

Schools and Communities Benefit from Consumer Horticulture

Horticulture and Plants Enrich Our Schools and Communities

- Unique gardens and cultural landmarks create a sense of place
- Parks and public green spaces provide economic benefits
- Public green spaces connect people and build community
- Students excel when schools provide access to green spaces



Consumer Horticulture Benefits a Community's Overall Well-being

The presence of shared green space enhances the overall well-being of a community, from neighborhoods, to schools, and to the local economy. Parks and gardens are favored sites for educational, civic, and social events. Some parks are celebrated as living art work, attracting seasonal visitors. Landscaped homes and streetscapes are appreciated by everyone, people living nearby and those simply passing through. The community's children benefit from nature experiences that enrich their education and enhance their cognitive development.

Creating Sense of Place

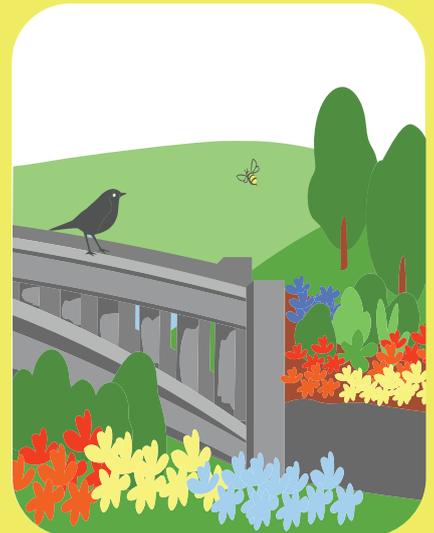
Arboreta, public gardens, and parks have their own identity and influence the character of their regions and cities. Central Park, Missouri Botanical Garden, Bartlett Arboretum, and Balboa Park are just a few from the long list of urban green spaces across the United States. Their planned intent was, and still is, to shape a sense of place and community.

These gardens and parks influence local prosperity as well as culture. The Greater Philadelphia Gardens, a large network of public gardens, arboreta, and historic landscapes, attracts 2.5 million visitors annually and has a regional economic impact of \$256 million⁶. The Biltmore is an iconic example of national landmarks, known for its gardens and natural surroundings. In 2016, the Biltmore Company contributed \$583 million to the total tourism impact in Buncombe County, NC². Nationally, America's public gardens generate \$2.3 billion in community impact and are important tourist destinations⁹.

While a Biltmore or Balboa Park may not be feasible in every city, a public garden, park, or cultural site has potential for valuable direct use by residents and contributing to community cohesion. These green spaces increase the property value of residences and businesses nearby, and reduce the costs of both urban stormwater and air pollution management. Public green spaces are sites for family occasions, special events, tournaments, festivals, and more, all of them impacting the community in various ways^{4, 10}.

Parks and gardens are municipal assets

- *Attracts visitors*
- *Builds local and regional relationships*
- *Supports local prosperity*
- *Become public symbols*



Parks and gardens connect people to people

- *Foster community engagement*
- *Build community commitment*
- *Improve municipal services*



Connecting People

A city's park network significantly affects residents' quality of life and facilitates a sense of community. By default, community engagement is a feature of the ongoing use and management of public green space, requiring civic collaboration, shared ownership and joint responsibility.

Parks are venues for the arts, whether by permanent displays, arts education, performances, or movie nights²². Parks foster human connections and residents' devotion to a community through both formal and informal interactions^{15, 16, 18}. Urban greenways offer increased opportunities to socialize, via pedestrian and bicycle commutes, physical recreation, and casual enjoyment of nature¹¹. Well-planned open spaces can improve municipal services, increase nearby property values, and attract people without substantially increasing municipal expenses²⁷.

Connecting People Continued

Shinrin-yoku, a Japanese term to describe spending time in forests, reduces stress and decreases the risk of psychosocial stress-related diseases; viewing these environments as therapeutic landscapes²⁰. Greening the physical environment reduces social aggression by creating social ties. Cleaning a vacant city lot, planting grass and trees for a park-like setting, and maintaining them as parks, reduces crime and increases residents' perception of safety^{3, 8}.

Community gardens cultivate social connections and can even connect different cultures within that common-space environment. Tending a garden becomes an outlet, or focused time, where people talk, share, and interact. This creates a sense of belonging. These gardens often prioritize food production for its members, bridging the gap between people and plants, increasing the consumption of fresh produce, and reducing the desire for processed foods^{1, 12, 14, 24}. They are also opportunities for social activities that enhance community ownership and encourage cohesion⁷.

Enriching Schools

Take a break. It's good advice for everyone. According to attention restoration theory, students need a restoring environment to relieve the normal fatigue of studies and regain attention to the task at hand. Time spent in nature are effective restorative experiences.

Window views of green spaces restore student attention. Access to green views during a short class break, helps students recover faster from mental fatigue, regain focused attention, and improve cognitive functions¹⁹. A quick view of nature boosts sustained attention, staying on task, and ignoring distractions¹⁷. Active and passive contact with nature plays a role in early brain development. Classrooms with a wall of green plants enable students to score better on tests for selective attention, better distinguishing relevant details from less relevant ones²⁶.

Walking 20-minutes in an urban park improves attention control for preschool and primary grade students²³. The overall level of greenness surrounding a child's home, school, and home-to-school commute impacts their performance on cognitive tests. More green relates to higher performance⁵.

Children's behavior is also influenced by the outdoor environment. Routine play time in green settings reduces the symptoms of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)²⁵. All children benefit from green time. Experiences with nature motivate them to explore and discover in a non-structured environment. This informal learning has a well-documented impact on cognitive and physical development, communication skills, and connects children to the natural world^{5,}

13, 21

Green spaces help students excel

- *Improves attention*
- *Relieves mental fatigue*
- *Improves cognitive functioning*
- *Reduces the symptoms of ADHD*



Consumer Horticulture Greens Our World

No matter the design, type or size of shared green spaces, they are multi-resource assets for cities large and small. Parks, gardens, and greenways present daily enrichment opportunities where we work, play, visit, learn, and live.

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The National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture (NICH) is a consortium of industry leaders who are promoting the benefits and value of horticulture. NICH brings together academia, government, industry, and nonprofits to cultivate the growth and development of a healthy world through landscapes, gardens and plants – indoors and out. The Mission of NICH is to grow a healthy world through plants, gardens, and landscapes.

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