

Just Living is Not Enough.
Community Gardens
Promote Life and
Connection to Others.

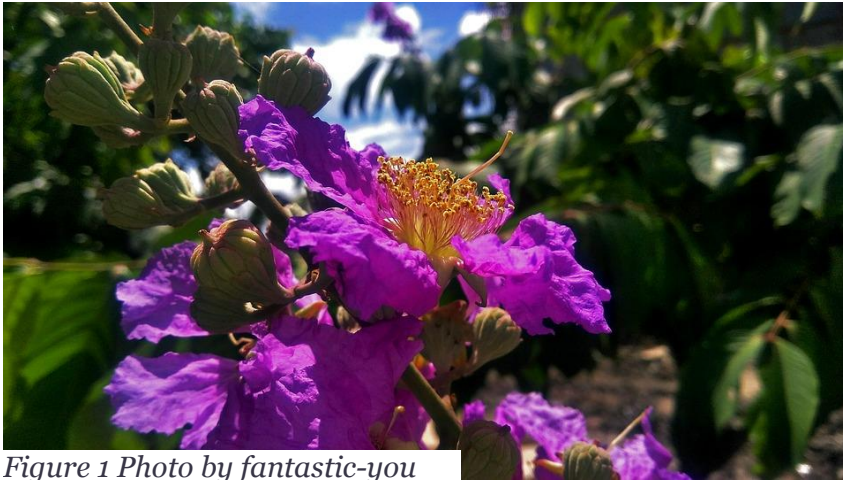


Figure 1 Photo by fantastic-you
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"Just living is not enough. One must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower."

-Hans Christian Andersen

In an increasingly fractured world, we search for visceral places to make human contact. Working together on a shared goal increases a sense of community by way of enhancing a person's individual happiness. It's a classic win-win!

Sure, community gardens promote "feel good" spaces detoxing us from traffic and urban sprawl by enticing our spirits with contrasting colors and fragrant aromas. The process of community gardening also provides opportunities for diverse members to work towards a common and tangible goal; food and beauty. Community gardening has also been shown to reduce community conflict. But does participating in community gardening really make us happier and if so, how?

"Paradoxically, reports of personal happiness and compassion are highest when we focus less on the needs of ourselves and respond more to the needs of other individuals within our community." (pg. 1)

Highlights

Community gardens are more than pretty spaces.

The process of community gardening promotes individual well-being and community connection.

We can (and should) measure pro-social community-level programs to better understand how and why they work.

In [Community Gardening, Volunteerism and Personal Happiness: “Digging In” to Green Space Environments for Improved Health](#), Hoffman seeks to empirically model and test how gardening might influence our levels of well-being through optimism, extroversion, personal control and self-esteem. Cultivating a green space with others promotes a sense of “connectedness” and social capital. The shared responsibility and communication necessary to grow and care for the plants, and the shared control of the seeds, garden equipment, and other inputs produces a sense of community “buy in” that ultimately raises our sense of social connection and social capital.

Methods

Twenty-five undergraduate college students participated in different kinds of volunteer and community service projects and completed a questionnaire about their experiences (available in the [original publication](#)).

“I like doing community service work projects because I feel more connected to the organization I am working with and the community in general. I like meeting new people, particularly different types of people that I wouldn’t normally encounter in my day-to-day life.” (-study participant pg. 5)

- The variable “increased connectedness to one’s community” was related to “volunteering is contributing to a better society.”

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ISSUES, RESULTS, AND IMPLICATIONS?

A Community Psychology perspective recognizes the inherent skills that people can share to build and empower their own communities.

Results

- Volunteers reported feeling better as a person, increased community connectedness, making a “better” society, and increased environmental awareness.
- The variable “increased environmental awareness” was related to “volunteering makes me feel better as a person.”

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: The links between “doing good” and “feeling well” is evidence-based. More research can further explain the positive impacts of community action.

Practice: All communities and particularly those with members who feel alienated from others and/or communities undergoing rapid change may benefit from shared outdoor, environmental projects like community gardening.

Summary and Discussion by August Hoffmann and Ashley Simons-Rudolph.

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