Community gardens help people to grow stronger—together

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New research from the University of Adelaide has highlighted the positive role of shared community gardens in city and suburban areas, helping residents to build community resilience and develop stronger social groups.

Using case studies in the Adelaide metropolitan area, researchers in the University's School of Social Sciences and School of Humanities investigated the underlying reasons why people developed community gardens, how they went about it, and what benefits they resulted in.

"Currently there are more than 50 community gardens in the city and suburbs of Adelaide, mostly run by people who have some form of community good as their main aim," says study leader Dr Melissa Nursey-Bray, Head of the University's Department of Geography, Environment and Population.

"Cities across the world are facing increasing challenges from the impacts of urbanisation, pollution and climate change. What we've seen is that new residential developments rarely plan for or provide gardens, at a time when green spaces and urban vegetation are at ongoing risk of destruction or removal. All of these issues combine, making the need to maintain urban green spaces more important than ever," she says.

The study has shown that people in Adelaide engage in community gardening for both social and functional reasons.

"While very local in scale, common motivations for involvement in community gardening include: the desire to consume fresh produce, reduce food costs, pursue social networking, and develop improved mental and physical health," Dr Nursey-Bray says.

"Members of community gardens ranged in age, although older people and young children were more prevalent. There were many instances where community gardens were used for therapeutic purposes, such as for people recovering from illnesses or those sick with cancer, or to help mentally handicapped people."

Interviews with people who work in community gardens revealed that the experience rewarded them with a strong sense of community and a happy social life.

"Environmental issues also motivated people's involvement in community gardening, with a desire to grow fresh food and vegetables, and an aspiration to be part of social enterprise that was committed to sustainability, addressing food security and adapting to climate change," Dr Nursey-Bray says.

"Our study found that community gardens have the potential to build local adaptive responses to climate change and food security. They can also act as a mechanism for strengthening community cohesion by building ongoing inter-generational valuing of and attachment to the environment.

"We also found that almost every garden has a waiting list, some for up to two years, which means there is greater demand for such gardens in our community than was previously thought."

The results of this study have been published in the *South Australian Geographical Journal*.

More information: Nursey-Bray, Melissa; Parnell, Eleanor; Ankeny, Rachel A; Bray, Heather and Rudd, Dianne. Community gardens as pathways to community resilience?: Reflections on a pilot study in Adelaide, South Australia [online]. *South Australian Geographical Journal*, Vol. 113, 2015: 13-28. Availability: search.informit.com.au/documen … 643187616;res=IELHSS

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