

A GARDEN FOR EVERYONE: TALES OF MARIN'S COMMUNITY GARDENS



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION,
MARIN COUNTY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Much gratitude goes to the hard-working Garden Coordinators, Educators, and Volunteers who live their passion on all of our behalf, with too little remuneration.

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: The Canal Community Garden, San Rafael. See page 4 for more information.

BACK COVER PHOTO: Bayside Martin Luther King Junior Academy school garden in the evening, Marin City. See page 8 for more information.

MARIN'S COMMUNITY GARDENS

Community gardens and urban farms are growing in popularity across the nation for good reason. The positive social, economic and health benefits are being increasingly well-documented.¹ Growing some of one's own food, whether at schools, early childhood education sites, centers of worship, senior homes, or in neighborhoods, alleviates food insecurity, builds community, and improves nutritional, mental and physical health, while increasing ecological awareness and community resiliency.

Marin County's community gardens have grown in both number and support. In 2010, there were 86 community gardens of all types.² In 2020, we now know there are over 130! Many school gardens have broadened their summertime management capacity by sharing the bounty and upkeep with community families. And most Marin municipalities include community gardens as an integral part of their Climate Action Plans by encouraging the use of underutilized public properties. Another example of this shift is EAH Senior & Disabled Housing that incorporates gardens in their design planning, and offers gardening as an additional community activity.

However, despite the growth in Marin's community food production and the growing awareness of the benefits gardens bring to communities, most community gardens still have long waitlists. Additionally, two Marin municipalities are still without neighborhood community gardens. Sometimes it can take several years to get all the permissions required to break ground on a garden.

¹ <http://ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/Research>

² Marin County Community Garden Needs Assessment, 2010

Further streamlining of the community garden zoning and approval process would ease the garden creation process. If a community garden committee is robust enough, building time can sometimes be shortened by having community members do the design and build work themselves. Clearly, this requires a good deal of donated expertise, resources, and volunteer time. With a donation of land, and access to water from the golf course, San Geronimo Valley Community Garden was established in one year. But more often, the process takes several years until groundbreaking.

As the impacts of climate change become a reality, food systems can be severely challenged. Growing food locally becomes ever more important for environmental and equity reasons. Besides the health aspects of fresh, local food and the community building that growing food together engenders, garden produce supplements family food budgets. Urban Agriculture and community and school gardens have become an important adaptation for many, particularly our lower-income communities. This is in addition to the ecological literacy that goes hand-in-hand with gardening efforts. Thus, supporting various community and school gardens is both ecologically and socially advantageous, building needed resiliency for the future.

We hope you like reading these inspiring tales of a variety of community gardens in Marin, whose gardeners, managers, and educators make the benefits of gardening available to so many. Join the movement to support community gardens across Marin County!

- [Explore an interactive online map of community gardens](#)
 - [Learn about growing food](#)
 - [Grow an extra row for those in need](#)
 - [Advocate for community gardens in your town](#)
-

THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GARDENS ARE MANY AND BROAD¹

Community building
Increases access to healthy food
Increases home values
Increases greenspace protection
Provides outdoor and nature education
Helps social integration for immigrants and seniors
Saves food dollars
Helps alleviate food insecurity
Increases fruit and vegetable consumption
Increases physical activity
Improves mental health
Provides space for community events and family gatherings
Supplies surplus food for food banks and shelters
Absorbs carbon with more green vegetation
Uses less water than a lawn per square foot ²
Supports pollinator insect populations
Builds community resiliency ³
Fresh local food can be tastier

1 <http://ucanr.edu/sites/UrbanAg/files/185846.pdf>

2 <https://denverwatertap.org/2015/09/15/save-water-grow-vegetables-instead-of-grass>

3 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21222153>

GARDEN GUIDE

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GARDEN STORIES FROM AROUND MARIN

Johny Ek, a Branson High School student, called the UCCE Marin Master Gardener Help Desk asking for advice setting up a garden in the parking lot of a non-profit where he tutored youth, Next Generation Scholars (NGS) in San Rafael. He explained that although he had healthy fresh food at his school cafeteria, most of his neighborhood friends did not. He wanted to share his enthusiasm for growing fresh vegetables and eating them! The UCCE Marin Community Garden Program responded immediately to his inspiring call, suggesting a variety of effective gardening techniques, providing him with seeds and tomato starts, and then finding him a Master Gardener Mentor for further advice. Soon, his garden was thriving. Johny had a limited amount of time before heading off to college, but he found a younger student, Cristian Maldonado, to continue in his footsteps, providing garden guidance to other NGS students. A couple months later, a second call came asking advice regarding chicken coops. And, “Voila,” three laying chickens were being tended by the group! They’ve expanded the **Jardin de Justicia** again, and it continues to benefit a community of very engaged young people. Cristian has now gone to college also, but even without them, Johny and Cristian’s vision continues to teach and give!



Johny Ek at Jardin de Justicia, Next Generation Scholars, San Rafael

The Cedars of Marin serves people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their large San Rafael garden was created with education and job-training in mind. It is a beautiful, well-run vegetable and fruit garden lovingly cared for by their day-students. Connie Pelissero, a long-time UCCE Marin Master Gardener, started the garden at the Cedars Textile Arts Center in 1981. Her involvement included initiating produce sales at the Ross Valley Farmers Market as well as using the bounty in the center's kitchen, creating a full service program for this wonderful community!



Cedars Textile Art Center's Hands & Earth Garden, San Rafael

Marin's older adults benefit greatly from gardens, and UC Cooperative Extension is supporting several senior residence gardens with technical advice, and often, free seeds! The county's growing population of seniors makes this increasingly important. Mercy House's **'Bennett House'** has a beautiful large garden and orchard that, over the years, has been tended with joy by many of the residents. There, Marin Master Gardeners' Pruning Guild gave a useful hands-on workshop about fruit tree care. UCCE Marin and Marin Food Policy Council's Fall 2019 senior garden tour highlighted the garden.* **Mackey Terrace** in Novato is an EAH Housing senior residence with a lovely garden. It is part of their mission that gardens be included at their residences as a resource and activity whenever possible. Marin Housing Authority (MHA) senior and disabled residences have hosted several UCCE Marin gatherings about the benefits and 'how-to's of gardening, whether in containers or in the ground.



Photos: top - Gardening at Maria B Freitas Senior residence, San Rafael, and bottom - Mackey Terrace, EAH Housing for seniors and disabled, Novato

* <https://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=38511>

Unlike the 4+ years that some neighborhood community gardens can take to get going, **San Geronimo Valley Community Garden** was a wonderful exception.

Having secured land and water from the San Geronimo Valley Golf Course, a group of dedicated community members built a garden within a year, comprised of 27 plots, several fruit trees, composting, and continued enthusiasm. Taking longer to establish -- but equally lively -- San Rafael's 90-plot **Canal Community Garden** continues to thrive providing much appreciated produce for its gardeners.



Canal Community Garden, San Rafael

After three decades, the **Fairfax Community Garden** on Fairfax Library land still has a waiting list, but has been spruced up to make it a bit more secure from “gopher gardeners!” Marin’s other long-established community gardens in **Pt. Reyes Station** (on Toby’s Feed Barn property), **San Anselmo, Terra Linda and Larkspur** continue to flourish, and a second community garden in **Mill Valley** opened in 2017, due to the diligence of many, particularly UCCE Marin Master Gardener Joan Irwin! Also in 2017, **Marin City’s Clarence & Mattie Boatman Community Garden** on Marin Housing Authority land got a facelift thanks in part to Sausalito Rotary Club, Wareham Development, and the Fruit Tree Planting Foundation.



Photos: top - Robson-Harrington Neighborhood Community Garden, San Anselmo, and bottom - Larkspur Community Garden

School gardens are growing well in northern Marin with the support of Lori Davis' Sanzuma, Marin Master Gardeners' School & Community Garden Program, and many other dedicated teachers, parents, and volunteers. At **San Pedro School**, the garden was converted to a farm and orchard providing produce to the San



San Pedro School Garden Farm, San Rafael

Rafael school cafeterias, and more recently Lori has started a new farm to help supply produce to Community Action Marin's nursery schools. At Sanzuma, nutrition education, cooking, and organic produce are all part of the deal for San Rafael!



Davidson Middle School Garden, San Rafael

Gilo Rodriquez is the Head of Maintenance at **West Marin Elementary School** in Point Reyes Station, where a school garden was started some years ago. He soon realized that he likely knew more than the volunteers about growing food based on past farming experience. Gilo took over the garden, growing as much food as possible while teaching the students all he knew about vegetable gardening. If the garden needs mulch, he just adds a bit to the maintenance order for the school. The garden is spotless, and the children follow after him like a pied piper! The school kitchen, with his wife Aracely as Head Cook, uses all the grown produce for the children's lunches and snacks. A win all around!



Gilo Rodriquez, West Marin Elementary School in Point Reyes Station

Another school nutrition and garden education program called Conscious Kitchen (CK) was founded in 2013 in the Sausalito-Marin City School District. It is a comprehensive, green, zero waste, organic non-GMO school food program started at Marin City's **Bayside MLK Jr Academy**. Good Earth Natural Food's school lunch program adopted much of Conscious Kitchen's criteria. The CK school meal program includes scratch-cooked breakfasts, lunches, and snacks prepared by a chef in a full service kitchen with food from local farmers and school gardens. Students become "Conscious Kitchen Ambassadors" in their community, encouraging a healthier lifestyle for all!



Bayside Martin Luther King Junior Academy school garden, Marin City

Joe Stewart is a high school biology teacher turned farmer in order to teach his students environmental stewardship and garden education. Through his Sustainable Agriculture classes at **Redwood High School**, he and his students acquired school land, planned, and broke ground on a school farm that was completed over the course of a couple of semesters in 2013. Part of their program takes their learning to other communities in Marin, helping to set up composting systems and generally using their knowledge in other school gardens. They sell their produce at their school farmstand, and recently built a chicken coop. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Joe got the farm going again to supply produce to organizations serving those in need. With the help of UC Marin Master Gardener and landscaper, Tony Mekisich, and parent and UC Marin Master Gardener, Leslie Myers, science teacher Jessica Watts recently created an edible garden at **Tamalpais High School**, such that all Marin high schools now have edible gardens or farms!



Redwood High School Sustainable Farm, Larkspur

The Dirt Club of Marin Oaks High School

participates in keeping their school garden thriving. As the volunteer facilitator for over a decade, Anita Jones Roehrick, provides the Club a much-loved weekly breakfast in the garden. The garden and the breakfasts teach these students about nutrition, gardening and community. The smiles follow!



Marin Oaks High School Garden Dirt Club, Novato

The Mill Valley Children's Garden at Edna Maguire Elementary School is a large, model school garden with robust parent volunteer involvement and strong leadership from their school garden educators. The garden boasts a fruit tree orchard, hens, and a plot for growing produce for the SF-Marin Food Bank. Don Sparks (pictured right) and his family have grown much needed produce for donation during the COVID -19 Pandemic, as have several other school and community gardens, like **Tam Valley School** garden, run for years by the knowledgeable Betsy Chatton!



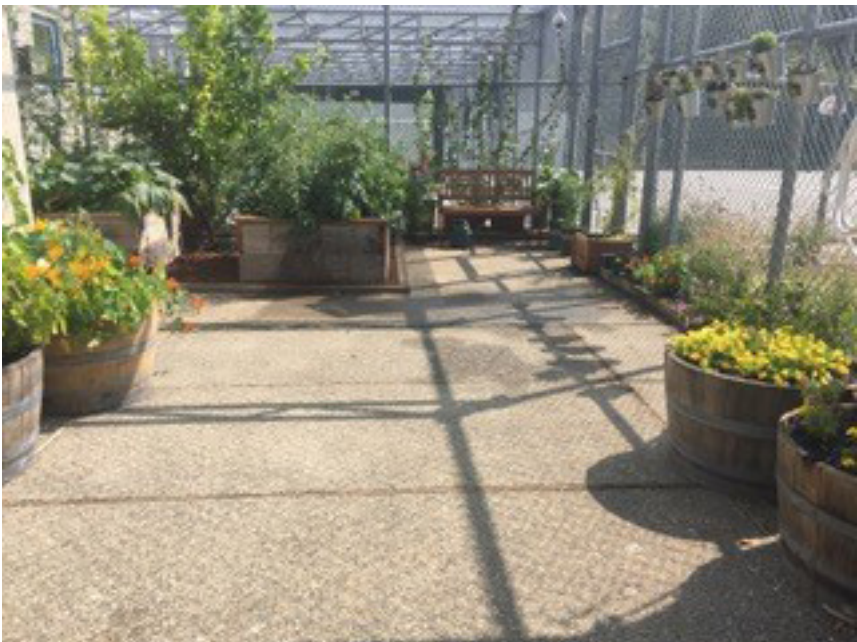
The Mill Valley Children's Garden at Edna Maguire Elementary School, Mill Valley

The Lincoln School is a one-room rural schoolhouse founded in 1872 with a handful of TK-6 students. They renovated their garden last Fall, but the pesky cows next door got in and wreaked havoc! With the fence strengthened, they're rebuilding again. That's great dedication to garden education on the part of the teacher and students!



The Lincoln School House and Garden

Marin Juvenile Hall requested help to start a garden from our UCCE Marin Community Garden Program. At the site visit, our program coordinator was impressed by the small non-profit, Next Steps Liason Project, spearheading the project and the young people it would serve. The circumstances were very different for a garden, as the interior space was quite constrained. After the first couple visits, UC Marin Master Gardener Beth LaDove was called in to help design the garden, and the possibilities began to multiply - The garden was built! It is still small, but mighty in terms of the positive effects on the young people living there. Beth continues her dedicated involvement. (nextstepsproject.org/main-st)



Marin Juvenile Hall Garden

What a wonderful idea Marin City Community Services District (MCCSD) had to create a program tailor-made for their community. For several summers, Marin City children had been invited to plant, tend and harvest from container buckets for the nutritional well-being of the children and their families. At the end of the summer the children can carry their container home to put outside their door, on their back deck, or wherever it can continue to thrive, securing each youths' place in the family as the "Head Grower!" This is the introduction to what will be a year-round **Intergenerational Garden** near the Marin City Senior Center. The greenhouse for the Intergenerational Garden is now up and functioning in anticipation of the garden build-out!



Marin City Community Services District's Children's Summer Container Garden

Early Childhood Education gardens are growing too! **Papermill Children's Corner** (PCC) in Pt Reyes is a large preschool serving children ages 3-6 years old. They serve the children breakfast, lunch and two snacks every day, supplementing the meals with garden education as they do so! Extra produce goes to school families since the Pt Reyes food pantry lacks fresh produce. Four raised beds were built with construction help from parents. They are tended by parents, and Educational Coordinator Madelene McCann of the Marin Child Care Council, a HEAL (Marin County's Healthy Eating, Active Living) program. They have several fruit trees, and hope to have an orchard soon in front of the school. A trellised kiwi vine surrounds their outdoor reading nook, and potted herbs abound.

In 2004, with the increase in childhood obesity nation-wide, **North Bay Children's Center** (NBCC) decided to make changes to its food program and set out to secure funding that would create opportunities to teach children and their parents about fresh, healthy food options by way of growing some of their own! The grant they were awarded established NBCC as one of California's first on-site learning gardens for children under the age of five. The main garden, *The Garden of Eatin'* was finished in 2006 at the Novato C Street Campus. Subsequent satellite gardens were developed at all NBCC center sites. NBCC encourages family engagement through garden events, and promotes a culture of health in all aspects of their school and communities.



Papermill Children's Corner, Pt Reyes

Patti Vance and Michael Durphy were instrumental in creating the **Sleepy Hollow Presbyterian Church (SHPC) Garden** and a farmstand. As a result of their successful garden experience, the church became a sponsor of the Short Elementary School Garden Project in San Rafael. Both UCCE Marin’s Community Garden Program and Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative provided



garden advice and support in response to Patti’s request. With part of the SHPC mission “to help the hungry and homeless” in mind, inspiration took over, and with the full support of the entire church community and Reverend Beverly Brewster, the garden produced more than 1000 pounds of vegetables in the first year. All of it was donated to the San Francisco-Marin Food

Bank and other local hunger programs. The farmstand now helps to keep the garden costs covered while SHPC continues to provide fresh local produce to Marin’s hungry. In addition, SHPC is a model of garden sustainability through their use of a large rain tank that feeds some of the garden’s water needs during the summer.



Photos: top - Sleepy Hollow Presbyterian Church Garden, and bottom - Sleepy Hollow Presbyterian Church Farm Stand, San Anselmo

Some years ago a Mill Valley family decided they had too much of a good thing: a big veggie garden! So they asked neighbors if they'd be interested in growing and harvesting some food or flowers for themselves in their backyard. Word got around. Voila! A **Backyard Community Garden** was born with 6-8 families involved, plus four hens! The community gardeners come and go at will, and meet for work parties seasonally. Everyone has plenty of fun growing nutritious food for their families and taking excess to the Food Bank!

And last but not least, a newer Marin garden is **Red Oak Farm**, a community garden and farm being built by San Rafael's Embassy Suites. It will provide organic produce to the hotel restaurant, as well as to Marin's food insecure communities. As an outdoor venue for educational and entertainment purposes, it will model how beautiful a food garden can be, and how important for a healthy community. With the Agricultural Institute of Marin's Farmers Market right next door, the options for collaboration are boundless!



Embassy Suites' Red Oak Farm, San Rafael

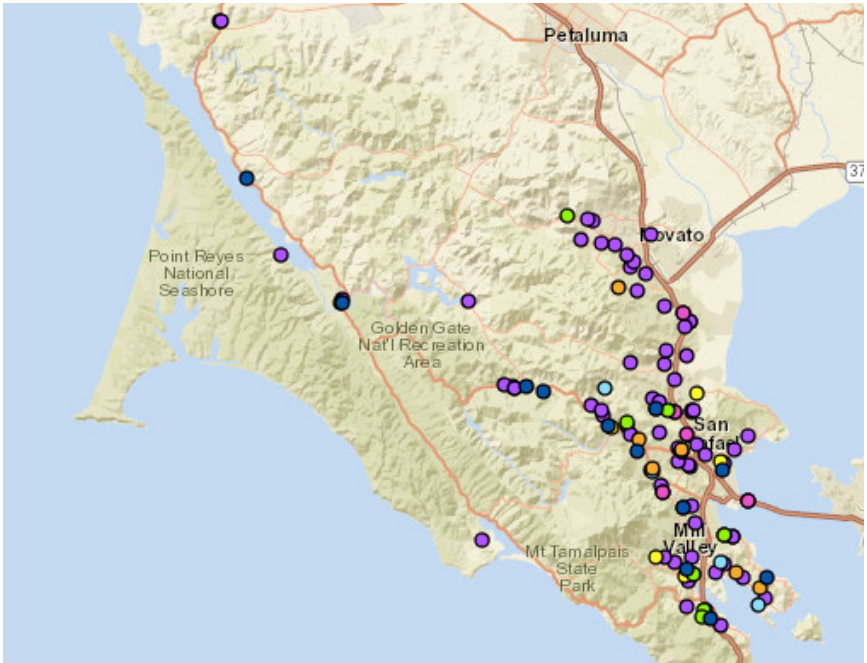
THANKING OUR MANY PARTNERS



“IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT A COMMUNITY GARDEN”

Agricultural Institute of Marin
Canal Alliance
CERES Community Project
City of Mill Valley
City of Novato
City of San Rafael
College of Marin Indian Valley Organic Farm & Garden
Community Action Marin
Community Development Agency of Marin
Conscious Kitchen
Corte Madera Parks and Recreation Department
ExtraFood.org
Friends of the Fields, Mill Valley
HEAL Marin: Healthy Eating, Active Living Program
Innovative Health Solutions
Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative
Larkspur-Corte Madera School District
Marin City Community Services District
Marin Child Care Council
Marin Community Foundation
Marin Municipal Planners
Marin Food Policy Council
Marin Health and Human Services
Marin Housing Authority
Marin Municipal Water District
Mill Valley Parks and Recreation Department
Next Steps Project
Novato Unified School District
San Rafael City Schools
San Francisco/Marin Food Bank
Sanzuma
Sloat Garden Center
UCCE Marin Master Gardeners
Wareham Development Fund
Zero Waste Marin

... And many more! Thank you!



The many types of community gardens are shown on an updatable, interactive map on UC Cooperative Extension Marin's website:

ucanr.edu/community_gardens_map.

If YOU have an update, please send to: banielsen@ucanr.edu.



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