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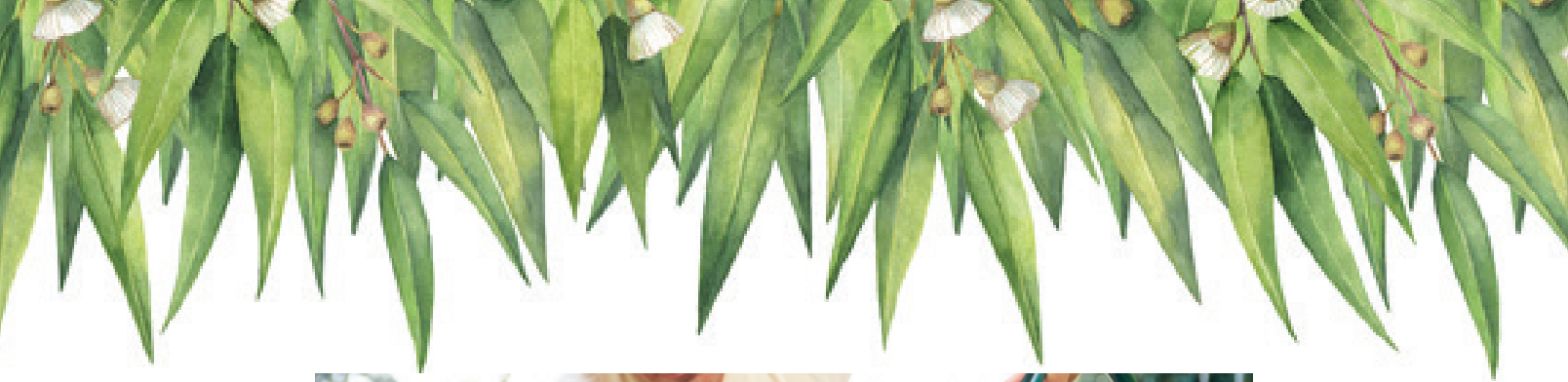
SUMMER 2017

Sharing the Story of Local Food & Culture



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summer
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COMMUNITY GARDENS MATTER

Meet the Los Angeles Community Garden Council

BY RUKSANA HUSSAIN

It's no revelation that community gardens in urban areas have witnessed an increase over the past few years.

According to one report by the National Gardening Association, food gardening in the U.S. is at its highest levels in more than a decade. One local organization that has slowly and steadily been making a difference is the Los Angeles Community Garden Council (lagardencouncil.org), which partners with 40 community gardens in Los Angeles County to take care of the business side of gardening, offering gardening advice and workshops to more than 125 community gardens in the area. This includes traditional community gardens, where people rent a plot to grow their own fresh produce, educational gardens where gardening, landscaping, nutrition and cooking are taught, and urban farms where volunteers grow vegetables for local markets and people in need.

Executive Director Julie Beals says, "LACGC is in the unique position of having more people approach us, with nearly all of our community gardens having waitlists for plots. The Crenshaw Community Garden, for example, has 36 plots and a waitlist of over 200 people!"

Since 1998, the organization has strengthened

communities by building new community gardens and supporting existing gardens such that every person in the county can grow healthy food in their own neighborhood. The long-term vision is a garden network for Los Angeles where people of all ages live healthy, active lives in a clean environment by growing fresh food.

"The largest project we are working on is the East Hollywood Community Garden on Madison Ave." shares Beals. "The 24,000 sq. ft. site will include a public park and 35-50 plots to lease to local residents as well as a 700 sq. ft. educational building with a deck for indoor/outdoor gardening instruction, landscaping, water conservation, nutrition, and cooking." LACGC is in the final stages of obtaining the necessary city permits to turn this into a reality.

Locals are realizing the benefits of community gardening, too. Growing one's own food is a way to get people outdoors, to be more active, meet new neighbors, and also just makes healthy eating more approachable. People come together to share their love of gardening, regardless of their ethnic or socio-economic background. Community gardens transcend social barriers and can help reduce neighborhood crime as well.

Take, for instance, Glassell Park Community Garden,

which is a huge success story of transforming an unattractive vacant lot into a community garden where former gang members now volunteer. Stanford-Avalon Community Garden is another success story with many of the gardeners here being first generation immigrants from Central America who do not have access to the regular workforce, so their families rely on the produce from their garden plot for their survival.

Starting a community garden is not as easy as simply getting the community together and planting a few saplings. Beals shares, "The hardest part is the community organizing. Once we have negotiated the lease for a new garden site, we need at least three months to canvass the neighborhood, organize 3-4 community meetings to design the garden, hold elections for the volunteer leadership team positions, and organize a volunteer day to build the garden." The South Pasadena Community Garden with 36 raised beds, was built in three hours with 65 volunteers, a good instructor, lumber that was pre-cut and pre-drilled, and bags of soil. "Gardens tend to fall apart when one individual tries to do everything on their own and/or when someone builds the garden without listening to what the local community wants to have in that space."

LACGC also helps with articles of incorporation, bylaws, agreements, and other rules and guidelines. They provide detailed resources on everything from garden rules to plot applications, budgets and responsibilities to tools and planting guides, and best urban farming practices. In its almost 20 years of operation, the team here has gained invaluable knowledge on community gardening and is constantly sharing information not just through the website but also through their social media channels, hosted workshops, fundraising and awareness events, and other community partnerships to truly make a difference in the local food scene that will be beneficial to community members well into the future. ✨

The Community Garden start up guide, available on the LACGC website, is a useful resource addressing some of the topics integral to starting a community garden:

Identifying land, if it is available for lease, and performing a soil test

Determining the type of community garden to begin in the space

Mobilizing community support for building the garden

Forming a volunteer leadership group to organize the community

Planning on how to manage the garden's finances

Organizing funds to cover setup expenses, garden maintenance, and water bills

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