

Community gardens don't impact crime rate

September 8 2009



The garden at San Antonio's Denver Heights Community Center was one of the gardens included in the study of crime rates and community perceptions. Credit: Photo by Michelle Gorham

Urban residents across the United States have dug in to create green spaces in their neighborhoods, transforming vacant lots into colorful and crowd-pleasing community gardens. According to the American Community Gardening Association, there were an estimated 150,000 community gardens in the U.S. in 2004.

Researchers interested in how community gardens affect urban dwellers'

quality of life have studied and measured signs of neighborhood stabilization in garden communities. The good news: studies have revealed an increase in the number of owner-occupied dwellings, more personal income (as a result of attracting people with higher incomes to the community), and rent increases in areas surrounding community gardens.

But could the presence of green space contribute to lower crime levels in neighborhoods? The research team of M.R. Gorham, T.M. Waliczek, A. Snelgrove, and J.M. Zajicek from Texas State and Texas A&M Universities published a study in *HortTechnology* that helps answer this question. The purpose of the study was to determine if community gardens had an impact on reported property crimes in neighborhoods surrounding urban community gardens in Houston.

Eleven community gardens in Houston were chosen for the research. The researchers interviewed citizens and collected and mapped crime data around the 11 gardens. The numbers of property crimes (using 2005 crime data from the Houston Police Department) surrounding the community garden areas were then tallied and mapped for each area. Next, the numbers of crimes were evaluated along with demographic data from the 2000 U.S. Census. Statistical comparisons were made between community garden areas and randomly selected city areas that were within a 1-mile area surrounding each garden.

Waliczek explained that "initial results indicated no statistically significant differences between the mean number of crimes in community garden areas and the mean number of crimes in randomly selected areas. The results from further analysis indicated that there were no crime number differences between the community garden areas and the randomly selected areas."

According to the study, while anecdotal evidence has pointed to a

reduction in crime surrounding community gardens, this research did not support that premise or show that the presence of a community garden can be used as a predictor for the number of property crimes.

But crime data accounted for only one element of the study; input from residents showed another, more hopeful outcome. The scientists found that people living in community garden areas reported the gardens to be a positive influence on their neighborhoods. Residents linked the presence of the gardens to neighborhood revitalization and perceived immunity from crime, noting changes such as the cessation of illegal activity, including dumping and/or drug activity, increased property values, and increased neighborhood redevelopment.

Therefore, noted the researchers, though the actual numbers of property crimes did not indicate a difference, residents of the community garden areas perceived their neighborhoods to be safer because of the gardens.

More information: The complete study and abstract are available on the ASHS HortTechnology electronic journal web site:
[horttech.ashspublications.org/ ... nt/abstract/19/2/291](http://horttech.ashspublications.org/...nt/abstract/19/2/291)

Source: American Society for Horticultural Science

Citation: Community gardens don't impact crime rate (2009, September 8) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-09-gardens-dont-impact-crime.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--