extensive list of native insects. I fully agree with Tallamy that we need to build our gardens with plants that feed insect larvae and adults, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that we should be focused on all natives. Instead, we should be thinking about the functionality of the plants we choose. To give a very specific example, *Prunus* (the plant sub-group that includes plums, peaches, and cherries) is a genus of plants whose members tend to support a wide range of insects. There are native and exotic members of this genus and choosing a native member does not necessarily mean that you will be feeding a wider selection of insects.”

Even harder may be the challenge of helping some gardeners break an addiction to pesticides. Consider: If we host these needed bugs, there are going to be HOLES in our leaves, and caterpillars will be crawling all over our tomatoes, roses, and, yes, even native oaks. Cognitive dissonance in our gardens!

So, what’s the bottom line for community gardeners? First, since we pretty much all agree with Tallamy on the big picture, let’s take action. Let’s create space in our community gardens for pollinator plantings and educational signage about the importance of habitat (see Alyssa McKim’s article on pollinators). Let’s include native plants and more ecologically informed plantings and practices, such as no-mow May, so neighborhood residents can become more familiar with the common-sense appeal and beauty of these alternatives. Let’s discourage use of toxins and pesticides, and encourage effective alternatives (including tolerating if not celebrating a few more holes in garden leaves). And let’s join the movement, and make every community garden its own “homegrown national park.”

Two successful ACGA conferences in 2021

DON BOEKELHEIDE

The American Community Gardening Association (ACGA) held not one but two conferences in 2021, one in-person and the other virtual. ACGA's live conference took place in historic Hampton, Virginia, from September 23 through 26, 2021. ACGA also organized a virtual conference, hosted on Zoom on October 22 and 23, 2021. The conference theme for both was Gardening in Challenging Times, and both gained high praise from participants. Over 200 gardeners took part.

IN PERSON: HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

ACGA's 2021 Hampton conference brought together 127 community garden organizers, supporters, and grassroots gardeners from across North America. The conference required proof of vaccination with a temperature check on check-in. Virginia Governor Norton issued a proclamation to coincide with the opening of ACGA's conference proclaiming "Virginia Community Gardening Week."

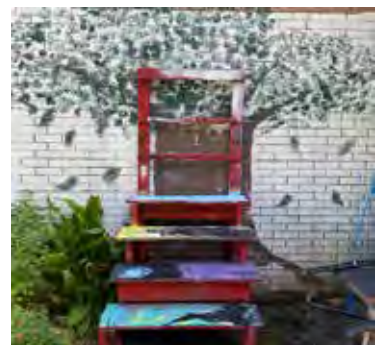
Hampton, Virginia, is an historic seaside city of just under 140,000 residents about 220 km (135 miles) south of Washington, DC, near the mouth of Chesapeake Bay.

The event was a success. 90% of participants rated the educational content as "exceptional", according to ACGA Secretary Fred Conrad. Wendy Iles, ACGA's Hampton Conference Chair, credits volunteer support:

"The incredible effort and team work from our volunteers really made a difference at this conference," Iles said. "Thank you to each and every team member who volunteered their time and talents!"

DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS

Iles spotlighted the tireless dedication of volunteers Catherine Sutton, Beth Smallridge, April Receveur, and Cynthia Harris. She praised Chef Justin Ramos of the Fox Tail Wine Bar, for a TV-show-





Above and page 31: Hampton conference scenes: Speakers, garden visits, and more.

Photos courtesy Wendy Iles and Don Boekelheide.

Right: According to the Hampton History Museum, the arrival of “20 and odd” African men and women at Hampton’s Point Comfort in 1619 was a pivotal moment in the nation’s history. Stolen by English privateers from a Spanish slave ship and brought to Point Comfort in late August of 1619 on a ship called the White Lion, these women and men from west central Africa were sold for food and supplies. They are thought to be the first Africans forcibly transported to the English North American colonies. To learn more, visit the museum’s special report on 1619 at <https://hampton.gov/3585/1619-Landing>.

This sign marks the location. A memorial and museum are planned for the site.

worthy edible presentation during the conference, and great generosity to ACGAers who visited his restaurant.

Hampton Keynote Speaker Ira Wallace, of Southern Exposure Seed Exchange, received a standing ovation for her presentation on seed saving in community gardens, showing how we can keep the precious heritage of traditional vegetables thriving in our gardens. Hampton University biology professor Dr. Shawn Dash led a preconference workshop on making a place for pollinators and avoiding toxins in gardens.

OUTSTANDING WORKSHOPS

The conference’s workshops covered a broad range of community gardening issues, from environmentally-friendly garden strategies to garden organization and management, and from strong community partnerships to nutrition-friendly cooking demonstrations. Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) made a persuasive case for reparations in community gardens, and leaders of Vermont’s statewide community garden network (VCGN) described their health-oriented community gardening program at a medical facility. GreenThumb from New York City’s Parks Department discussed how NYC’s community gardens were coping successfully with COVID-19.

Sociologist Tracy Ore, of Saint Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and her colleagues captivated the audience with stories of the college’s community garden. Ore first organized the garden in 2005 on a vacant lot used by the university to dump winter snow, with soil so hard the rototiller just bounced across the top. St. Cloud’s garden was named Minnesota’s state Community Garden of the Year in 2014.

“It’s representative of what happens when you have faith in people: Good things happen,” Ore told the Saint Cloud Times.

Andrea Muffly and Staff Sergeant First Class Kirby Oliver of the Fort Story Community Garden in nearby Virginia Beach described how they and gardeners revitalized a neglected garden site near base housing. Both the St. Cloud and Fort Story gardens cultivate





support from businesses, organizations, and individuals in the area, and both provide “common ground” where neighbors can meet, even during a pandemic.

“Having a community garden allows residents of Fort Story a chance to meet their neighbors in a safe outdoor setting as the uncertainty of COVID precautions continues into the fall,” Muffly says. “Like the Victory Gardens in WWI and WWII, this community garden is part of a trend that will be documented in history.”

ACGA’s traditional community garden tours were again a high point. On Saturday morning, following a visit to a farmers’ market beside the beach (ACGA Board members were seen soaking their toes in the surf,) groups visited local community gardens, then rendezvoused at the Community Learning Garden project of Holistic Family Solutions for a rollicking drum circle, spectacular community garden murals, and a stimulating taste of All Hands hot sauce, handmade by the Learning Garden’s teen gardeners from peppers they grew themselves.

*Volunteers
really made
a difference
at this
conference.*

ACGA conference goers visit the Community Learning Garden at Holistic Family Solutions in Hampton, VA. Photo: Don Boekelheide



Scenes from the virtual conference: Lauren Hickman, Fort Worth, Texas, and the MyPlate gardens (top photos); virtual conference logo; Terri Carter (third from top) and Michelle Gambon (bottom left), conference co-organizers. Photos courtesy ACGA.



THE 2021 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

A month after Hampton, ACGA held a virtual conference on Zoom, organized by ACGA Education Chair Terri Carter and media consultant Michelle Gambon, both based in Atlanta. Over 100 participants registered from across the US and Canada.

Over the two days, attendees viewed seven presentations covering a variety of topics, from Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) to fermented foods. Participants viewed video highlights from the Hampton conference, and discussed community gardening issues in small group virtual “breakout sessions.” A highlight was MyPlate gardening, an approach used in Fort Worth, Texas, at the Tallent Area Food Bank, presented by Lauren Hickman. Sessions stressed that community garden success begins with cultivating healthy relationships within the garden and with community members and groups “outside” the garden such as businesses, governmental agencies, and other non-profits. Inclusion (inviting young people into the garden, for instance, and affirming and welcoming all kinds of people) is also essential in community gardening.

TWO TRANSFORMATIVE CONFERENCES IN 2021

Taken together, the two 2021 conferences allowed over 300 community garden supporters and gardeners to share ideas and learn from one another. The popularity of the virtual event, following the successful Los Angeles virtual conference in 2020, has sparked interest in ACGA offering more online learning opportunities in the future. At the same time, the impact of the in-person event further establishes the value of gathering (safely) face-to-face. There’s a need for both options, according to the ACGA Board, with hopes that, at some point, the end of the pandemic will make conference organizing, and everything else in life, easier in the years ahead.

Food growing vs. native plants

In gardening, we reshape the natural world. That's especially true when we grow food. Planting native flowers to feed pollinators and birds may be nature-friendly, but it nevertheless is yet another human intervention. As gardeners, that's our fate. We change nature even when we try to work with her.

This is nothing new. Here in North America, growing food has shaped the "natural" landscape for millennia. Corn (maize) growing in particular changed local ecosystems as people cleared the land using fire as a tool. Make no mistake, this approach was not as destructive as industrial farming. First Nations farmers skillfully managed natural systems, including wildlife, as part of food production. There are many lessons we can learn from their practices: Consider the clusters of Three Sisters plantings of corn, beans, and squash in countless community gardens (with sunflowers, too).

Modern gardeners must remind ourselves that food growing was part and parcel of our "native" natural communities. Welcoming indigenous plants back to our gardens, as Doug Tallamy advocates, makes sense for many reasons. At the same time, what we seek to restore is not pristine forests or prairies, but something more like a continental-sized community garden, where cultivating food played a central role.

Picking up on an idea Michael Pollen suggested decades ago in *Second Nature*, community gardeners may be able to help find common ground between extremes in the garden wars between "nativists" and "nozzleheads." In community gardens, we proudly grow food from all over the world – okra from Africa, sugar peas from Asia, potatoes from the Andes (via Ireland,) broccoli from Italy, yes, sweet corn from the Americas, and the list goes ever on. Our escapees are now wild flowers, for instance, carrots have become Queen Anne's lace, my mother's favorite flower. We make room for diversity, inclusion, and natives, too.

Admittedly, food growing community gardeners do disturb the soil and (try to) manage pests. This does not however justify behavior that destroys Earth's life support system. On the contrary, our responsibility is to harmonize our vegetable patches with a healthy planet and to provide good food and habitat, for people and pollinators alike, now and in the future. - DB

Photo: Three Sisters +: Corn, beans, squash, flowers. allispossible.org.uk/Flickr



ACGA: AMERICAN COMMUNITY GARDENING ASSOCIATION
www.communitygarden.org



T-SHIRT CONTEST



Share your original t-shirt design
& WIN a free ticket to ACGA's 2023 conference!

Where: Houston, Texas

When: September 27-30, 2023

Theme: CELEBRATING THE DIVERSITY OF GROWING

Contest deadline: June 30, 2023

Submit your entries and learn more at www.communitygarden.org

Winners chosen by vote by your fellow ACGA gardeners

IN THIS ISSUE

This issue is devoted to the gardening part of community gardening: Growing lettuce with Pam Dawling; Attracting pollinators; Gardening tips; and much more. Plus reports on ACGA conferences in Hampton, VA, and online.

Front cover: Fiely skipper butterfly. Winner of the NC Pollinator Photo contest, by Ryan Imperio of Briggs Community Garden, Durham, NC.

Back cover: Submit your entry in the ACGA 2023 t-shirt contest! Visit www.communitygarden.org for details.

ACGA



AMERICAN
COMMUNITY
GARDENING
ASSOCIATION

ACGA: The American Community Gardening Association
1441 Woodmont Ln NW Suite 1400
Atlanta, GA 30318, USA
www.communitygarden.org
info@communitygarden.org