

Placer Resource  
Conservation District

# PLACER COUNTY COMMUNITY GARDENS REVIEW

2021





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# PREFACE

A healthy community garden that is able to adapt and pursue their goals in a sustainable way can be, and are, driving forces for health in the communities and landscapes they serve. And yet, the Placer Resource Conservation District, an organization dedicated to helping people help the land for the purposes of nurturing the land toward health and productivity, knew little about the community gardening activity occurring in Placer County; who they are, how they operate, and what they do. We wanted to find out!

Thanks to an Urban Ag and Community Initiative Grant made available by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), for nearly a year, we set out to learn what we could about Placer County's community gardens. In total we met or talked with 14 of the 17 known community gardens in Placer County which included hours of community garden exploration and touring, meetings with community garden leaders, walking the community garden grounds, touching the soil, hearing stories, and an online survey conducted to collect and review the information gathered. In the end, we gathered only some of what we learned and compiled it into the 2021 Placer County Community Gardens Review.

Because a document for community gardens like this, to our knowledge, does not exist for Placer County, our main purpose for putting together this review was simply to hear community garden leaders, discover what they are up to, and share what we learned with the general public. The perspectives we chose to look through were operational, organizational, and relational in nature. Meaning, we wondered how community gardens relate to those around them, how they were organized, and what they did to function and achieve their goals. But we kept an eye toward the ways Placer RCD could play a supporting role in the act of community gardening. We also kept an eye toward you, the reader, hoping that you, too, have an eye toward the sustenance and hope community gardens have been known to offer.

(continued on next page...)



**Andrew Justus Fritz**

AG & COMMUNITY  
PROGRAMS MANAGER



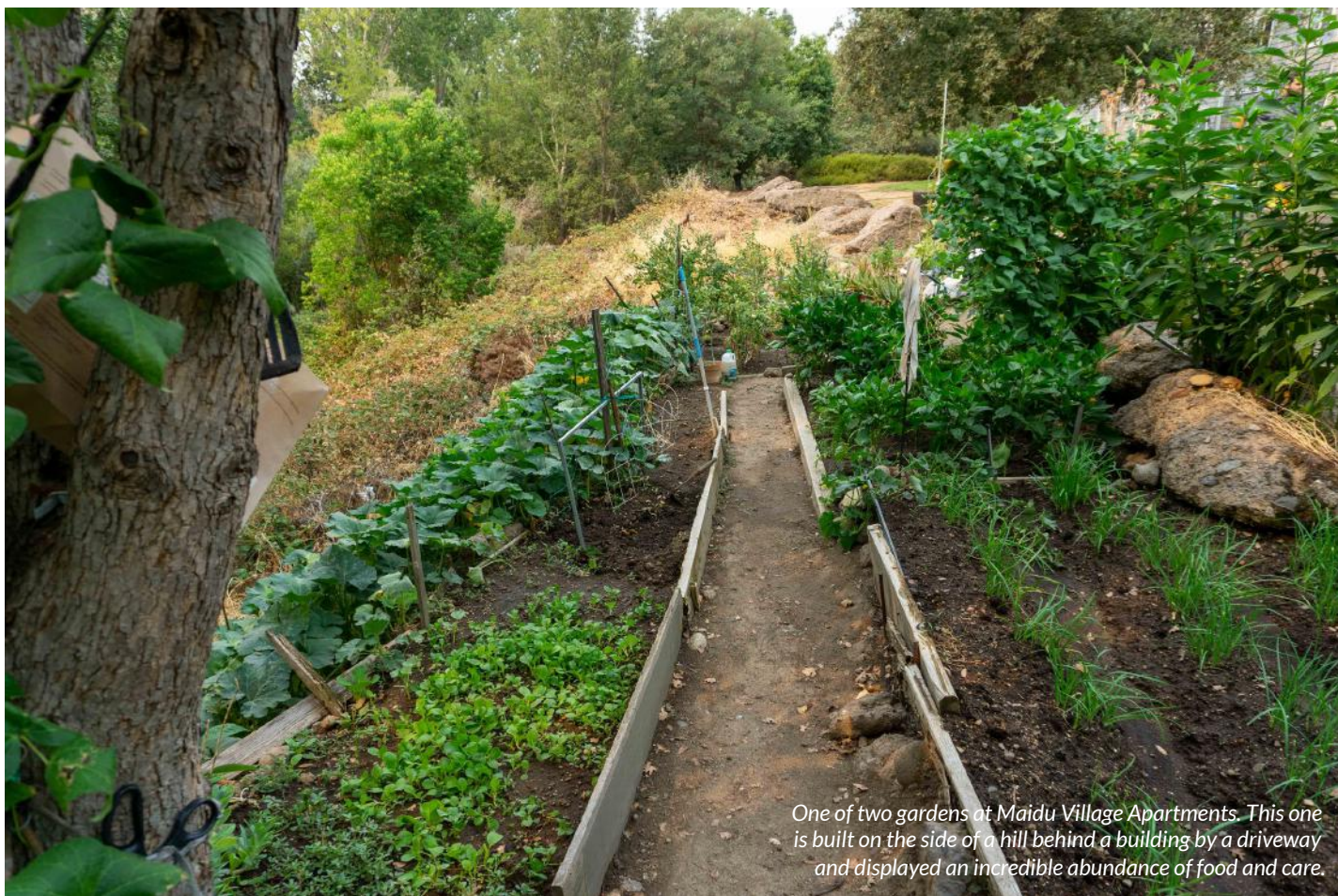
*"A healthy community garden that is able to adapt and pursue their goals in a sustainable way can be, and are, driving forces for health in the communities and landscapes they serve."*



We had assumptions going into this – we knew there would learn about challenges for community gardens; funding, organizing, volunteers, water access, difficult relationships, to name a few. We assumed gardens would also be thriving. We also assumed that Placer County would want to know this information for their own contemplation and action. What we didn't expect, however, was how quickly relationships began to form and how we began to build connections that supported one-another's efforts. Workshops were established. Networking of resources commenced. Fulfillment occurred. Everyone benefited.

This document is not complete or thorough. There is a lot more that could have been discussed. One challenge in creating this review was the time allotted to really sink our teeth into it. Had we had the bandwidth, we would have wanted more partner participation and diverse insight. This review is perspective-weak and is coming from a limited world-view which is why we steered away, as much as we could humble ourselves to, from making recommendations or offering analysis. This review would have also benefited from quantifying the impact community gardens make on its participants and those who are adjacent to it – like those patrons of food pantries that eat a vine-ripened organic tomato only a few hours old, the native insects that find food and habitat in the nooks and crannies of a compost pile, the carbon-capturing potential of soil in a community garden, or the participants, who would otherwise be lonely, that find a spiritual, physical, social, and creative home to nurture and learn from. We see this review as a humble stage or Whisper-ma-Phone to broadcast this often unseen aspect of our community.

We hope it is helpful for you in gathering a better understanding of community gardens in Placer County. Thank you for being here.



*One of two gardens at Maidu Village Apartments. This one is built on the side of a hill behind a building by a driveway and displayed an incredible abundance of food and care.*





## INTRODUCTION

*The apple orchard at Auburn 7th Day Adventist Community Garden in Auburn, CA.*

Welcome to the 2021 Placer County Community Garden Review. In this review, we've collected information from in-person visits and tours of community gardens as well as information from an online survey, to present a windshield survey, or review, of community gardening in Placer County.

The topics covered include a basic overview of community gardens, organization and leadership, education and programming, garden infrastructure, accessibility, art, conservation practices, growing, relationship to its neighborhood, relationship to the food insecure community, and with the future of community gardens.

Within most of these main topics there are sub-topics. If you haven't already, please read the preface in the previous pages to gain a better understanding of how this document was put together.

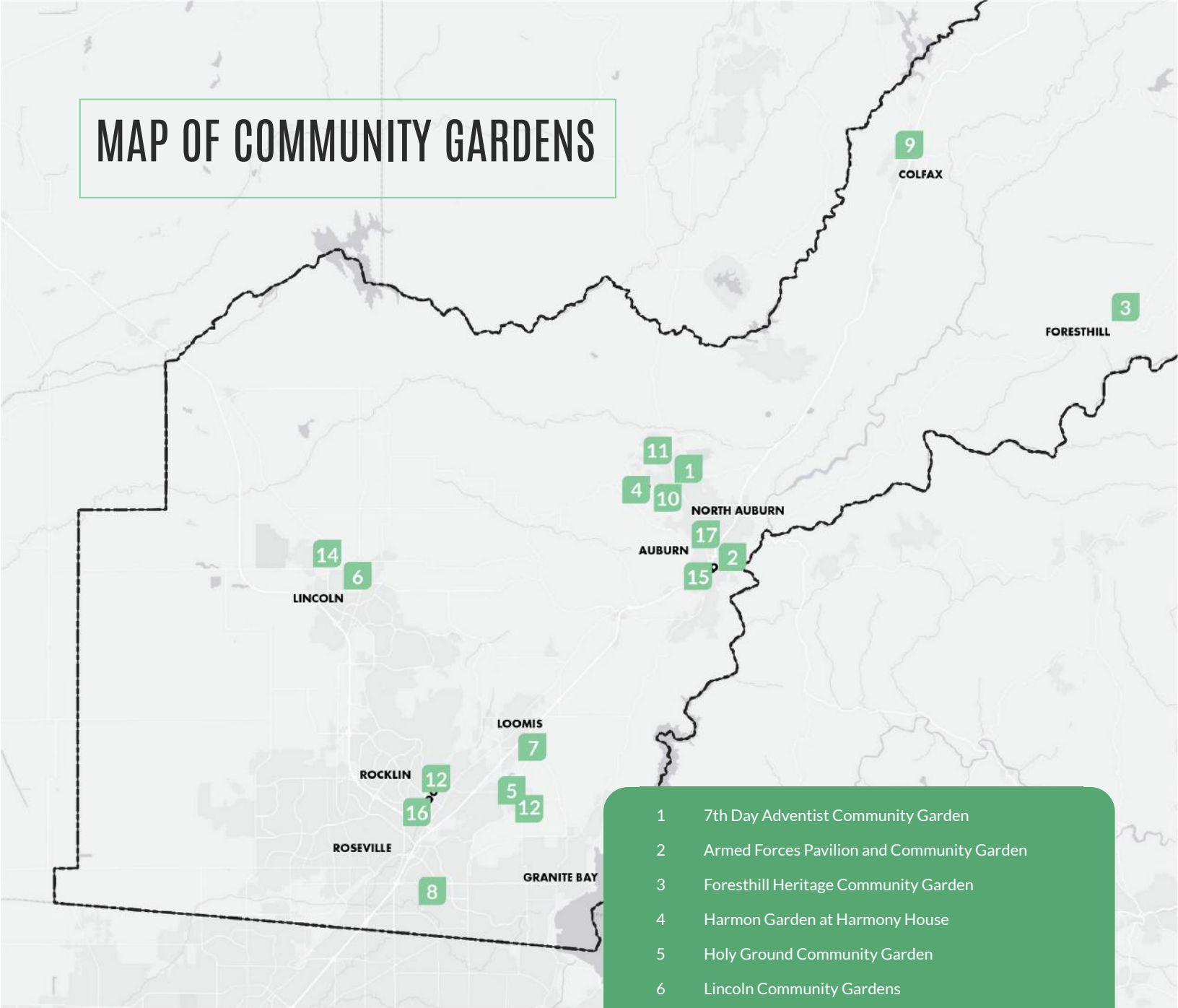
Although not explicitly stated, the contents can be split into three main sections: 1) what's happening in the garden, 2) what's happening around the community garden, and 3) the future. The format is that of a survey with statistics followed, when needed, with some anecdotal observations and limited analysis or conclusions.

The topics were chosen, in-part, due to early conversations with community garden leaders and what seemed important to them and in-part from input offered by the Urban Agriculture Advisory Committee; a committee of local stakeholders invited by the Placer Resource Conservation District, to advise and consult on matters related to urban agriculture, diversity and inclusivity, and other related matters. The other influence affecting the topics was our own office especially on the topic of conservation, education and programming, infrastructure, and growing.

Some topics that you would think would be in here are not. For example, in the infrastructure section, there is no mention of raised garden beds. It's not that they aren't important or a large expense for a community garden – it's just that nobody really talked about them as a particular concern. But there were some topics that weren't discussed unless prompted. For example, we made a point of asking about artwork in the garden and asking about that gardens ecological community in which it plays a role.

Finally, please read this review as an initial look into community gardens in Placer County. It's an entry-point into something that has potential for evolution or as a guide for conversations and action as it relates to community gardens in Placer County.

# MAP OF COMMUNITY GARDENS



## 17 Community Gardens

- 1 7th Day Adventist Community Garden
- 2 Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden
- 3 Foresthill Heritage Community Garden
- 4 Harmon Garden at Harmony House
- 5 Holy Ground Community Garden
- 6 Lincoln Community Gardens
- 7 Loomis FUMC Faith Garden
- 8 Maidu Village Senior Apartment
- 9 Outfielder's Community Garden
- 10 Senior Garden
- 11 Rock Creek Mobile Home Park Community Garden
- 12 Rolling Oaks Community Garden
- 13 Sacred Ground Community Garden at Sierra Christain Church
- 14 Saint James Community Garden
- 15 School Park Community Food Garden
- 16 Unknown at Johnson Springview Park
- 17 Valley Oaks Senior Apartments Community Garden





# ABOUT PLACER COUNTY'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

*The FUMC Community Garden in Loomis, CA.*

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: PURPOSE AND MISSION OF COMMUNITY GARDENS

To provide an inviting and warm atmosphere for gardeners and help those in our community to grow fresh traditional produce for their immediate and extended families.

To allow seniors a place to grow vegetables to supplement their groceries, or flowers/plants to nurture the soul.

To provide a safe space for the clients of Harmony House to spend time outside and participate in therapeutic community gardening. Long term goal of producing enough fruit and vegetables to do house healthy living demonstrations in our kitchen and eventually to have a stand at a local farmers market, to teach pre-employment skills to clients and raise funds to improve the garden and our clients' lives.

To bring our residents together using their skill and sharing their harvest with each other. Brings residents out of their apartments for socialization someday.

To allow the people in the community who don't have the space to create their own gardens to come in and be able to grow food.

To grow fresh produce for People with Food Insecurity and to provide fellowship for the Garden team.

Our mission is to provide a safe area where Lincoln residents can grow their own food to supplement their diets, learn basic skills for growing plants, meet like-minded persons, and hopefully learn from each other.

The garden ("Garden") is a sanctuary for seniors to garden and learn together to produce healthy, fresh foods for their families and the community, while nurturing and protecting the natural environment.

Provide produce for our Community Services clients and other food banks.

To give veterans a common place to work together on healing, to join with the community and learn about each other. Helping with growing vegetables and plants. Harvesting and providing food for the Homeless and the families that work in the garden.

# ABOUT PLACER COUNTY'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

## COSTS AND FEES

Of the ten community garden surveyed, half require an annual fee ranging anywhere from \$25 to \$225 per year. Fees, in general, cover water and maintenance of the garden. Other fees, like liability insurance, are typically covered by the community gardens fiscal sponsor of which every garden toured and surveyed had one.

## OPEN AND EXCLUSIVE / INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNAL

Community gardens can be distinguished into several categories. They can either be open to the general public, referred to as “open” or they can be exclusive to a particular club, community, or neighborhood - referred to as “exclusive.” A further way to distinguish community gardens is how they participate in the growing food. Some community gardens offer individual plots for one person or family of which the produce serves their own interests. The other type of participation is communal (sometimes referred as collective) meaning that a group of people work together as a whole that serves them as a whole or others. A communal plot is cared for by many people for many people whereas an individual plot is cared for typically by one person for that one person (and sometimes for others).

These distinctions are a function of the goals and mission of the garden, their neighborhood and cultural matrix, and the resources available. These distinctions are not exclusive, however. For example, many gardens host individual and communal plots within the same community garden. Rarely, however, is a garden both open to the general public and exclusive. Either there are requirements for membership or there are not.

Of the gardens surveyed, 60% (9) are open to the general public whereas 40% (5) are exclusive to a particular club, neighborhood, or other organization. Furthermore, of the 14 gardens surveyed on this question, 29% (4) are a hybrid of communal and individual garden plots, 50% (7) offer garden plots for individuals only, and 21% (3) offer communal garden plots.



*The Senior Garden (PCGC Garden: Managed by Auburn Golden Gardeners, Inc.) in Auburn, CA. This is an example of an exclusive community garden with both individual and communal growing plots.*



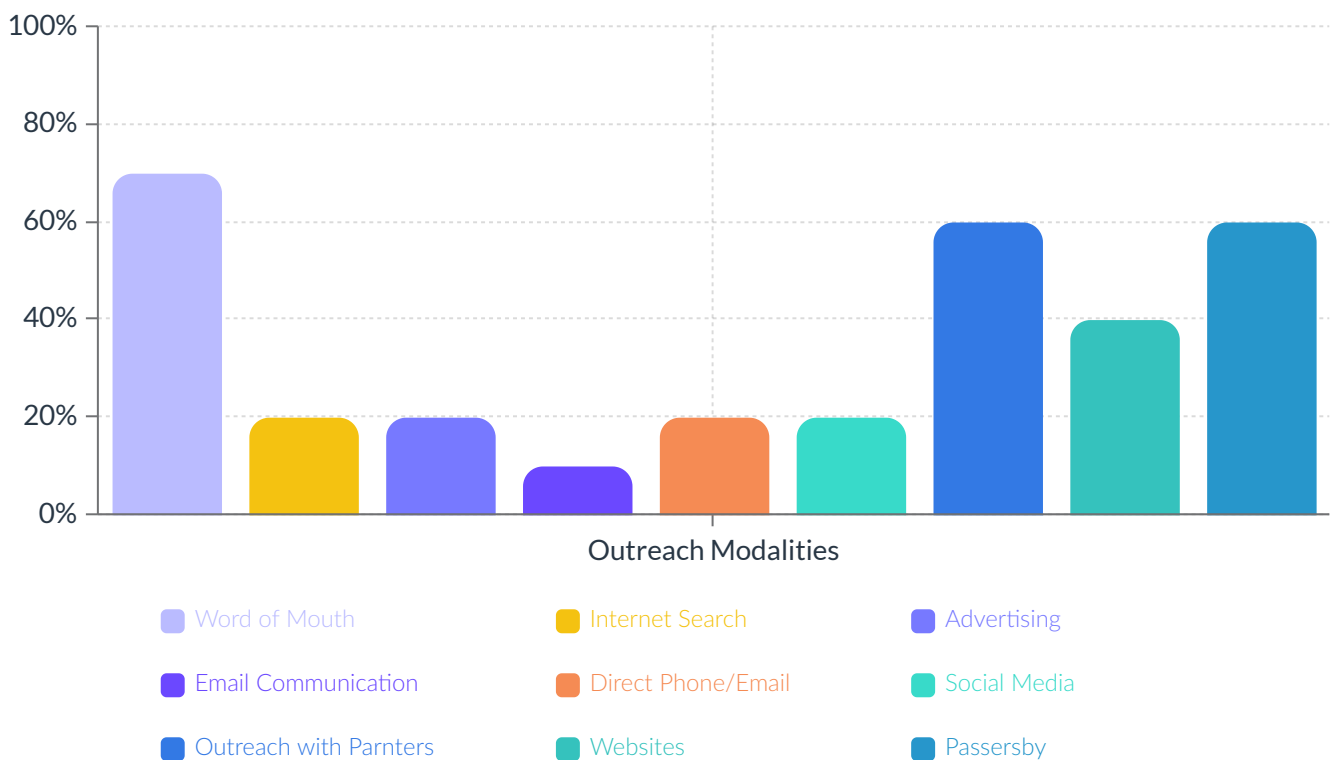
# ABOUT PLACER COUNTY'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

## HOW PEOPLE LEARN ABOUT THEIR GARDEN

The question “How do people hear or learn about this garden?” was asked as part of the online survey. Of those who responded (10) 70% said word of mouth, 20% through internet searches, 20% through advertising, 10% through email communications, 20% through direct phone/email, 20% through social media, 50% via outreach with partners, 40% through websites, and 60% through other means including monthly community/supporting organization newsletters and passersby.

Of the community gardens surveyed (10), 40% (4) have a website or social media account whereas 60% (6) do not.

How People Learn About Community Gardens





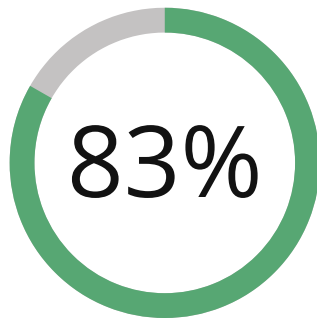
# ABOUT PLACER COUNTY'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

## AVAILABILITY AND VACANCY

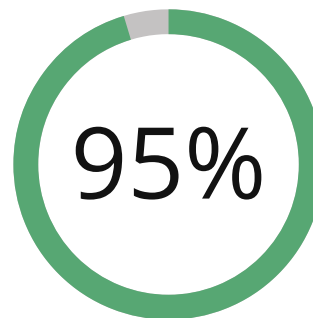
Between the 10 community gardens that participated in the online survey, they hosted 165 total plots (including communal and individual) with a vacancy rate of 25%. The vacancy rate among exclusive gardens was astonishingly low at only 5% whereas the vacancy rate for open gardens stands at nearly 36%. Part of the reason for a much higher vacancy for open gardens is due, in part, from a larger community garden undergoing management transition in which the garden had been closed for several years. If that is taken out of consideration, the vacancy rate for open gardens is 17% - still currently significantly higher than exclusive gardens.

There are no discernable and easily decipherable patterns that can make sense of the difference in vacancy rates between open and exclusive gardens. It may not be feasible to consider the difference given the relatively low sample size. However, speculations on factors that may influence this observation include walkability and proximity, safety and security, population density, life stage of participants, intrinsic motivations, accountability to ones community, and or cultural and leadership values.

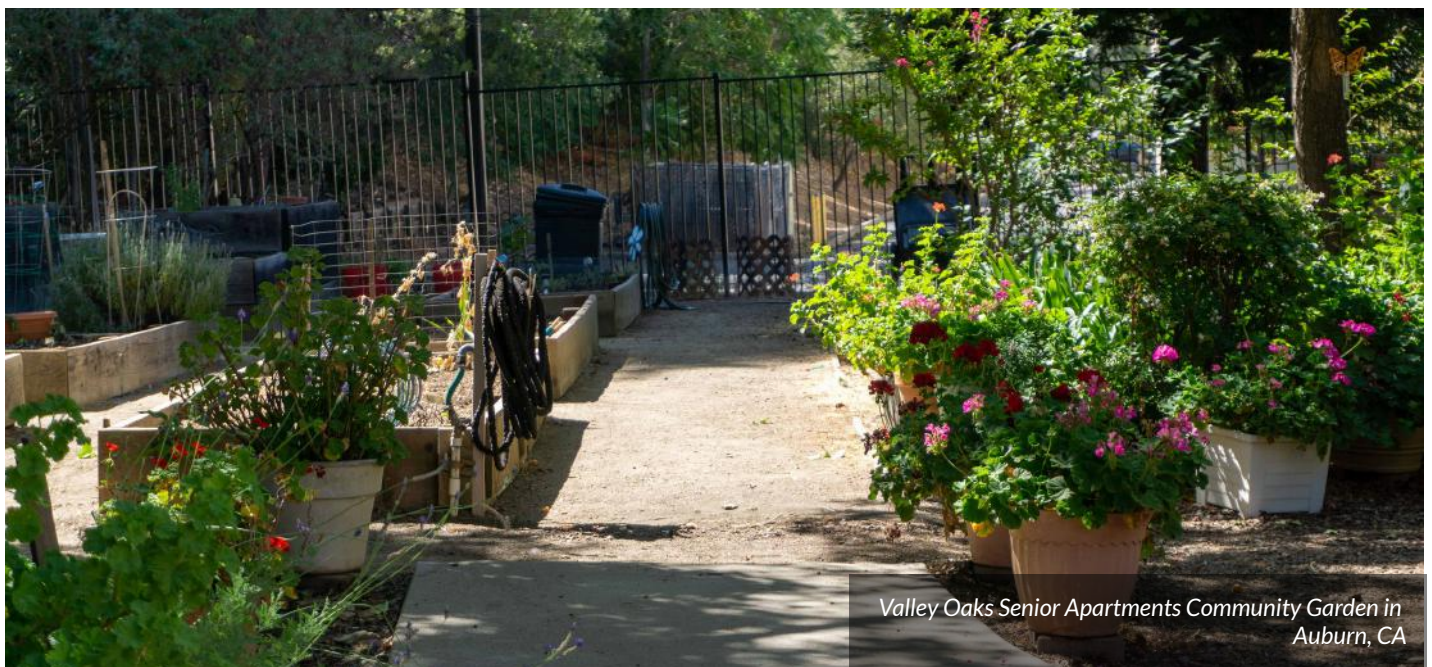
It is worth noting, however, that if a garden plot is vacant, it is often still planted by a member of the community garden.



RESERVED BEDS FOR OPEN  
COMMUNITY GARDENS



RESERVED BEDS FOR EXCLUSIVE  
COMMUNITY GARDENS





# ABOUT PLACER COUNTY'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: WHAT IS GOING WELL IN THE GARDEN?

Gardeners really tending to their gardens, coordinating watering duties with relatives and enjoying their time in the garden.

The winter garden planting was something new, and the crops were extremely successful. It opened up possibilities and brought in residents who had not yet secured a garden bed.

The garden has motivated clients to spend time outside for reasons other than smoking cigarettes. Some have really benefited and participate in watering.

Residents are wanting the area to look nice and be full of growth year around.

People are growing!

The teamwork of a small team. The increase of additional organizations benefitting from our efforts.

We are always full and have a waiting list of eager gardeners.

We call for workdays several times a year in which most members participate. During these times I am teaching and having fun.

Our sense of community is much improved over the past.

The level of garden knowledge is good.

Some plants like tomatoes and peppers seem to grow well every year.

So many complements!



# ABOUT PLACER COUNTY'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: WHAT IS GOING NOT-SO-WELL IN THE GARDEN?

Theft of veggies/plants, disruptive critter visits (cats and occasional deer).

Some gardeners are feeling overwhelmed with the amount of work involved, and need help maintaining their bed.

Time management. Due to the work load there is limited time to dedicate to gardening and if things are not prioritized then things do not get done.

The lack of volunteers and time.

Recruiting more volunteers.

Our irrigation system needs constant monitoring, and when leaks occur, the system must be turned off for the member to make repairs. Produce was not as bountiful as other years due in part to the extreme heat. I will encourage members to plant earlier next year. We weren't able to give as much to the Salt Mine.

Because we are a senior garden, many of our members aren't able to help with shared garden tasks. Manual labor tasks can be difficult to complete.

Underground irrigation is sometimes problematic. Insects (aphids?) were a problem this year. Some loss due to birds and rodents.

Always needing donations.

Periodic vandalism.

Continual water pressure issues.

# ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP



Tool shed at Foresthill Heritage Community Garden in Foresthill, CA.

## ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL

There are as many ways to organize a community garden as there are community gardens – and there is no one right or wrong way to structure and coordinate one. Yet, if the community garden participants and structure are attuned to its resources, opportunities and constraints, values, and culture, it will often organize itself in a way that sustains the garden long-term and will often change over time to adapt to new operating environments. A community garden itself can express a collective personality, or a consciousness, which can be used to inform the organizational model. But when an organizational model is inelegantly and egotistically placed onto a garden and the alignment isn't a good fit then frustration, tension, wasted energy, and organizational atrophy can be the result.

To get a sense of what organizational models or leadership looks like among community gardens here in Placer County, listed below are responses from the online survey respondents in their own words within their respective garden:

- Single manager. Property is owned by church which is run by 7 elected members of the Vestry.
- Property staff organizes maintenance and uses of the garden.
- I am passionate about gardening and do most of the planning, procurement, and development. I encourage clients and staff to participate, and some do, but I do not force the issue and we do what we can to keep things moving forward.
- Staff oversees everything residents want to grow and keep up the operations of the garden area.
- We are re-vamping this garden next season, there will be one person in charge of the garden
- Single facilitator but each Garden team member helps make decisions.
- We currently have a steering committee of five gardeners. Also, the garden is divided in four with four Garden Captains who watch over a member's plot if he/she is ill or on vacation.
- AGG is a public benefit non-profit corporation with a board of 9 members.
- Single garden manager reports to Community Services director.
- There is a board.

In an admittedly over-simplification, there are two organization models that emerge from the statements above. The first is one that has a single leader, or single entity (e.g. board or vestry), that establishes how the garden functions and establishes roles. The second organizational model observed involves a more distributed and complex structure that gives autonomy and authority to groups to guide and make decisions on behalf of the garden. This flattens the hierarchal model and, in some ways, inverts it. (continued...)



# ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

(...CONTINUED)

30% of gardens surveyed include committees or subcommittees to carry out the functions of their respective community garden. While this is not indicative of any particular organizational model, it does show that the garden is large enough, complex enough, and or experiencing a different set of questions that would encourage the use of committees. It's worth noting that many community gardens are very small and would not, or could not, benefit from more complex organizational models.

One other anecdotal observation noted in the surveys and in-person was this: community gardens that seek to educate themselves or invite the expertise of others to teach and guide their practices, are likely attempting to answer and resolve more challenging questions outside of the basic needs required to sustain the community garden.

More research and understanding in this area can be done to help make better sense of the organizational models of community gardens – and to help new community gardens get started. The particular interest and understanding in this is significant. In organizational and psychological development theories, an organism or an organization can transform in response to the larger questions besetting our communities. Community gardens are not immune to income and racial inequality, climate change, water resources, ecological collapse, or societal fragmentation. In fact, in many ways, community gardens today, and especially in Placer County, are a response to some of the larger existential pressure points experienced as a community.. Healthy community garden organizations that are able to adapt and pursue their goals in a sustainable way can be, and are, a driving force for health in the communities and landscapes they serve.

## THRIVING

Eighty percent (8) of community garden leaders who responded to the online survey consider their garden to be thriving while 20% responded did not agree that their garden was thriving. The content of the survey did not examine this question further but bears further understanding.

## ASSOCIATIONS

Of the gardens surveyed and toured (14), 2 gardens are part of a larger supporting association. The Senior Garden in Auburn, CA, is a member of the California Garden Clubs, Inc. while the Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden is a member of the Forgotten Soldier Program.

## LIABILITY

All the gardens reporting on the online survey, and those toured, except for two (15%), have a form of liability insurance provided to them by their supporting organization or purchased by themselves if they are a stand-alone non-profit entity.



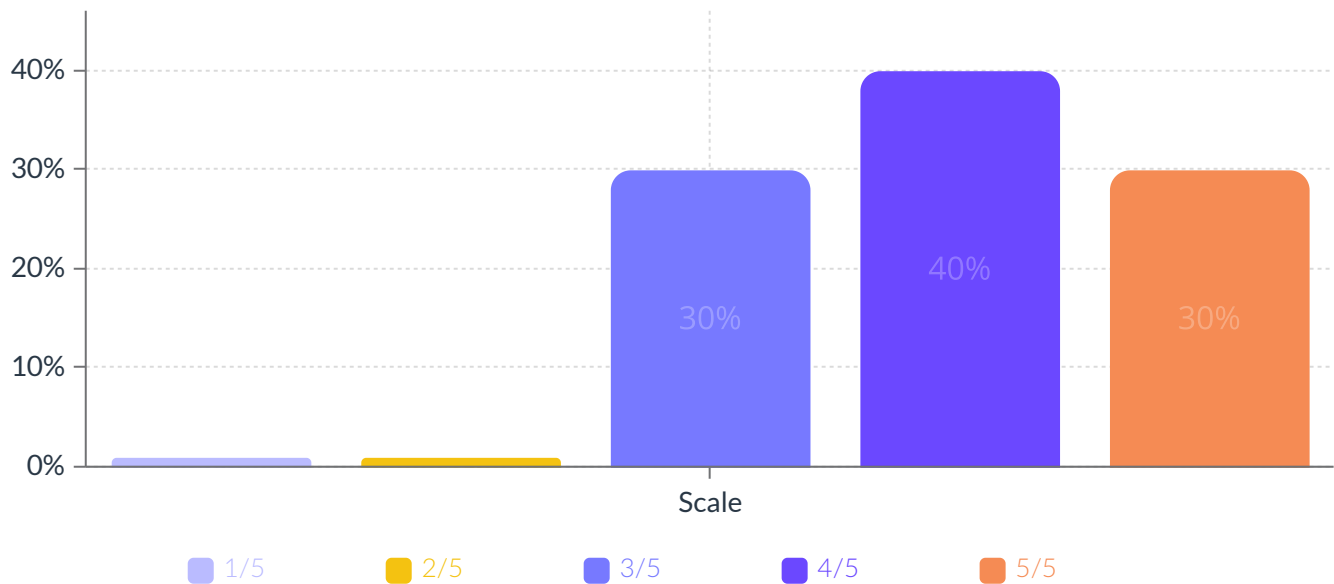
# ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

## LEADERSHIP JOY

We asked participants of the online survey, “On a 5-star scale, how much are you enjoying your role as a community garden manager?”

Of the 10 responses, 30% reported a 3/5, 40% reported a 4/5, and 30% reported a 5/5.

On a 5-star scale, how much are you enjoying your role as a community garden manager?





# ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

## ON VOLUNTEERS

The question was asked, “How reliant is the garden on volunteers?” They were asked to respond on a scale of 1 to 5. Ten percent (1) responded with a 1/5 (no to little reliance), 10% (1) responded with a 2/5 (limited reliance), 20% (2) responded with a 3/5 (some reliance), 10% (1) responded with a 4/5 (major reliance), and 50% (5) responded with a 5/5 (significant operational reliance).

All of the five community gardens who indicated a significant operational reliance on volunteers either need or desire additional volunteers to support the functioning of their respective community gardens. In total, 80% of the 10 respondents need or desire additional volunteers whereas 20% (2) are not in need of additional volunteers. It is worth noting that one of those two gardens, the Auburn 7th Day Adventist Community Garden, is operated by a handful of volunteers that operate more as a very small farm than a conventional community garden – producing high quality and quantity of produce with fewer human resources.



*Holy Ground and Sacred Ground Community Gardens at Sierra Christian Church in Loomis, CA. Combined, these gardens rely entirely on volunteers to manage large communal plots. Most of the produce grown here is donated.*

# ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: ON WHAT INSPIRES LEADERSHIP OF A COMMUNITY GARDEN

The gardeners inspire me. Some of them work 2 and 3 jobs but always stop by the garden to harvest indigenous wild plants, vegetables and strawberries which they share with their immediate and extended families. Their personal stories and their amazingly positive attitudes touch my heart and life.

The health benefits it provides for our senior residents - both emotional and physical. Gardening gets them out of their apartments into the sun and fresh air.

For years I volunteered at the Virgil Traynor Community garden in Auburn, where we produced several tons of vegetables a year, which were donated to local food closets and community outreach programs. I saw the benefit of a program like that for the local community.

To bring our residents together and enjoying being outside and out of their apartments.

I am a farmer myself and the gratification I get from my own is something I would love for other people to have.

Service is My Rent to live on earth. People need people!

As a retired nurse I enjoy teaching others how to better their lives. As a Placer County Master Gardener, I teach research based information on gardening and pest management to the general public. I offer classes in the spring on basic gardening to the members of the LCG and St James CG.

I work with a small steering committee to help with administration, physical tasks, and problem solving.

I believe in the value of the garden to our community, and the potential for improvement in quality of life for seniors.

I assisted one year and the next year the leader didn't want to lead any more, and no one else volunteered.

It helped bring heart & soul into the community. A safe place to come together and make our community a better place. Service to a greater vision to help include the whole of community.



# ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: "AS A COMMUNITY GARDEN, WHAT, IF ANY, CHANGES HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT TO MAKE?"

Convincing stakeholders for the need of a new fence while also securing funding for it.

Installing new beds (raised) and rehabilitating the old ones (replaced rotted wood with cement blocks).  
Reallocating garden beds based on appropriate uses or taking away from folks who did not garden, but wanted the bed. Making sure that everyone who wants to garden gets a chance to do so.

Our main road block to success is funding. We are able to make the small donations that we have gotten to spread well but the time frame is slowed by lack of immediate funds for upgrades like auto irrigation and expanding the garden plot area.

Expansion [of garden], water spickets and hoses in better locations, unwanted squirrel and turkeys in the area, more soil for the boxes, some free items for the low-income residents to garden with.

Recruiting volunteers.

Leaking water pipes can be a problem, especially if members install timers for irrigation. This is my main worry and I am always checking for leaks.

We are a new garden. It was difficult to form our management structure in order to negotiate with the [landowner] and to get buy-in from legacy gardeners.

Construction to increase main water line (currently only 1") to increase water pressure.



# EDUCATION AND PROGRAMMING



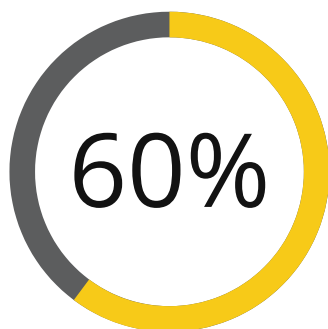
A soil health presentation by Placer RCD at the Senior Garden in Auburn, CA.

## EDUCATION AND PROGRAMMING

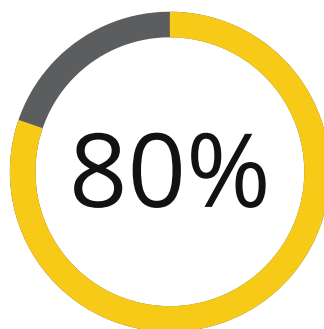
When asked in the online survey if community gardens are currently offering programming, either through knowledgeable leadership or education workshops and presentations, to its members, 60% responded "yes" while 40% responded "no". When asked if their respective community garden would welcome additional educational and programming resources, 80% responded in the affirmative.

## A PLACER COUNTY COMMUNITY GARDEN NETWORK

The Placer Resource Conservation District is interested, should there be capacity and funding, to develop a community garden network. When asked either in-person, or through the online survey, "Would you see a benefit for you or for the community garden to being part of a Placer County Community Garden Network?", 100% agreed. Many community garden leaders agreed that networking with other community gardens would be beneficial in terms of morale and sharing of local knowledge.



Currently offer some kind of education and programming for their members.



Would like additional educational and programming for their members.



Would be interested in being part of a community garden network.



# INFRASTRUCTURE



## FENCING

Fencing is one of the largest expenditures for community gardens and many gardens have difficulty affording one. Gardens require fencing to prevent theft either from wildlife including humans. According to the online survey, 70% of gardens use a fence to prevent unwanted birds and or animals from entering the garden while one other garden is currently applying for grants to secure funding for their own fence. The Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden, for programmatic reasons, chooses not to have a fence.

While some gardens have fencing to prevent unwanted birds or animals, it takes a more reliable and secure (and more expensive) fence to prevent theft and vandalism. Sixty percent of respondents to the online survey indicated that they have a fence specifically to limit theft and vandalism with another community garden (mentioned above) applying for grants to install a fence that would be sufficient to deter vandalism and theft – a common problem this particular garden experiences.

## IRRIGATION

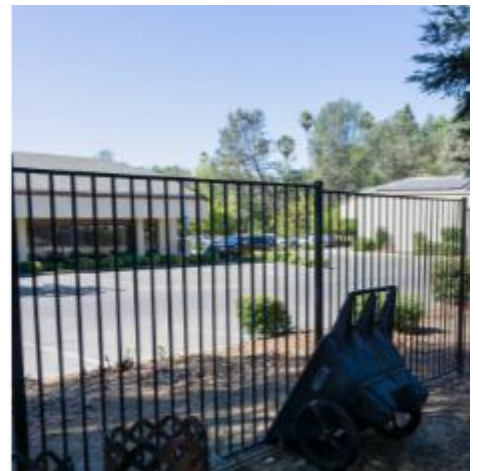
While not asked in the online survey, irrigation was a frequent topic of discussion with community gardens. There are always new needs, new hoses, replacement parts, and a need for better, more efficient, irrigation. Throughout this review you will see several comments on this.



Hoses for irrigation at Maidu Village Apartments Community Garden in Roseville, CA.



Pest fencing around a raised bed at Rolling Oaks Community Garden in Rocklin, CA.



Security fencing at Valley Oaks Senior Apartments Community Garden in Auburn, CA.



# ACCESSIBILITY



*Wide, smooth paths at Valley Oaks Senior Apartments Community Garden in Auburn, CA.*

## LANGUAGES

Community gardens who reported to the online survey indicated that English is the primary language spoken at each garden with 20% (2) indicating that they would like additional translation and resources to accommodate non-English languages. The St. James Community Garden in Lincoln, CA has a community of Nahuatl and Spanish speaking members of its community garden. Rolling Oaks Community Garden in Rocklin, CA, also indicated a need to accommodate languages other than English.

## GARDENING ACCOMMODATIONS FOR SENIORS OR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Of the 10 online survey respondents, 90% indicated that their community garden accommodates seniors or persons with a disability with a garden bed or other gardening opportunity. When asked if the garden was ADA accessible, 30% (3) said “Yes”, 40% said “Partially”, 20% (2) indicated that their garden was not ADA accessible and have no plans to make it accessible at this time. One other garden was unsure.



*Elevated raised beds at Maidu Village Apartments Community Garden in Roseville, CA facilitates gardeners who benefit from standing rather than kneeling.*



# ART IN COMMUNITY GARDENS

## ART IN COMMUNITY GARDENS

Art used to inspire or provoke an emotional response, as a form of self-expression, or to generate intellectual curiosity, was reported to exist in 20% (2) of community gardens who participated in the online survey. However, 60% of community gardens that did not have art on display wish to include art within their community garden while 20% of gardens expressed no interest in utilizing art within the programming of their community garden.

Possibly the most visible display of formal artwork pieces that we observed was at the Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden in Auburn. However, whether or not it was reported in the survey, each garden utilized art either as form or function and to varying degrees.

*Photos from top to bottom:*

- 1) The Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden
- 2) The Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden
- 3) Rolling Oaks Senior Apartments Community Garden
- 4) The Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden





# CONSERVATION PRACTICES



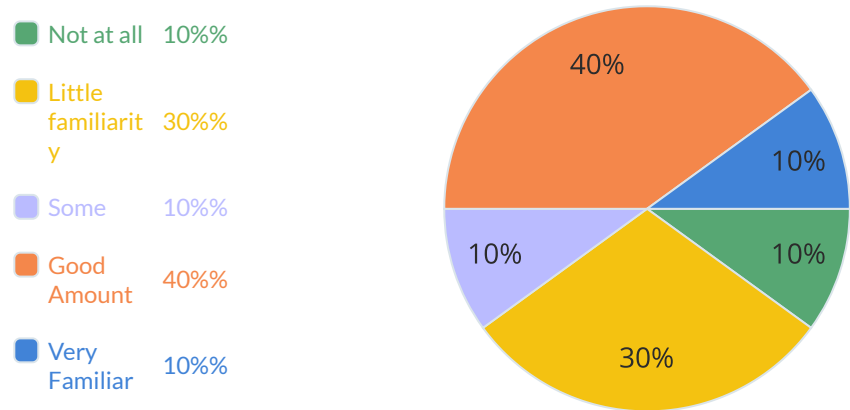
Conservation practices are those practices and techniques that protect and enhance soil, water, and ecological resources. They help to strength the immune system of plants, improve yield, build resilience to stressors brought on by climate change, and can even benefit our moods! To get a sense of the respondents’ familiarity with conservation practices, we asked a series of questions that gauged knowledge and understanding, interest in integrating conservation practices, and if there was interest in receiving assistance to fill knowledge and skills gaps as it relates to conservation practices.

## CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Participants were asked to rank, on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being “Not Familiar” and 5 being “Very Familiar” their familiarity with conservation practices .

Of the ten online survey respondents, 10% (1) indicated that they are “Not at all” familiar with conservation practices, 30% (3) indicated a 2/5 of “little familiarity”, 10% (1) indicated a 3/5 of “some familiarity”, 40% (4) indicated a 4/5 of “good familiarity”, and 10% (1) indicated a 5/5 score suggesting “high familiarity” with conservation practices.

### Familiarity with Conservation Practices



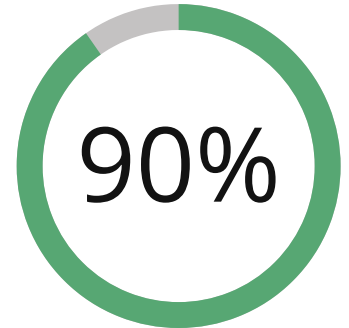


# CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Conservation practices, as a term or phrase, is not common vernacular used within the community garden nomenclature. There could be some limitation by the participants in answering this question with a high degree of understanding. And, of course, this question is subjective based only on the respondents realm of influence. One common occurrence related to habitat creation for pollinators and other beneficial insects. This was the highest reported conservation practices. However, much of the beneficial habitat utilizes non-native plants which can encourage native or beneficial insects, but has been known to present issues to native insect populations.

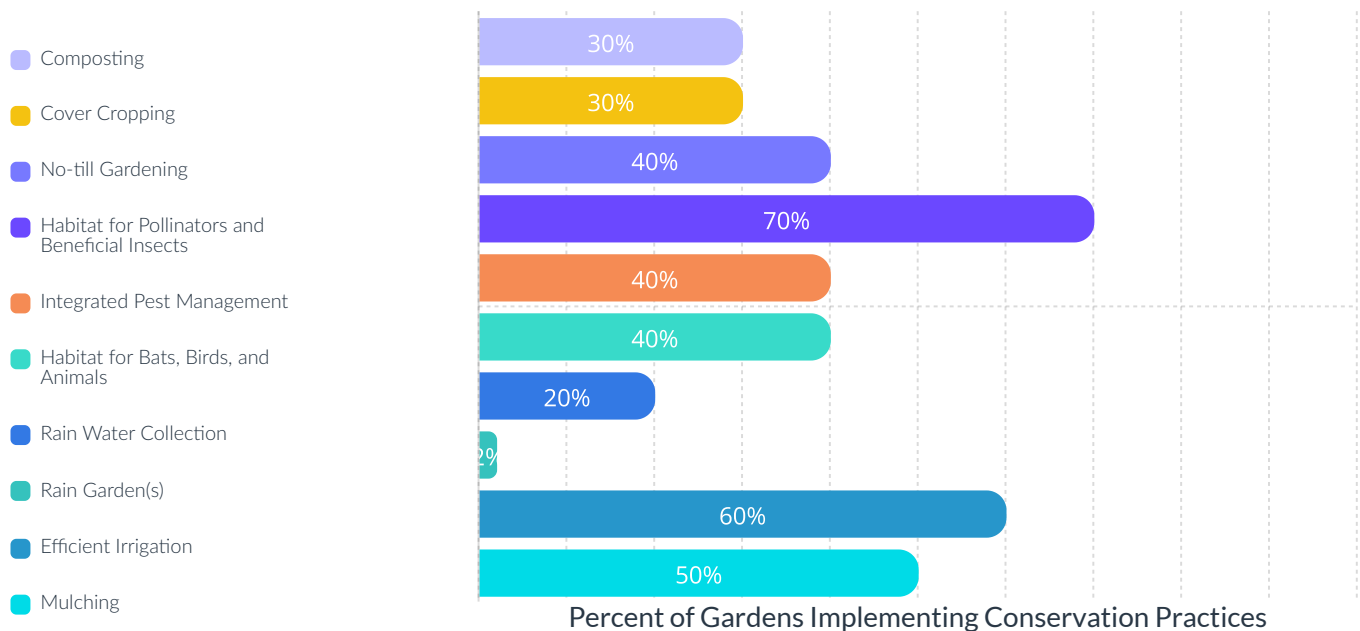
When asked if the community garden would like to implement more conservation practices like the ones mentioned above, 90% (9) said "Yes" and 10% (1) said "Maybe."

When asked what conservation practices are utilized within their respective community gardens respondents indicated the following:



90% of gardens surveyed want to implement more conservation practices.

## Implemented Conservation Practices at Community Gardens



# CONSERVATION PRACTICES

## GREEN WASTE AND COMPOSTING

Composting offers a tremendous opportunity to recycle nutrients and organic matter – limiting or reducing inputs while also improving soil health. Among the respondents of the online survey, 30% of gardens compost within their community garden, 60% have green waste and compostable materials removed via a green waste bin, 10% have space to pile it up without active composting, and the remaining 30% have it hauled away by other means.

Other community gardens that were toured, but that did not respond to the online survey, chose to dispose of green waste through green waste bins or other methods – but intentionally chose not to compost. Reasons cited for this included the difficulty in organizing community garden participants in maintaining the compost pile, the concern over smell, appearances, pests, and adequate space. One challenge for composting that was heard most often is that the material comes all at once (in the fall) and becomes difficult to manage. It is worth noting that composting, even with little care, will have little to no smell and no pests.



Compost bins at the FUMC Community Garden in Loomis, CA. This is an example of a 3-bin system where, as organic material breaks down, is moved to subsequent bins and then, eventually, sifted.



## GROWING

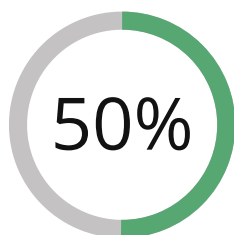
*The Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden in Auburn, CA.*

### GROWING ORGANICALLY AND PESTICIDE USE

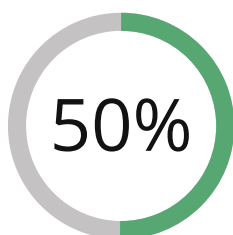
Of the ten gardens who participated in the online survey, 50% grow organically whereas the remaining 50% do not exclusively grow organically.

To manage pests, 50% of the online survey indicated that they use organic pesticides or methods consistent with organic principles whereas 20% use non-organic or synthetic pesticides and 30% use no pesticides.

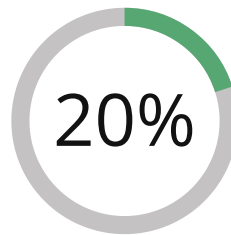
Grow Organically



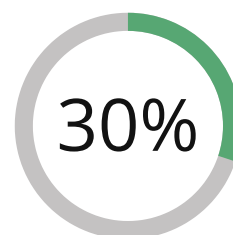
Use Organic Pesticides



Use Non-Organic Pesticides



Use No Pesticides



### GROWING IN WINTER

It is possible in Placer County, anywhere lower than 1500' in altitude, to grow year-round without high-tunnels or heat. This includes all known community gardens except Outfielder's Community Garden in Colfax, CA and the Foresthill Heritage Community Garden in Foresthill, CA. Of the gardens that responded in the survey, 30% of community gardens do not grow food throughout the year, 40% do, and in 30% of gardens some gardeners will continue to grow through the winter.

Anecdotally, it was discovered that many gardeners aren't aware that it's possible to grow in the winter and/or are unsure how.

### SPECIFIC PRODUCE GROWN FOR ETHNIC, CULTURAL, OR RELIGIOUS REASONS

One garden, Saint James Community Garden in Lincoln, CA, is especially unique in that some of its gardeners are ethnically Nahuatl (people native to southern Mexico). This community grows huehuezontle (amaranth), tzupil, pipila, and epazote that is unique to their heritage. No other garden indicated other specific produce grown for ethnic, cultural, or religious reasons.





## RELATIONSHIP TO NEIGHBORHOOD

*The Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden in Auburn, CA is open to the public for passive recreation and includes an inviting entry way off a main pedestrian and vehicle thoroughfare.*

Passive recreation, gleanings, or identifying with a community garden in a neighborhood are examples of ways in which one can interact and relate to a community garden outside of active participation in the garden itself. In other words, community gardens can play a role in the well-being and sense of belonging of the neighborhood at large – and not just the human neighborhood, but the other-than-human one, too.

### PASSIVE RECREATION

We asked the question, “is the general public allowed to use the space for passive recreation like sitting, looking, and walking?” Of the 10 community gardens who participated in the online survey, 30% (3) reported “Yes, open all the time,” 20% (2) responded with “Yes, open part-time,” 40% (4) responded “No, not open to the general public,” and the remaining respondent indicated the need for background checks and vetting to allow the general public.

### WALKABILITY

Of the ten gardens who participate in the online survey, 90% of gardens are considered walkable meaning that the public or garden participants are able, as a result of proximity and infrastructure, to walk to their garden safely. One garden, however, stated that their garden is not walkable and that it impacts their operations.

Anecdotally, other gardens that did not participate in the survey, including Holy Ground Community Garden and Sacred Ground Community Garden at Sierra Christian Church, due to its proximity and rural context, would not be considered walkable. However, the Rock Creek Mobile Home Park Community Garden, School Park Community Food Garden, Foresthill Heritage Community Garden, are walkable based on existing pedestrian infrastructure and assuming that it is perceived or experienced as safe.

# 90%

Community gardens in Placer County that are walkable



# RELATIONSHIP TO NEIGHBORHOOD



Locked gate and fence at Foresthill Heritage Community Garden in Foresthill, CA.



A "Please do not pick!" sign at the Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden in Auburn, CA.

## VISIBILITY

Some community gardens are inconspicuous, often tucked away behind buildings, trees, or in areas the public may not regularly come into contact with. Some of this is by design. More often, however, it is a function of the space available for community gardens. Examples of inconspicuous gardens include an unknown garden that exists in a gravel parking lot behind a baseball field in Rocklin, CA. Other open inconspicuous examples include Holy Ground Community Garden in Loomis and the School Park Community Food Garden in Auburn – both tucked away out of site of passersby.

Many open gardens, however, have high visibility. The Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden is on a main vehicle and pedestrian thoroughfare in downtown Auburn which elicits curious passive recreation off the street. Interestingly, the School Park Community Food Garden and the Armed Forces and Community Garden are directly adjacent to one another yet separated visually by topography, a fence, and shrubs. Those within the Armed Forces Pavilion and Community Garden would never know another community garden exists adjacent to it unless they had previous knowledge of it.

Another example of a highly visible open community garden is the Lincoln Community Garden in Lincoln which rests at the intersection of neighborhood streets.

In general, many exclusive gardens are inconspicuous to the general public. The Harmony Garden at Harmony House exists behind their building; it is not open to the public for privacy and safety reasons. The Rolling Oaks Community Garden in Rocklin resides behind a building and out of site of the general public – again as part of its intentions and out of practicality – it's where there was space. However, exclusive gardens are generally very visible and accessible to its own community.

## VANDALISM AND THEFT

Within the last year, 30% (3) of the online survey respondents reported either vandalism or theft. The remaining 70% (7), and the four additional gardens toured but who did not submit an online survey, indicated that theft or vandalism has not been an issue for them in the previous year. 60% of gardens (6) use fencing specifically to limit or prevent vandalism and theft. One or more gardens surveyed are actively pursuing more secure fencing to prevent theft and vandalism.

# 30%

Placer County  
community gardens that  
experienced theft or  
vandalism in the past  
year.

# RELATIONSHIP TO NEIGHBORHOOD

## GLEANNING

Gleaning is the allowance of the general public to harvest food for themselves especially for those in need. Few gardens allow for this. The Gleaning Garden in Carmel, IN, is one example of the few that allowed, and actively encouraged the public, to take what they need for one meal at a time. It's a challenging and unfamiliar concept and practice. It stems from an ancient agricultural practice which allowed widows and others in-need to glean from the edges of fields after harvest – it was a way of supporting the community. In some ways, the ancient practice of gleaning is the modern day version of food pantries.

Of the ten respondents to the online survey, 70% (7), do not allow gleaning. One garden (10%) allowed gleaning to people approved by the garden leadership, one was not familiar with gleaning, and one other suggested that gleaning was not necessary.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: BENEFITTING THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOOD

"It is representative of adding beauty, peace, and meditative space to the local residential area."

"Aesthetically pleasing."

"Currently the community garden is limited in its ability to support the neighboring areas, however in the future we would like to see harvests go to community events, farmers markets and food closets. "

"For pollinator species we provide pesticide free plants and blooms. Our hope is to give them a sporting chance in the community and develop a sanctuary for their continued growth."

"It really depends on if you have space to have your own garden."

"Aesthetically pleasing, pollinator activity and support (bees, birds, frogs, lizards)"

"We try keep a perimeter of flowers and blooming shrubs cared for and pruned to be enjoyed by people driving or walking by. Many times people will stop and take photos."

"The garden provides areas to sit and picnic tables for eating. It is used as a stop-over for walkers."

"Not sure it does directly as it is mostly commercial properties."

"Enjoyment, meditation, gatherings, music, and yoga!"



# RELATIONSHIP TO FOOD INSECURE COMMUNITIES

First  
United  
Methodist  
Church  
of  
Loomis

## FAITH COMMUNITY GARDEN

The fresh food grown in this Community Garden is used to feed "the least of us"! We donate this food to the Placer Food Bank, Loomis Senior Life Center, Loomis FUMC members and to the team that feeds clients from The Gathering Inn. We do NOT use toxic herbicides or pesticides to manage the common garden pests. The flowers are planted purposely to attract pollinators and to add a wonderful environment for our volunteers and visitors.

### ON FOOD (IN)SECURITY

Seventy percent of community gardens who participated in the online survey indicated that the garden donates produce to local charities, nonprofits, food pantries/banks, and other organizations to help alleviate food insecurity. Importantly, the food being donated is likely organic and more nutritious than store-bought produce – helping to fill a gap of fresh food scarcity known to exist within the food insecure community.

The scope of the survey did not attempt to quantify the amount as many gardens do not currently do this (though some do). However, below are the responses of how produce is used by each community garden:

*Non-rented boxes are planted for the benefit of the Pantry, the Church's food outreach distribution group. The Pantry serves approximately 80 clients a month with free food, some of which is grown in the CG. The gardeners share produce with immediate and extended family members which approximates 475 individuals in the community.*

*Residents grow for their own use, and to share with their friends/family.*

*In this initial phase we are currently trying out new species to determine what is best suited for this environment. The vegetable and fruit that have been produced have been used for educational purposes and cooking demonstrations for our clients.*

*Individuals treat their own areas as they see fit for what they are growing.*

*People who grow their own things are in charge of what they want to do with the produce.*

*Donated and consumed by Garden team.*

*Each individual or family that is renting a bed uses their own produce, usually members take extra produce to the Salt Mine Food Closet for distribution to needy families. In the summer produce can be stored in the shed and a designated person collects it and runs it over to the Salt Mine.*

*Primarily used by grower, often shared with club members, neighbors, families, etc. At this time, there is no formal contribution program to other organizations.*

*Shared with our Community Services clients or donated to Auburn Interfaith Food Closet.*

*Local restaurant use. Used by growers and or donated.*

# RELATIONSHIP TO FOOD INSECURE COMMUNITIES

(...CONTINUED)

Community Gardens reported donating to the following places:

- St. James Church Food Pantry
- Low-income seniors in the building (Valley Oaks Senior Apartments Community Garden) and some donate to their family members as needed.
- Loomis Basin Food Pantry, Loomis Senior Life Center, and Placer Food Bank.
- Lincoln Salt Mine Food Closet
- Local Church
- Auburn Interfaith Food Closet
- Colfax Food Train
- Local Food [closets]

# 70%

Percentage of community gardens who donate produce to local charities, nonprofits, food pantries and other organizations.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: SERVING OTHERS

Of the 9 respondents to the question, “Does this garden serve any underserved or disadvantaged community in any way,” 89% affirmed whereas 11% responded “No.”

Those who affirmed their support for underserved or disadvantaged communities, share in their own words below:

- 95% of our gardeners are low-income residents living in apartments with no available access to gardens and are Hispanic.
- Rolling Oaks is a senior only (62 and older) affordable housing subsidized by HUD.
- Clients of Harmony house have a variety of mental health diagnosis'.
- Produce is given to food pantry clients, Loomis Senior Life Center clients and Placer Food Bank free farmers markets.
- In the past, the Rotary Club sponsored two beds which are supposed to be offered to needy families or individuals who will care for one or both beds for a year to supplement their diet .
- We have a Membership Dues Assistance Program for low-income seniors.
- Primary users of garden produce are financially struggling families.
- We offer a safe place.





## NEEDS AND THE FUTURE

*Saint James Community Garden in Lincoln, CA.*

### GROWTH

When asked if the community garden would like to expand in physical size to include additional amenities or garden space, 60% (6) said “No”, 20% (2), said “Yes, for more gardeners, participants, and amenities”, 10% (1) said “Yes, for amenities”, and 10% (1) said “Yes, for more gardeners and or participants.” Of those who said “Yes...” (40% in total), all indicated that there are limitations to physical expansions include the lack of access to physical labor and volunteers, funding to purchase materials, and or lack space to expand.

# 40%

Community gardens who wish to expand the physical size of their garden operations.



*The Harmony House Community Garden in Auburn, CA - envisioning a future with an orchard, bees, and more.*



# NEEDS AND THE FUTURE

## CONCERNS ON THE HORIZON

When asked, “Are there concerns on the horizon that may impact the long-term viability of the community garden?”, 20% (2) indicated “Yes” whereas 80% (8) indicated “No”. Of the two who indicated concern with long-term viability, the reasons stated relate to land insecurity, climate/weather changes, and cost of up-keep.

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: FUTURE GOALS

To get a fence, improve deficient boxes to encourage more participation of new gardeners referred by current gardeners.

A flat patio area for residents (including non-gardeners) to rest and socialize.

Expansion, More plants, more education, more crop diversity.

For all gardeners to keep growing things and sharing. To have more classes on how to make things better and more conservation.

Make it cleaner and more desirable for people to want to rent plots

Addition of garden art. Improvement of composting process. Reworking storage shed foundation and contents. Increase number of volunteers. Begin to winter garden, increase total output of fresh produce.

Our irrigation system needs updating and we would like to apply for a grant to do this.

Increase the number of raised beds for seniors to age into.

Raise funds for a more permanent and larger shelter structure.

Improve the gardening knowledge and practice of our members.

Involve outside people with our garden skill building.

Increase number of guest speakers and field trips.

Reduce losses due to rodents, birds, insects, or soil issues.

Make it more lush and colorful. Holding master gardener workshops, more yoga sessions.



# NEEDS AND THE FUTURE

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS: FUTURE GOALS

It would be great to learn to create and install a rain collection system for use later in the season!

Perhaps volunteers willing to help with bed cleanout to help residents get ready for spring planting. Also, some sponsorship in helping residents purchase plants for spring/summer.

I think we have the support that is needed.

Conservation needs and classes offered on our property like what can be grown in winter and how-to's.

Master Gardener support. Pursuing being a certified organic garden.

There is a tree on city property, directly across from the small shed in the LCG. Heavy branches hang over the roof, and the tree could be trimmed before any storm causes the branch to damage to the building.

We'd like to have an outside source for volunteer labor.

Possible review of recommended soil amendments after recent garden soil sample test.

Donations.

Awareness.

Visibility.