

Department of Horticulture

# ALLOTMENT GARDENING AND PERSONAL WELLNESS

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Senior Symposium



Growing Well

Horticulture and Human Health

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# Context: Comparing Community Gardens and Allotment Gardening



Corcoran Park Community Garden, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Source: Barry A. Hyman, 2021



Ashton Court, Bristol, UK

Source: Ben Birchall, 2008



# Community Gardens vs. Allotments

- Community gardens are collaborative projects on shared open spaces where participants share in the maintenance and products of the garden, including healthful and affordable fresh fruits and vegetables. (USDA)

- Allotments are a plot of land rented by an individual for growing vegetables or flowers. (Oxford)



Source: Anthony Devlin

# Community Gardens vs. Allotments

- Collectively managed,  
along with private plots/beds
- Maintained by volunteers
- Generally open to the public
- Usually found in urban areas
- Smaller in size
- Less common comparatively

- Privately leased plots
- Contract through local council
- Autonomy in design
- Public access limited
- Found in urban & rural areas
- Generally, 2,700 ft<sup>2</sup> each
- Fairly widespread





St. Ann's Allotments, Nottingham, UK

Source: Google Earth, 2024



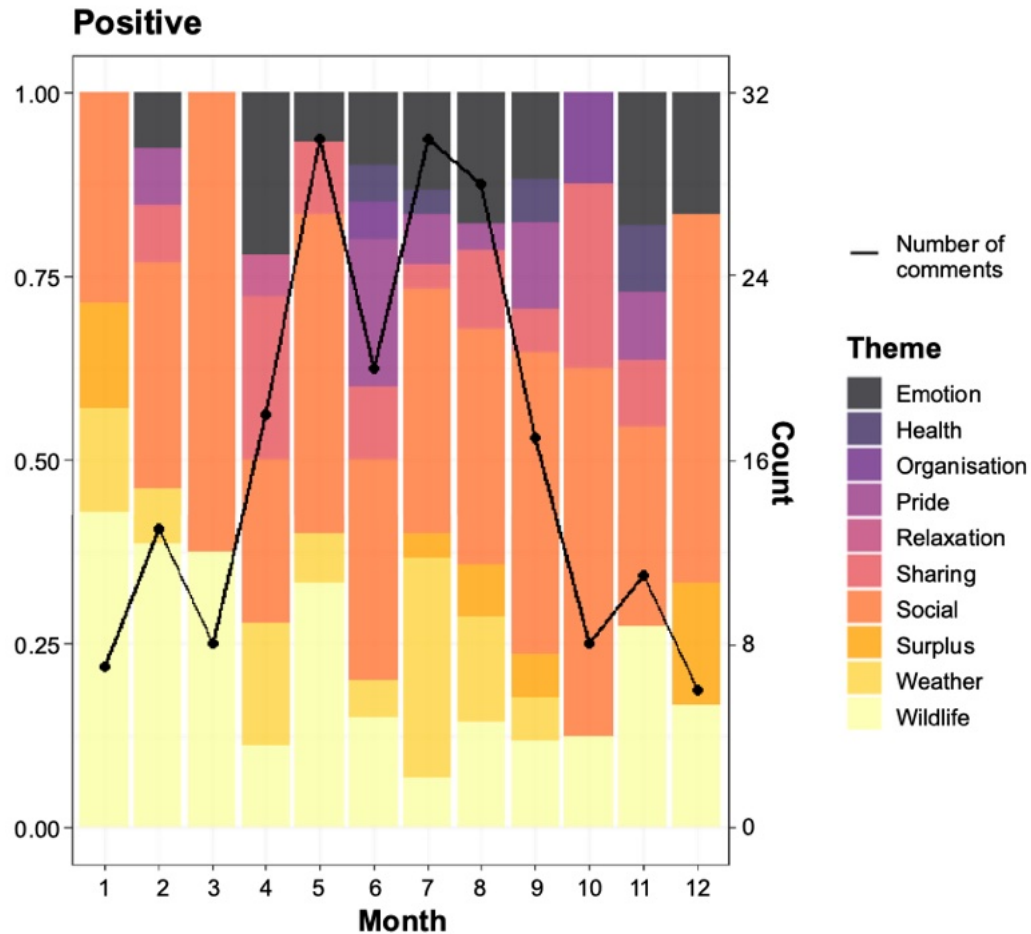
# Does the culture of allotment gardening significantly improve resident well-being?



Port Meadow, Oxford, UK

Source: Dave Price, 2013

# Positive Remarks from Allotment Holders



Source: (Dobson et al., 2021)

- **Social** aspect highly regarded
  - Allotment holders share advice with neighbors, learn from one another, fraternize, etc.
- **Wildlife** also regarded higher than one might expect
  - Observations of animal behavior
- **Weather**, such as rain, could be viewed positively if beneficial
- **Physical health** was a small proportion of positive comments
  - Mental health always positive



# Two Major Themes Identified from Studying Allotment Gardening's Effect on Well-being

- **Social Network**

- Important venue for meeting and sharing with others
- Also found to be true when reviewing literature regarding American community gardens
- In those with mental health struggles, allotment gardening was associated with improved ability to cope with stress
- Allotment gardening found to encourage family bonding



Source: (Genter et al., 2015)



# Two Major Themes Identified from Studying Allotment Gardening's Effect on Well-being

- **Personal Development**
  - Increased self-confidence
  - Increased initiative
  - Increased sense of achievement
- In a review of literature on American community gardens, community development was instead a major theme
  - This reflects a specific purpose that community gardens fulfill
  - Highlights a deficit, perhaps

Source: (Genter et al., 2015)



Source: Reddit



# Psychological Benefits of Nature

- “Attention Restoration Theory”
  - Kaplan (1995) describes how nature provides a person relief from directed attention and mental fatigue, a source of stress
  - The concept of fascination allows a person to engage with nature while minimizing burdensome stressful thoughts
  - Fascination restores fatigue derived from directed attention

Source: (Kaplan, 1995)



Allotment Shed

Source: Margaret Bird, 2022



# Allotment Gardening as a Form of Preventative Healthcare

- Even in an urban location such as Tokyo, Japan, allotment holders identified contact with nature as an important motivation
- Physical activity is identified as being correlated with improved physical and mental health
- Increased vegetable consumption is another benefit derived from allotment gardening

Source: (Soga et al., 2017)



Kunitachi City, Tokyo, Japan

Source: Scott Kouchi

# Why Allotments?

- **Personal development** a key theme identified in research
- Sense of **initiative** and **achievement** associated with allotment gardening
- Allows urban or apartment dwellers to benefit from the ability to tend to a plot of land
- Personal harvest associated with **improved physical health**



Allotment Cuppa

Source: John Lines



# Challenges Facing Community Gardens

- *“Give me the flowers or I will call the police,”* Lori shouted, brandishing a pair of garden shears.
- *“The worst kind of pest is the two-legged kind.”*
  - Gardens as a microcosm of the world
- “Tragedy of the Commons”
- Disincentivizes participation
- Personal stakes lowered in a communal arrangement
- Consistent struggle to divide personal property from communal property



Source: Reddit

# Questions or Comments?



Allotments in Edinburgh, Scotland

Source: George Clerk



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