



Pittsfield Charter Township
Department of Community Development

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PITTSFIELD TOWNSHIP CELEBRATES 5 YEARS OF COMMUNITY GARDENING

With the anticipation of sunny skies, birds chirping, and warm spring and summer days on the horizon, the Pittsfield Charter Township Community Garden has opened applications to come “grow with us” and secure your spot for our 5th gardening season. Walking through the community garden in peak season, you will be greeted with ripe tomatoes, bright purple eggplants, bees hopping from one pollen-rich plant to the next, rows of crunchy greens, climbing vines sporting peas, a rainbow of cutting flowers, and most importantly, the smiling faces of the gardeners that keep it looking so lush.

Supporting local agriculture and access to local foods is an integral piece of Pittsfield Township's Sustainable Vision. Since its opening in 2019, the Community Garden has been enthusiastically adopted by community members. It is no question that the demand is increasing. As inflation increases the price of produce and more people have become invested in the story of where their food comes from, residents have been excited to take matters into their own hands.

Matt Catanzarite, the Community Garden Coordinator and gardener since 2019, believes that the location of the garden is what makes it special. The garden shares a parking lot with both the Township Administration Building and the Farmers Market – accessible by bike, walking, or car. This location allows for high visibility and symbolizes the importance of sustainability within the Township's framework.

Access to fresh produce should not be a luxury afforded to only those who have the space to grow. With Pittsfield's diverse housing stock, many residents lack an outdoor area of their own where they can plant gardens and store all of the tools and supplies that come along with it. The Pittsfield Township Community Garden offers a practical solution – raised and ADA accessible garden beds, a shed full of gardening tools, a designated composting area, and access to a water hookup to keep beds hydrated and thriving.

In celebration of the 5th anniversary, new and exciting improvements are planned for installation this year including a free food pantry where gardeners can donate excess produce or other food items to the community; three new bee boxes to promote a bee community that can increase pollination and yield more flowering plants; and upgrades to existing beds at the request of our gardeners. There are now 24 total gardening beds including five 10'x4' raised, twelve 10'x4' double raised, four 6'x4' ADA double raised, and three 4'x4' ADA table height garden beds.

For many of the gardeners, the original draw to the Community Garden was that it provides the space and tools needed to garden where their home does not. Jessica Hogle, a member of Pittsfield's Community Garden since 2019, was born and raised gardening- it is a huge part of who she is. Her current living situation, however, does not provide the ample space to take on gardening at her home. Eager to get her hands back in the soil, she was one of the first to sign up and has been returning every year since.

This garden allows anyone in the community to be able to grow their own plants- meaning that accessibility to fresh fruits and vegetables is available to residents- regardless of if their home has space for gardening. One of the greatest benefits, Matt says, is what this garden signifies- cultivation of the skills necessary to sustain oneself with the fruits of their labor.

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“It is a great skill to know how to grow your own food. Even if you are just starting small with a basil plant in your kitchen” he says.

The Community Garden has a solid rate of return for gardeners, with new people showing interest each year. Of the 20 gardeners in 2022, 7 have been part of this community since its launch.

For Jessica, the relationships she has built through the Community Garden keep her coming back each year. According to Jessica, this is a community of people whose shared passion for gardening brings people together and creates a space where people share their abundance and look out for one-another.

For Meredith Nickerson, gardening has allowed her to foster community both inside the Community Garden and amongst her neighbors. With overflowing abundance sprouting in her garden each year, she finds joy in sharing the fruit of her labor with fellow gardeners and her neighbors. She jokes that she keeps returning to her garden each year to uphold her neighborhood expectations of receiving fresh produce.

Meredith, a gardener since day 1, has been cultivating a plethora of knowledge through experimental gardening practices. Whether it is trying the square-foot method, vertical gardening, or a new seaweed and fish fertilizer- she comes back each year with a wealth of knowledge and a determination to yield greater outcomes than the year prior. Meredith is planting the seed for the next generation of gardeners, too- joined by her son who shares the same enthusiasm in connecting with his food in such a way. The two, who regularly bike to their plot, work together to tend to their garden in the summer months.

Jessica, too, is no stranger to trying new things in her gardening plot, which she has jokingly coined her “adult sand box”. Each year, she tries her hand at growing a new set of produce along with her seasonal staples that she has perfected over the years through close-attention to soil health and optimal space-utilization.

According to Matt, the vision of the Community Garden is driven by its gardeners. In years past, gardeners have facilitated a surplus bed that was used in coordination with our Farmers Market guest Chef who would gather fresh herbs and produce and give market-goers cooking demonstrations. In past seasons, gardeners have also volunteered to gather surplus produce and donate it to Food Gatherers, a local food bank. Since then, a new vision has been realized by gardeners- and that is a Community Garden-driven “food library” or food pantry where gardeners can leave excess produce for anyone who may need it.

Meredith explains that her connection with food has deepened throughout her time as a community gardener. Rather than reaching for basil at a grocery store that has been shipped in from another state and treated with harmful pesticides and fertilizers, Meredith is able to pick her organic basil at its freshest and eat it that same day in her famous pesto. Additionally, gardening has allowed her to lean into eating seasonal produce and learn the art of canning for the winter months.

Jessica, whose meals are always adorned with fresh pico de gallo from her garden in the summer months, shared the same sentiment. When asked about the benefits of growing her own food, she answered “It’s garden to table. Chemical-free, no pesticides. There is nothing better than fresh vegetables that you can pick and take home!”

The Pittsfield Township Community Garden is not only emblematic of the Township’s sustainable vision, but also signifies community-building, education, public partnerships, and residents’ connection with food through its means of accessibility. Residents interested in getting in on the fun can keep an eye out for updates on the Community Garden home page: www.pittsfield-mi.gov/communitygarden.

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