



In Partnership With



# KNOX COUNTY COMMUNITY GARDEN REPORT

- 2023 -

## **Written By**

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# Table of Contents

1. Acknowledgements & About Us .....	1
2. Report Goal & Survey Methodology .....	2
3. Recent History & Unique Aspects of Gardens in Knox County .....	3
4. Survey Results .....	
a. Garden Overview & Administration .....	
i. Map of Gardens .....	4
ii. Number of Gardens .....	4
iii. Age of Gardens .....	5
iv. Size of Gardens .....	5
v. Types of Gardens .....	6
vi. Public Access .....	6
vii. Land History .....	7
viii. Land Ownership .....	7
ix. Wildlife Certifications .....	8
b. Gardeners .....	
i. Gardeners Served .....	9
ii. Languages Spoken by Gardeners .....	9
iii. Active Members .....	10
iv. Distance Travelled to Garden .....	10
v. Gardener Responsibilities .....	11
vi. Agricultural Training .....	11
c. Membership & Capacity .....	
i. Capacity .....	12
ii. Support .....	12
iii. Waitlist .....	13
iv. Dues .....	13
v. Volunteers .....	14
d. Food Production .....	
i. Vegetables .....	15
ii. Fruits .....	16
iii. Cultural Relevancy .....	17
iv. End Use .....	18
v. Composting .....	19
e. Physical & Social Structures .....	
i. Physical Structures & Amenities .....	20
ii. Events .....	21
iii. Partnerships with Schools .....	22
iv. Partnerships with Seniors .....	23
5. Conclusion .....	24
6. Appendix A: Gardens that Completed the Survey .....	25-26
7. Appendix B: Garden Descriptions & Unique Aspects .....	27-30
8. Appendix C: Overview of Refugee Gardening .....	31

# Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the support and participation of our survey participants. Thank you!

Grow NYC's 2010 Community Garden Survey served as an essential source of guidance for this report.



Knox Pride Community Garden

## About Us

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### Knox County Community Garden and Growers Alliance

We are a community-driven organization dedicated to fighting and eliminating food insecurity and promoting healthy living. Our initiative focuses on building community gardens, educating our members on gardening and healthy living, and distributing fresh produce to the community. Through our programs and partnerships, we seek to create a sense of community, purpose, and hope.

We plan to track the total number of pounds grown, harvested, and distributed to the community, as well as the pounds of produce contributed by our members, to measure the success of our approach. A byproduct of our work is that it will preserve, restore, and enhance pride in the beauty, productivity, and creativity of our community.

We believe that by having easy access to healthy, fresh produce, individuals' physical and mental health will improve. Our focus on education and youth development is at the core of our mission, and we plan to partner with other organizations to create a community center focused on food and education.

Learn more at [knoxgardenalliance.org](http://knoxgardenalliance.org)

### United Way of Greater Knoxville

United Way of Greater Knoxville unites people and resources to strengthen communities and solve systemic issues. Our vision is an equitable community through partnerships, impact, and commitment to transformation.

At UWGK, we are dedicated to ensuring that where you live doesn't determine your health. Our focus on food systems centers on equitable access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally-relevant food for all.

We advocate for a just food system that empowers communities socially and economically, fostering sustainability and self-sufficiency. Access to food is a basic human right and is crucial to alleviating financial and mental burdens. To create lasting change, we must start by mobilizing our resources to invest in diverse food system leaders and innovative solutions created by the community for the community.

When we Unite for Change, we build better lives – where community residents, stakeholders, policy makers and change leaders all have a seat at the table.

Learn more at [uwgk.org](http://uwgk.org)

## Report Goal

The goal of this report is to provide a foundational resource for stakeholders within the Knox County food system. This report establishes a baseline of information and datasets which are available for use by any resident or organization in Knox County to support a wide variety of initiatives. It will serve as the basis for an asset inventory and will help the Knox County Community Garden and Growers Alliance to create strategic priorities for growth and alignment.

## Survey Methodology

The data used in this report was collected using Survey Monkey from April through August 2023. Participants were offered the option to complete the survey online or via phone call. The survey was shared widely via email and social media. Flyers were hung up on bulletin boards at local businesses, nonprofits, and known community gardens.

The data collected from Survey Monkey was analyzed using both Microsoft Excel and Survey Monkey's data analytics tools.

Survey design, implementation, and analysis were completed by Katy Neusner and Kimberly Pettigrew served as an advisor.



Marble City Community Garden

## Recent History of Community Gardens in Knox County

Knoxville has a rich history of community gardens and diverse growers that have laid a strong foundation for the work of the Knox County Community Garden and Growers Alliance. The Alliance began in 2020 as an informal group of like-minded individuals with a passion for community gardens and serving their community through food. The space was used to learn, share, and identify collaboration opportunities. As the group began to meet regularly, we decided to survey the group around the question of, "What do you need to be supported?"



**University of Tennessee Gardens,  
Free and Open to the Public**

Those responses identified the need for an organization to serve as the backbone support for community gardens and growers of our community and laid the foundation for the mission and vision of the work.

## Unique Aspects of Knox County Community Gardens

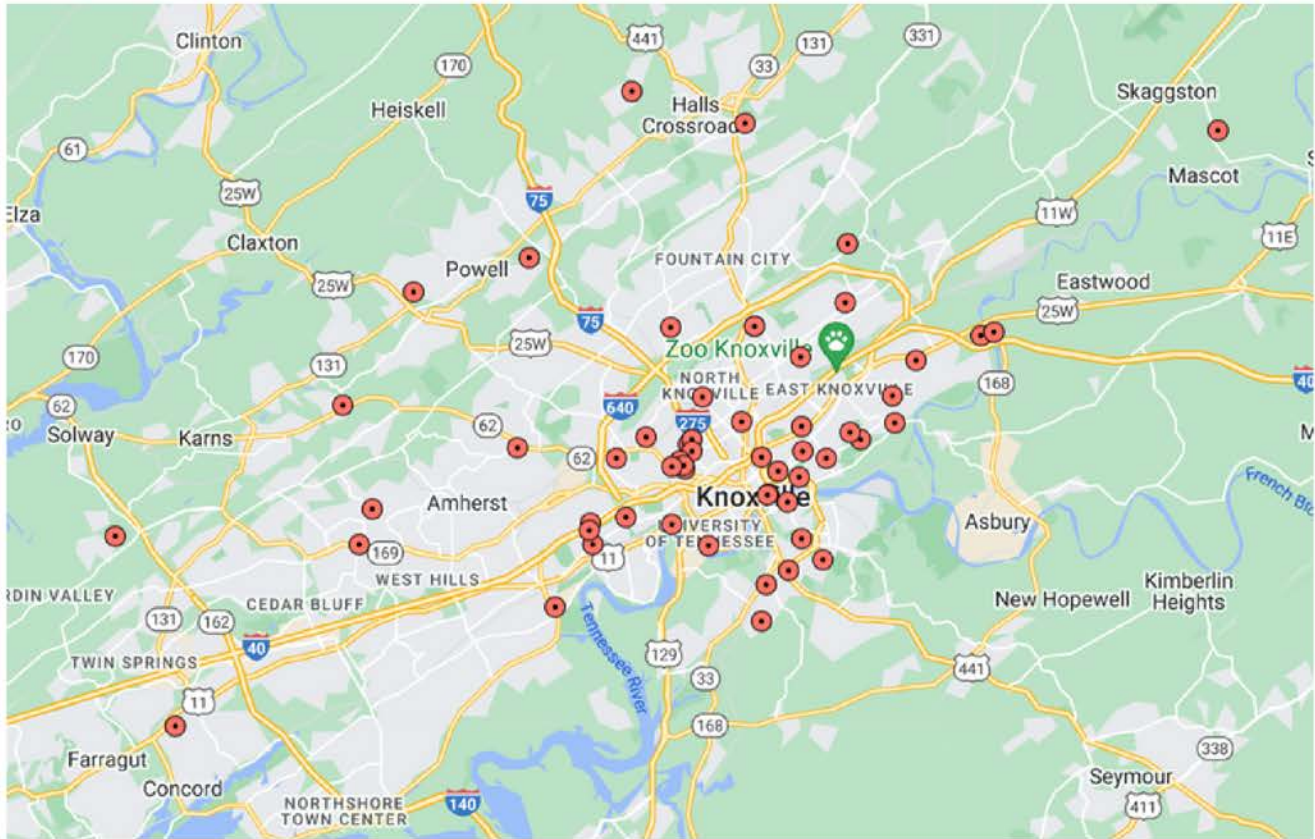
The following is a sampling of open-ended responses pertaining to general descriptions of gardens, unique aspects of the garden, and garden history. Responses have been edited for brevity and clarity. The full data set can be found in Appendix B.

- We desire to be a space where neighbors not only learn to grow their own food, but also develop friendship.
- +10,000 sq ft of in-ground growing space reserved for migrants and refugees.
- Gardeners sign a contract that they will donate 10% of the crops to local folks in need... Each year, the garden participates in Dr. Natalie Bumgarner's UT Vegetable Trials.
- We have a unique crop plan to provide food outside of traditional garden months.
- The largest school garden in Knox County and the only school garden that uses the permaculture model.
- 1 native garden used as a biodiversity plot and soon a sensory garden that we hope will be used as a space to relax and help to de-escalate students.
- We have built all of our soil on site with wood chips, clay and other natural amendments.
- It is about growing L-O-V-E.

## Survey Results - Garden Overview & Administration

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### Map of Community Gardens



### Number of Gardens

This survey identified 53 community gardens. 52 gardens were located within Knoxville city limits and 1 garden was located in Mascot, which is within Knox County limits.

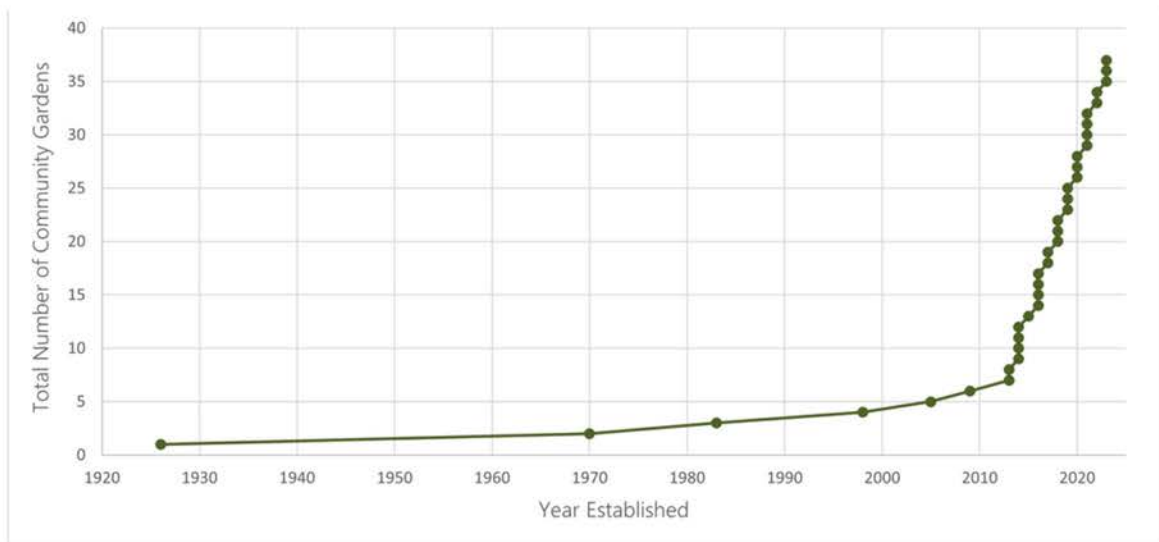
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## Survey Results - Garden Overview & Administration

### Age of Gardens

It is likely that there have been many more community gardens in Knox County that have been established and since shut down. This data reflects only active community gardens. The oldest known garden was established in 1926 and the newest garden was established in 2023.

#### Timeline of Community Garden Establishment



Total Respondents: 53  
Skipped Question: 0

Known Year Established: 37  
Unknown Year Established: 16

### Size of Gardens

The size of community gardens ranged from 64 square feet to 4.5 acres. The average garden size was 0.5 acres.

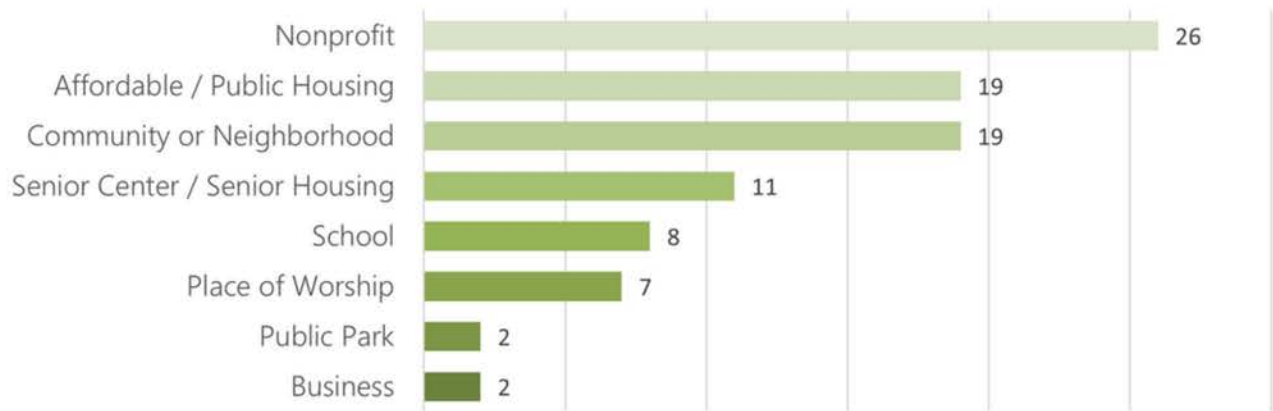
60% of respondents did not know the size of their garden or skipped the question.

## Survey Results - Garden Overview & Administration

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### Types of Gardens

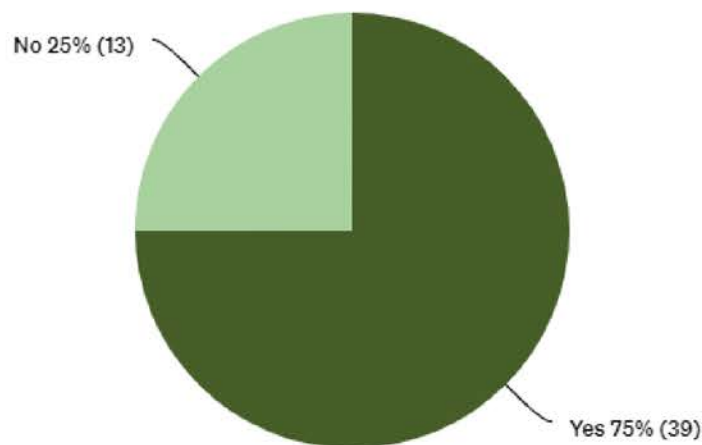
What type of garden do you operate? Select all that apply.



Total Respondents: 53  
Skipped Question: 0

### Public Access

Is your garden open to the public?



Total Respondents: 52  
Skipped Question: 1

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## Survey Results - Garden Overview & Administration

### Land History

What was on the land before it was a community garden?  
Select all that apply.

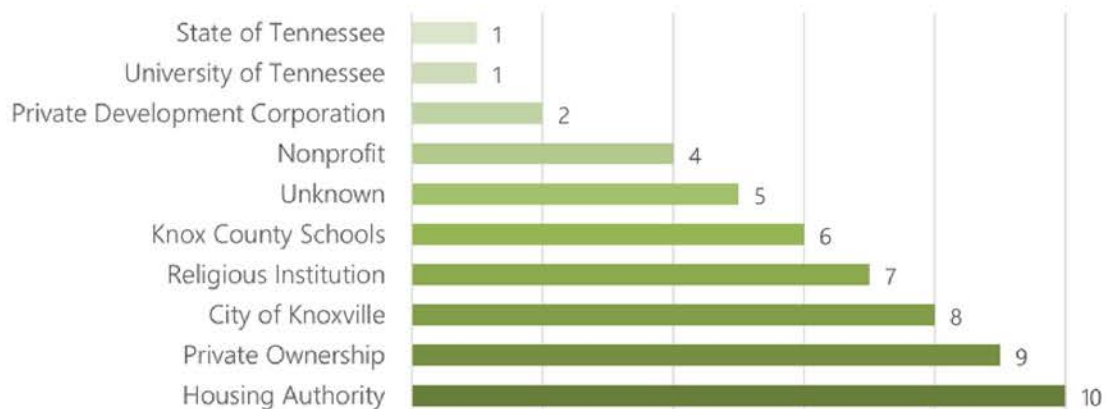
Type of Site	Number of Responses
Vacant Lot	17
Yard	15
Park	4
Housing Property	4
School Playground	3
Abandoned Building	2
Parking Lot	2

Type of Site	Number of Responses
Patio	2
Neighborhood Space	1
Nursery	1
Campus Green Space	1
Farmland	1
Public Property	1
Unknown	1

Total Responses: 54

### Land Ownership

What type of entity owns the land? Select all that apply.

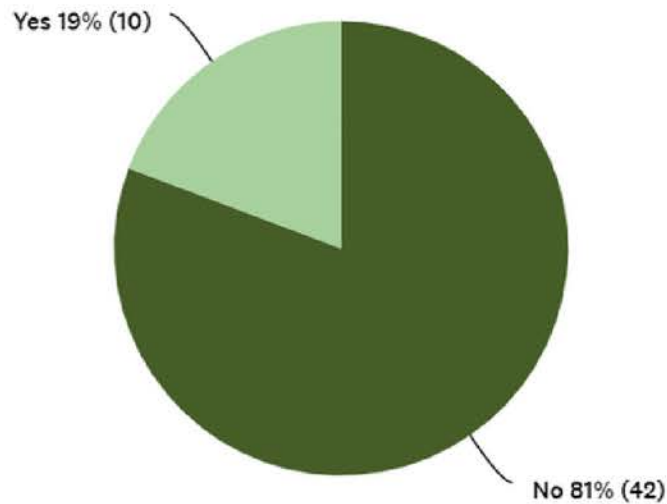


Total Respondents: 47  
Skipped Question: 6

## Survey Results - Garden Overview & Administration

### Wildlife Certifications

Does your garden have any wildlife certifications?



Total Respondents: 52

Skipped Question: 1

Certification	Total Respondents
NWF Certified Wildlife Habitat	8
Monarch Watch Certified Monarch Waystation	5
TUFC Certified Arboretum	2
NABA Certified Butterfly Garden	1
ArbNet Certified Arboretum	1
All-America Selections Test Garden	1
AAS Display Garden	1
American Conifer Society Reference Garden	1
American Hosta Society Reference Garden	1
Bee Campus USA Affiliate	1
Tennessee Community Smart Yard	1

## Survey Results - Gardeners

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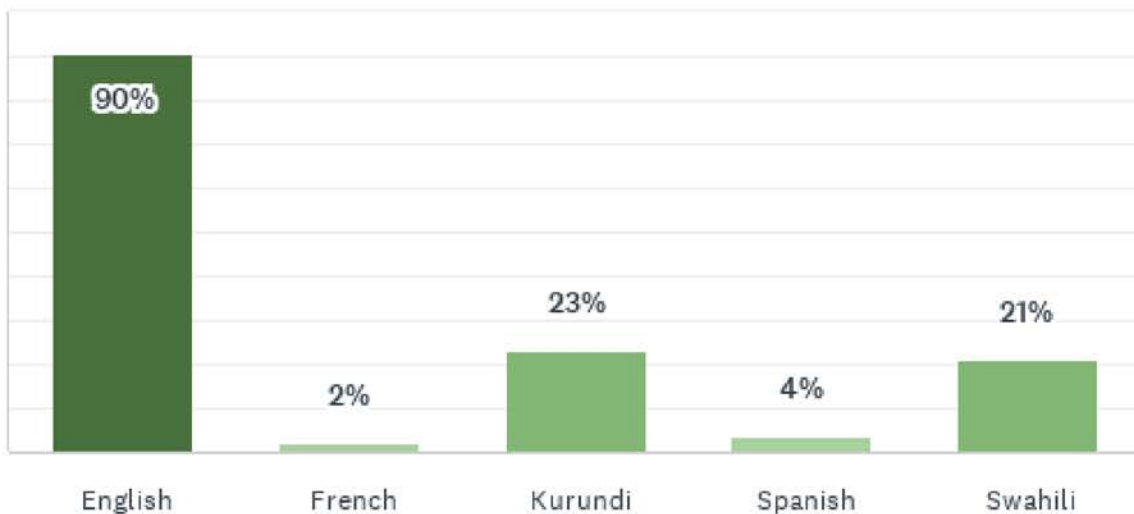
### Population Served

Total individuals served by community gardens in Knox County:

# 3801+

*Note: This data may not accurately reflect the true number of individuals served. The question was worded vaguely and many respondents answered in terms of households. The above calculation used the average household size in Knox County to determine individuals served. The phrasing of this question will be improved in future surveys.*

### Languages Spoken by Gardeners



Total Respondents: 51

Skipped Question: 2

Knox County has a large refugee population from countries including the Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, and Burundi, many of whom are used to growing their own food. CAC Beardsley Community Farm provides space on-site for 34 refugee families to grow food each year, as well as over 50 families off-site. The farm staff helps to prep the soil, provide access to water, and donate seeds and plants to gardeners who maintain large tracts of land. The farm partners with [Bridge Refugees](#) and [Sodela](#) to match clients in need with gardening space. An overview of refugee gardening in Knox County can be found in Appendix C.

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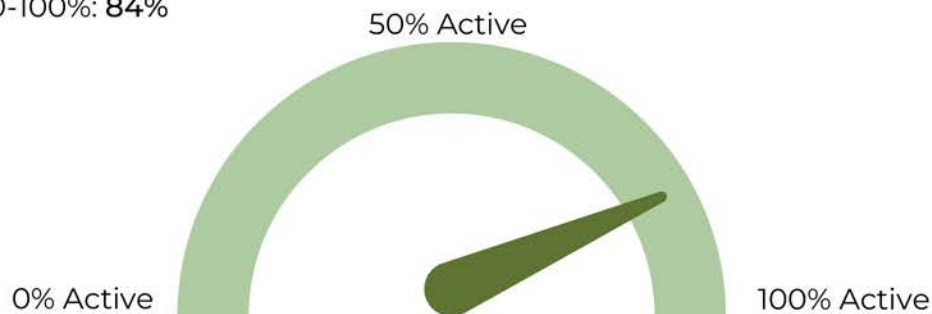
## Survey Results - Gardeners

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### Active Members

Approximately what percentage of your gardeners are active vs. inactive? "Inactive" members are those who do not regularly visit and/or tend to their beds.

Average Response on a scale from 0-100%: **84%**



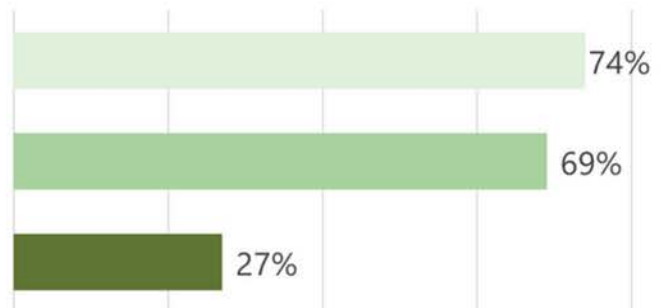
Total Respondents: 35  
Skipped Question: 28

### Distance Travelled to Gardens

Q1: What percentage of your gardeners live in the same neighborhood as your garden?

Q2: What percentage of your gardeners live within walking distance from your garden?

Q3: What percentage of your gardeners travel from outside the neighborhood they live in to use your garden?



Q1  
Total Respondents: 41  
Skipped Question: 12

Q2  
Total Respondents: 43  
Skipped Question: 10

Q3  
Total Respondents: 40  
Skipped Question: 13

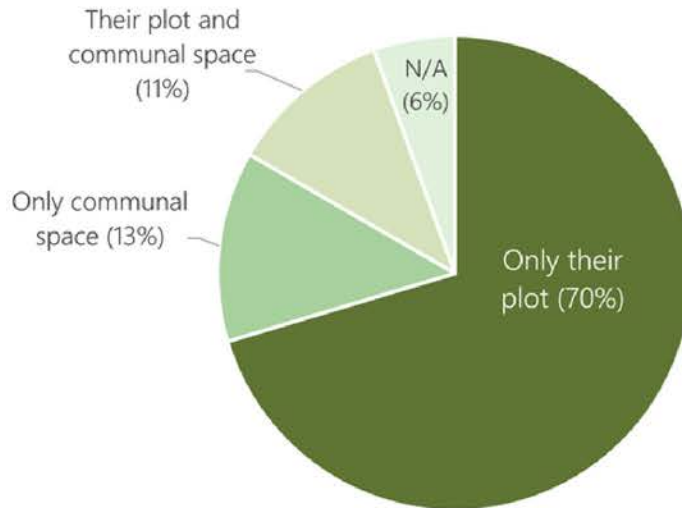
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## Survey Results - Gardeners

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### Gardener Responsibilities

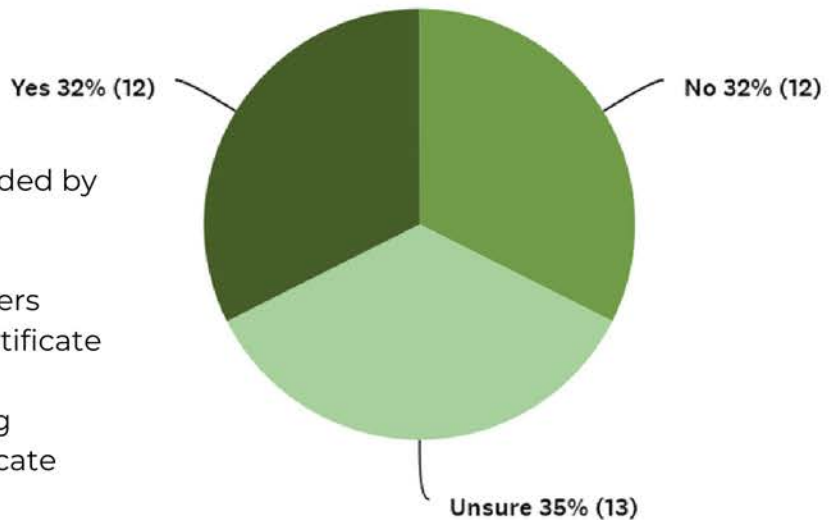
What are gardeners responsible for maintaining?



Total Respondents: 52  
Skipped Question: 1

### Agricultural Training

Do you and/or your gardeners have any related certifications or formal training?



Certifications and training provided by survey respondents:

- Knox County Master Gardeners
- UT Horticultural Therapy Certificate
- TN Naturalists
- B.S. in Biological Engineering
- Permaculture Design Certificate
- Relevant bachelor's degree
- Volunteer Foresters

Total Respondents: 37  
Skipped Question: 16

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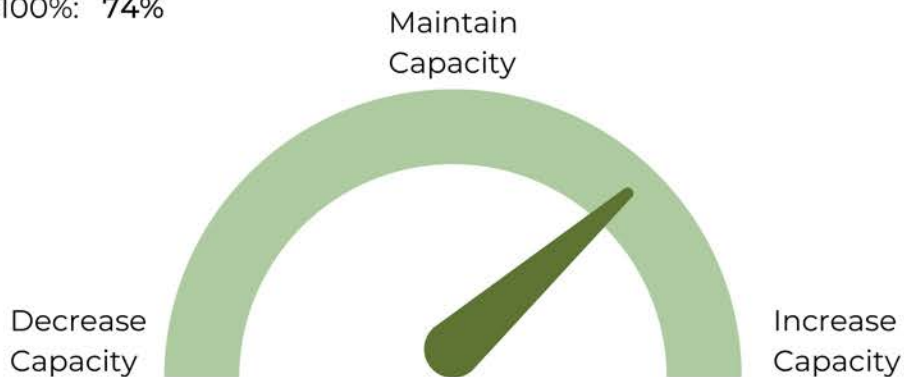
## Survey Results - Membership & Capacity

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### Capacity

Are you, or the organization who runs your garden, looking to increase, maintain, or decrease the capacity of your garden?

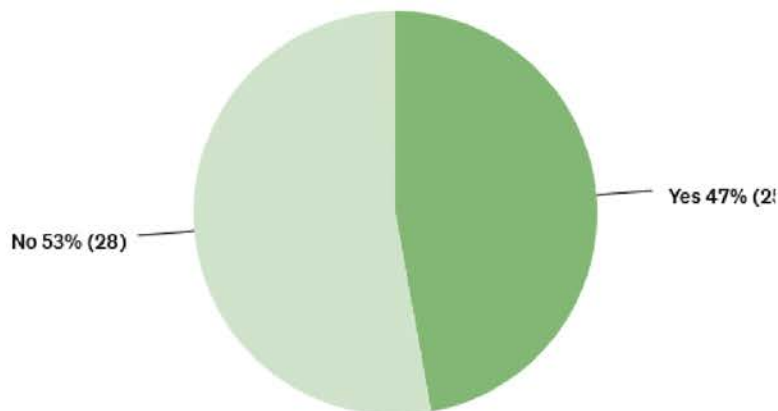
Average Response on a scale from 0-100%: 74%



Total Respondents: 53  
Skipped Question: 0

### Support

Do you feel that you have adequate support in regard to physical labor in order to maintain your garden year-round?



Total Respondents: 53  
Skipped Question: 0

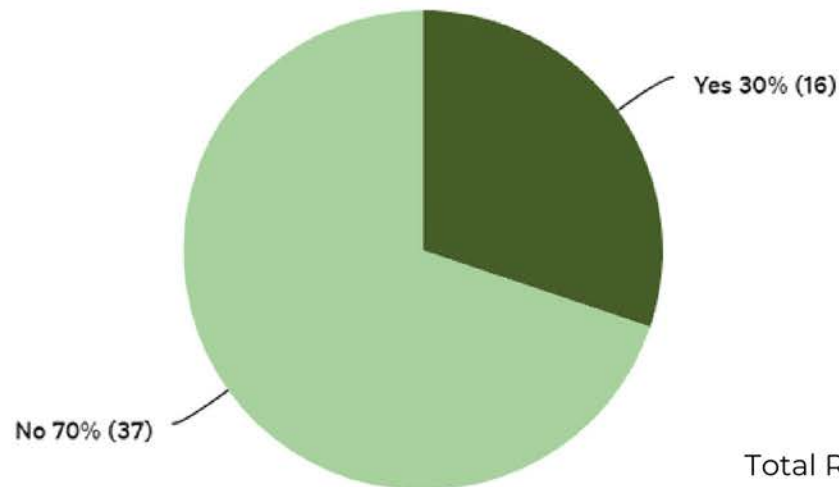
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## Survey Results - Membership & Capacity

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### Waitlist

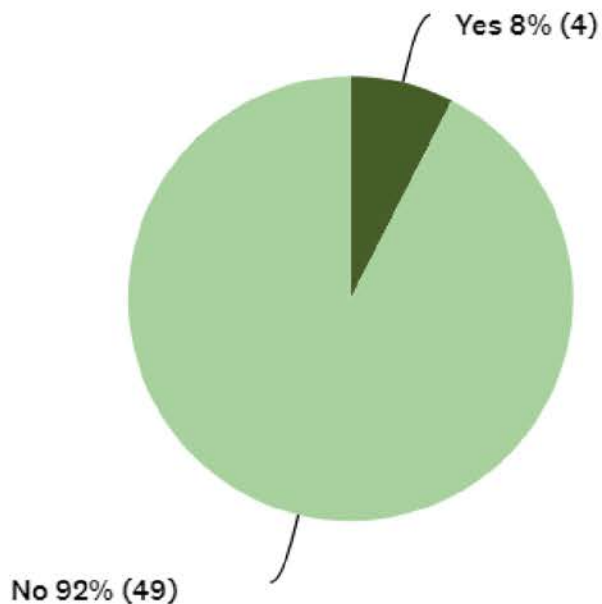
Does your garden have a waitlist?



Total Respondents: 53  
Skipped Question: 0

### Dues

Does your garden charge annual dues for membership?



If you answered yes, how much are your garden's annual dues?

- \$20
- \$15-30
- \$100
- \$10-50 sliding scale dependent on household income

Total Respondents: 53  
Skipped Question: 0

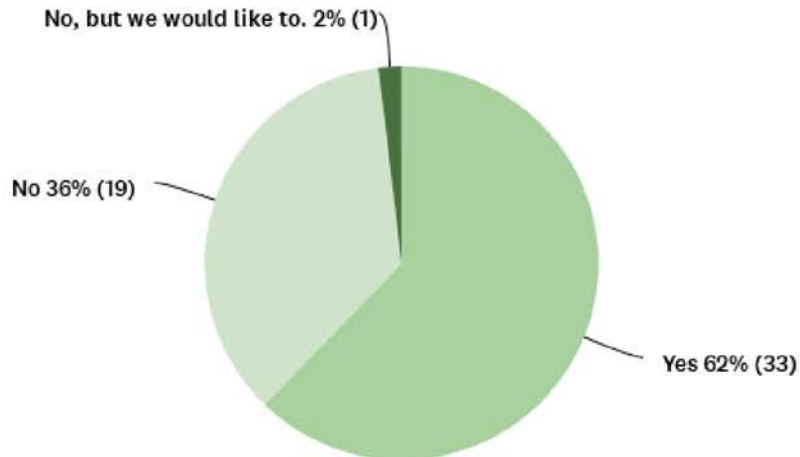
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## Survey Results - Membership & Capacity

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### Volunteers

Does your garden host volunteers?



Total Respondents: 53  
Skipped Question: 0

### Volunteer Needs

The following is a sampling of open-ended responses pertaining to volunteer needs. Responses have been edited for brevity and clarity.

"Need more skilled and unskilled volunteers, programming, and food resources."

"Always welcome volunteers! ... We would very much like to make connections with U.T. students to help in the garden as part of community service and learning. "

"Help with maintaining the garden, an approved volunteer who could take a small group of students out to weed a garden bed weekly (like 3-4 students), donations and/or help with building benches or fixing."

"More assistance through the week in maintaining garden (watering, weeding, etc.), help during the summer."

"Our [volunteers] shriveled as a result of Covid. Now I am the only one left and cannot maintain on my own. We used to grow large amounts of communal food, but I cannot do that without help."

"More skilled volunteers, we need to be better about harvesting regularly, we need to get back to hosting big groups to tackle large projects."

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## Survey Results - Food Production

### Vegetables

Which vegetables do gardens grow?



Not pictured: Brussel Sprouts (8%), Celery (4%), Parsnip (4%), Ground Cherries (4%), Leek (2%), Cauliflower (2%), Bok Choi (2%), Arugula (2%), Tomatillo (2%)

## Survey Results - Food Production

### Fruits

Which fruits do gardens grow?

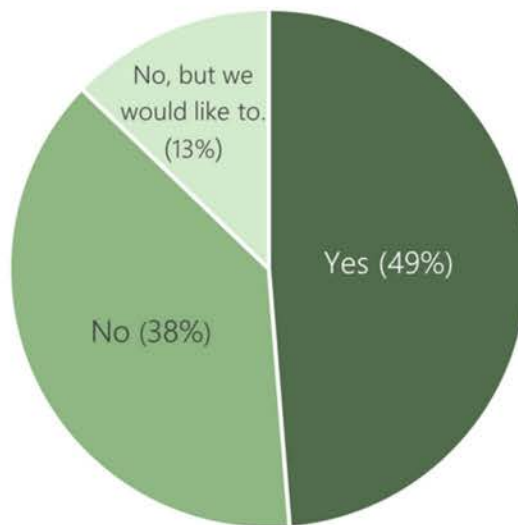


*“A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust.”*  
– Gertrude Jekyll

## Survey Results - Food Production

### Cultural Relevancy

Does your garden grow any culturally preferred foods? The CDC defines "culturally preferred foods" as safe and nutritious foods that meet the diverse tastes and needs of customers based on their cultural identity.



Total Respondents: 39  
Skipped Question: 14

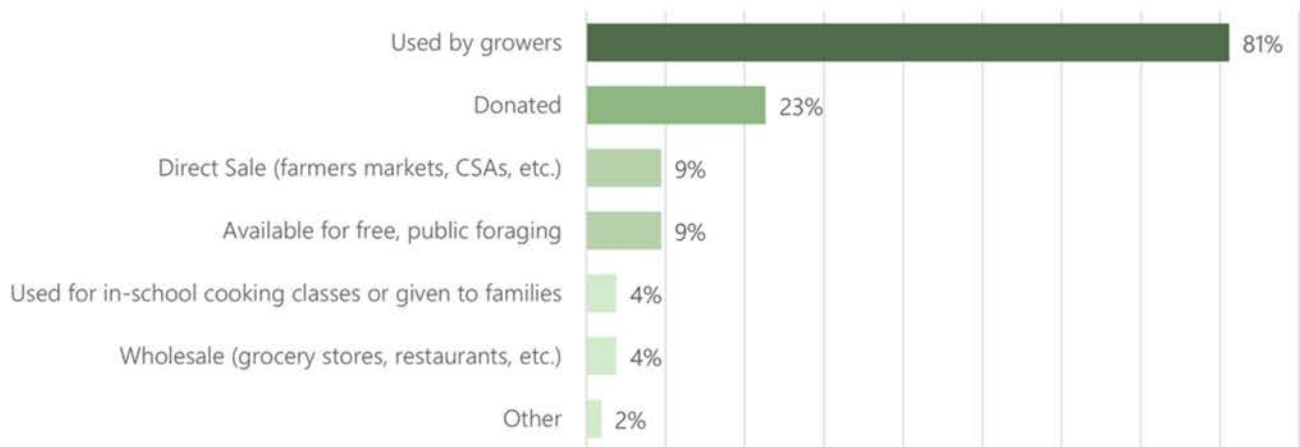


## Survey Results - Food Production

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### End Use of Produce

What happens to the produce that is grown in your garden?  
Select all that apply.



Total Respondents: 53  
Skipped Question: 0



**Blount Mansion Garden**

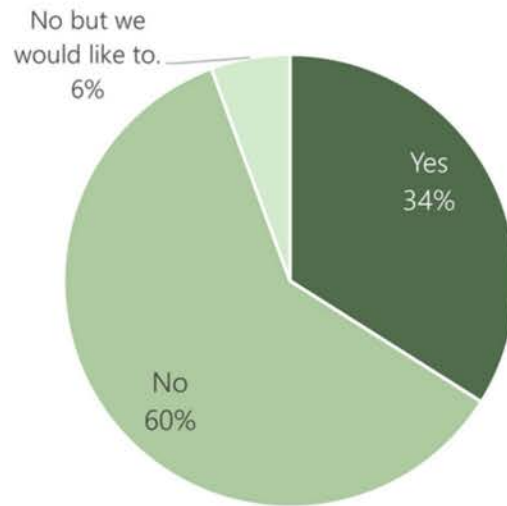
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## Survey Results - Food Production

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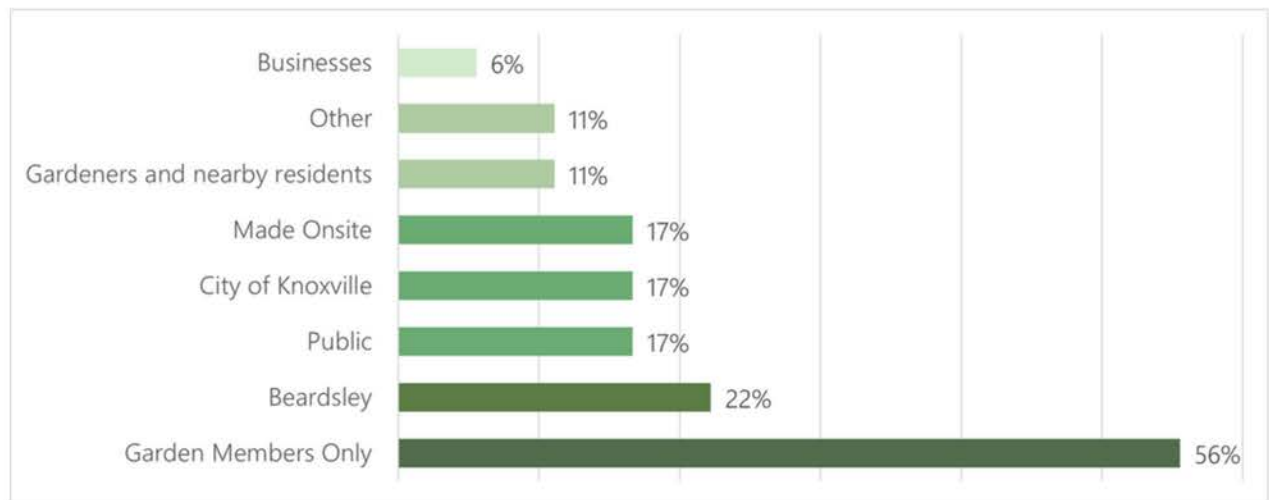
### Composting

Does your garden compost?



Total Respondents: 53  
Skipped Question: 0

Of the gardens who use compost, where do they source their compost?



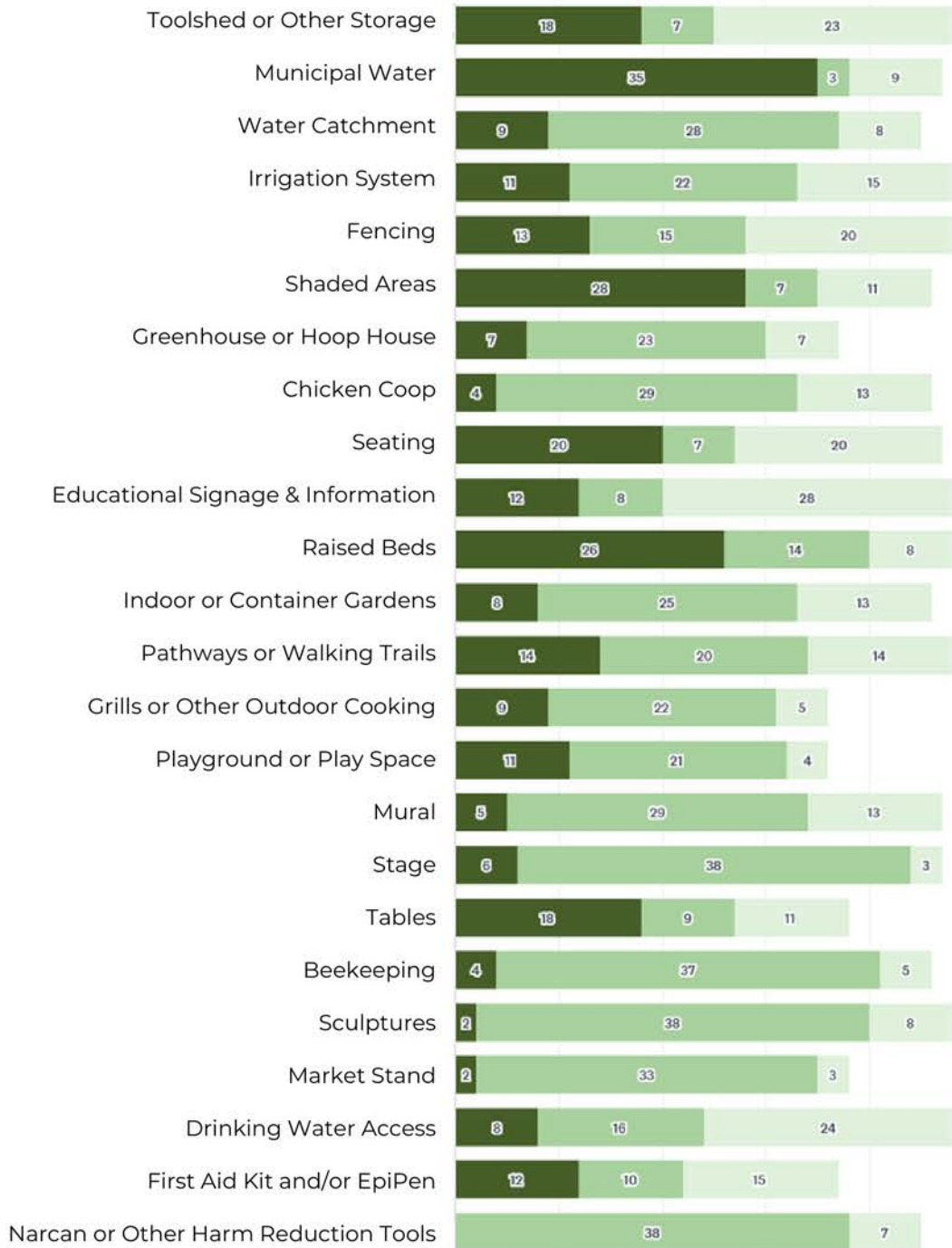
Total Respondents: 17  
Skipped Question: 36

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## Survey Results - Physical & Social Structures

### Current and Desired Structures & Amenities

**Key:**  Yes  No  No, but I would like to have this.

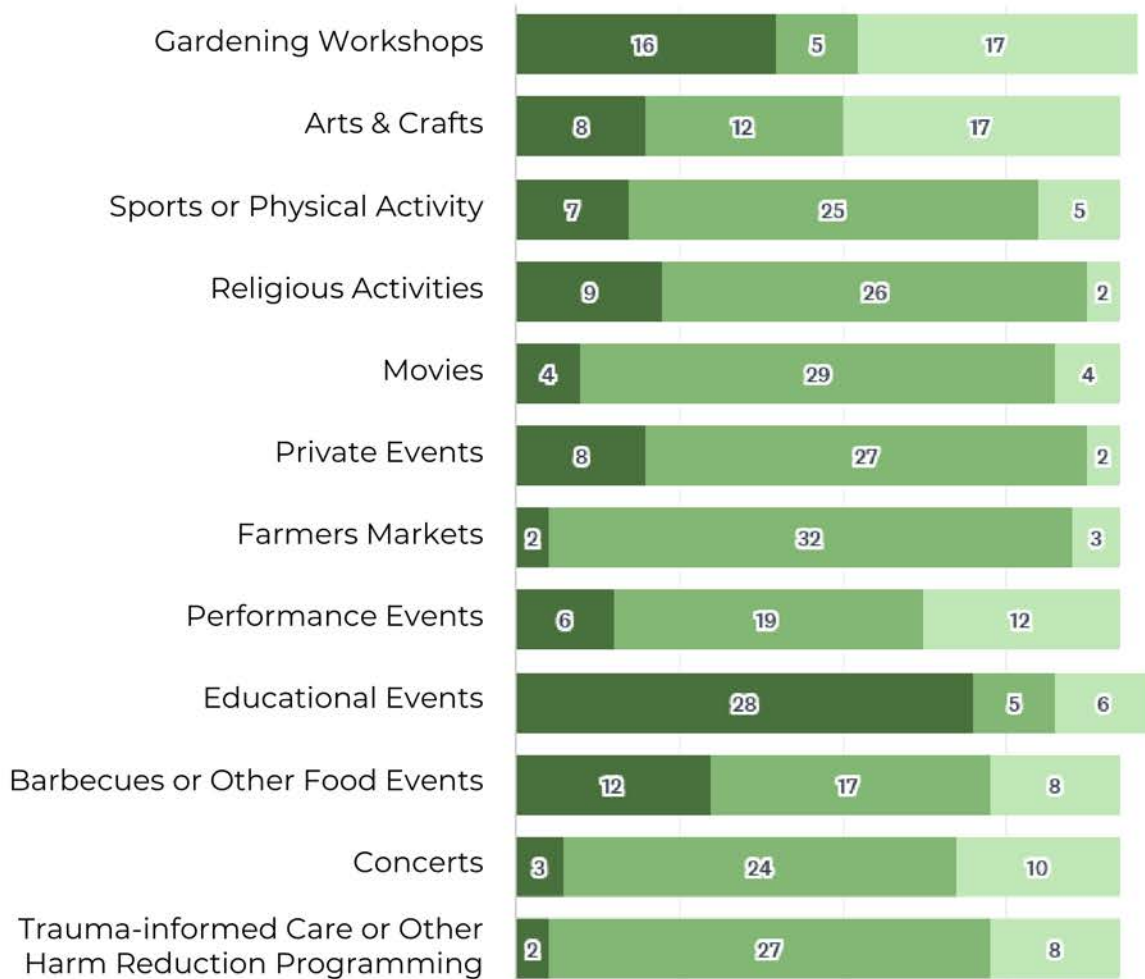


Total Respondents: 47  
Skipped Question: 6

## Survey Results - Physical & Social Structures

### Current and Desired Events

**Key:**  Yes  No  No, but I would like to have this.

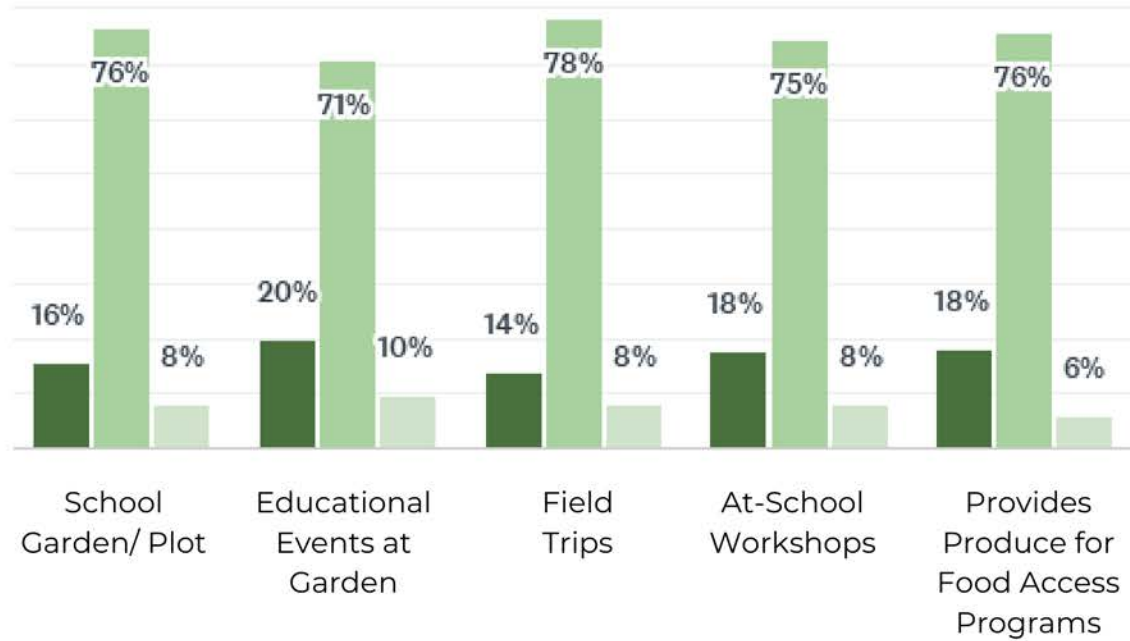


Total Respondents: 37  
Skipped Question: 16

## Survey Results - Physical & Social Structures

### Partnerships with Schools

**Key:**  Yes  No  No, but I would like to have this.



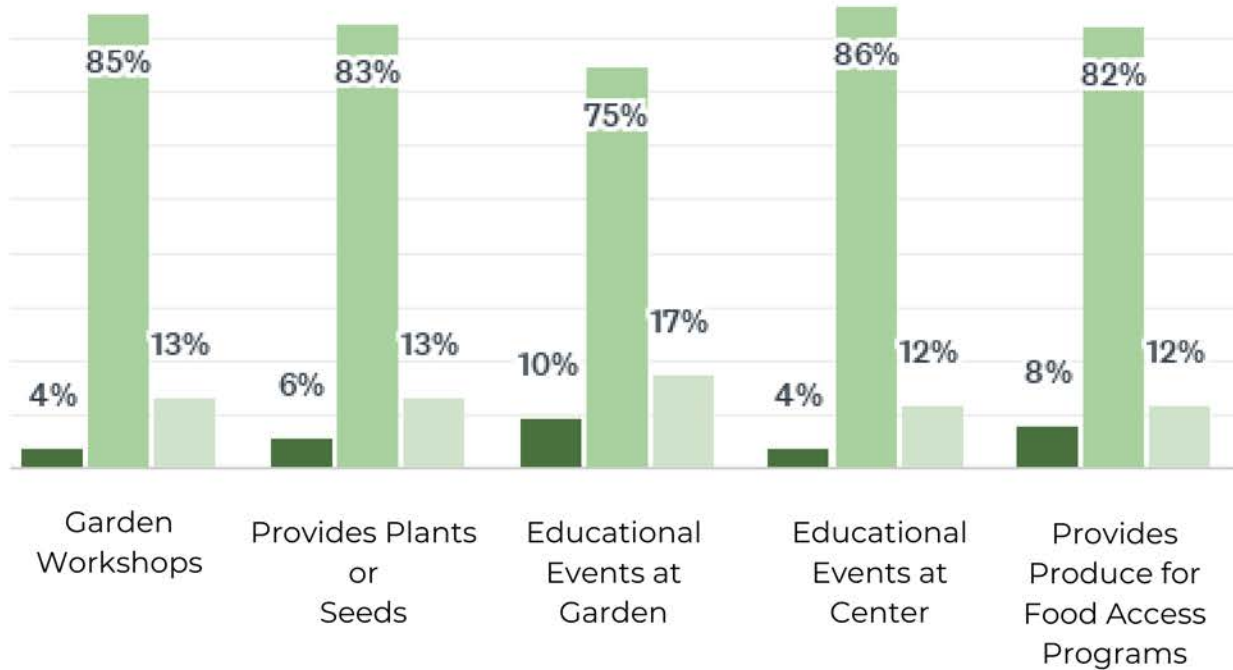
**Pond Gap Elementary School Garden**



## Survey Results - Physical & Social Structures

### Partnerships with Seniors

**Key:**  Yes  No  No, but I would like to have this.



## Conclusion

Community gardens provide space to nurture the land, our bodies, and our connections with one another. Growing food increases food security, has positive impacts on physical and mental health, and provides economic, social, and environmental benefits. 97% of participants in a recent Knox County Community Food Security Assessment believe that it is important for our community to conserve or protect local land for farmland or community gardens.

Through the dedication of individuals and organizations in our community, this survey highlights the abundant existing assets of community gardens in Knox County. These assets form a foundation upon which we can continue building a thriving, sustainable, and equitable food system. The established baseline of knowledge in this report can serve as a catalyst for action, helping stakeholders to identify opportunities for growth and collaboration.

Thank you to all those who participated in the creation of this report. We look forward to growing with you!



**Burwell Gardens**

*"... no matter how urban our life, our bodies live by farming; we come from the earth and we return to it, and so we live in agriculture as we live in flesh." -Wendell Berry*

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# Appendix A

## Gardens that Completed the Survey

- Austin East/MARRNS Garden
- Battlefield Farm
- Beaumont Elementary
- Becoming Beloved community garden
- Blount Mansion Garden
- Blueberry Ridge
- Burwell Gardens: A Neighborhood Garden
- CAC Beardsley Community Farm
- CAC Beardsley Farm New Ground Garden
- Cagle Terrace
- Candleridge Apartments
- Community Garden at Knoxville Botanical Garden and Arboretum
- Concord UMC Community Gardens
- Cottages KCDC
- Dogwood Elementary
- Dogwood Terrace
- Epperson Ministries New Ground Garden
- Golden Age
- Guy B. Love Towers
- Hardin Valley Campus Garden
- Hardy Park New Ground Garden
- House Mountain Hens
- Isabella Towers
- Knox Pride Community Garden
- Lonsdale New Ground Garden
- LT Ross Head Start
- Marble City Community Garden
- Maude Booth
- Montgomery Village New Ground Garden
- Morningside Neighborhood Garden
- Nature's Cove



**Sustainable Future Center**

Continues to next page

# Appendix A (cont.)

## Gardens that Completed the Survey

- New Covenant Presbyterian
- New Harvest Park
- North Hills Arboretum
- Northgate New Ground Garden
- Northgate Terrace
- Old City Gardens
- Parkridge New Ground Garden
- Pond Gap Elementary School Garden
- Ridgebrook New Ground Garden
- South Doyle Middle School Garden
- South Knoxville Elementary Community Garden
- St. Mary's Riverview
- Stop and Go New Ground Garden
- Sunny Brook Apartments
- Sustainable Future Center Garden
- The Village at Holston Place
- Timberline Neighborhood Garden
- Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church Community Garden
- University of Tennessee Gardens
- Western Heights Boys and Girls Club
- Western Heights New Ground Garden
- Willow Place Apartments



Old City Gardens

## Appendix B

### Garden Descriptions (if provided)

Garden Name	Description and unique aspects of garden. Responses have been edited for clarity and brevity.
Austin East/MARRNS Garden	There are 12 raised beds at Green Magnet Academy, 6 beds at Austin-East High School, and 4 beds at Mount Zion Church.
CAC Beardsley Farm's New Ground Gardens	CAC Beardsley Farm's New Ground Garden and the Lonsdale New Ground Garden are two of the first refugee gardens in the area.
Burwell Gardens: A Neighborhood Garden	Burwell Gardens is a neighborhood garden working to help improve the relational, physical, and spiritual health of the Oakwood-Lincoln Park Neighborhood and surrounding area. We desire to be a space where neighbors not only learn to grow their own food, but also develop friendship. The original owner of the house that used to sit in the property was well known around the neighborhood for growing a large garden in his backyard and sharing his produce with neighbors. Folks also talk about the large peach tree that used to produce on the property.
Community Garden at Knoxville Botanical Gardens and Arboretum	The two parts of our garden are our 26 raised-bed garden, and +10,000 sq ft of in-ground growing space reserved for migrants and refugees.
Concord UMC Community Gardens	Concord UMC Community Garden has both an N40 garden and an S40 garden where a variety of fruits, veggies, and flowers are grown for pollinators and for our Flower Ministry, which donates flowers to our CADES program, shut-ins and shared with fellow gardeners. The garden has given away over 60,000 lbs. of food since 2014. Gardeners sign a contract that they will donate 10% of the crops to local folks in need. Gardeners are required to give 10 hours of support labor in the community gardens from April through October. The garden provides multi-generational opportunities to participate in helping local folks in need of fresh veggies. Concord UMC partners with 3 other churches in a food pantry where all produce goes to for their pantry days. The garden was awarded a USDA Soil Conversation grant that has allowed installation of a new drip irrigation system. Each year, the garden participates in Dr. Natalie Bumgarner's UT Vegetable Trials.

Continues to next page

# Appendix B

## Garden Descriptions (if provided)

Garden Name	Description and unique aspects of garden. Responses have been edited for clarity and brevity.
Dogwood Elementary	Dogwood Elementary School earned the Tennessee Urban Forestry Council's State Arboretum of the Year award in 2020.
Guy B. Love Towers	The Guy B. Love Towers Garden is one of the oldest community gardens managed by CAC and KCDC.
Hardin Valley Campus Garden	The Hardin Valley Campus Garden has a unique crop plan to provide food outside of traditional garden months. By utilizing row covers and careful crop selection, produce is harvested while students are on campus January through April and August through November. The Hardin Valley Campus Garden provides fruits and vegetables to the Pellissippi Pantry.
House Mountain Hens	Free range hens, egg production, vineyard, vegetable production.
Knox Pride Community Garden	We have a small space next to the center with raised bed gardening. We are working to install vertical gardening as well. We hope to provide food to our community through our pantry, satellite pantry at South Press, and our new outdoor FREEDGE in partnership with the Knox County Health Dept. It was a blank piece of land left over from the Sam Duff Park refresh in 2021/2022. We worked with the city to develop into a test site for sustainability and hope to expand in the future.
Marble City Community Garden	Water, Composting, Raised Beds, Green House, Shady Pavilion, Work Shop, Gathering Circle with Swings and Fire Pit, Amphitheater, BBQ grill. Open to community residents and Gardners only.
North Hills Arboretum	First and only neighborhood arboretum. The arboretum was developed for public education and is open to the public to provide information on trees & shrubs in the neighborhood. It is certified by the Tennessee Urban Forest Council and ArbNet with the Morton Arboretum.

Continues to next page

## Appendix B

### Garden Descriptions (if provided)

Garden Name	Description and unique aspects of garden. Responses have been edited for clarity and brevity.
Old City Gardens	Old City Gardens is in an excellent location, nestled into the Old City of Knoxville right off James White Parkway. The raised beds on the urban farm are used in production for CSAs.
Pond Gap Elementary School Garden	The largest school garden in Knox County and the only school garden that uses the permaculture model. Contains 50+ native fruit trees. The Pond Gap Elementary School Garden consists of a 1/4-acre permaculture-style food forest and 25 raised beds. The food forest focuses on perennial and native species, growing both food crops and beneficial plants that support a complete ecosystem. This area provides food and habitat for native wildlife while producing a yield for the community. The raised bed garden focuses on standard annual fruits and vegetables, while also pulling permaculture principles into the space with the interplanting of beneficial and pollinator species. The garden space is regularly used as an educational asset, with two outdoor classrooms and a biodiverse area for students to explore. All yields are sent home with students or donated to Second Harvest.
South Doyle Middle School Garden	4 plots of veggies that students use in my science enrichment class to eat and study, 1 native garden used as a biodiversity plot and soon a sensory garden that we hope will be used as a space to relax and help to de-escalate students. Would love to know more history but it has a lovely forest on property so lots of birds, some deer, turkey.
South Knoxville Elementary Community Garden	Large vegetable garden planted and cared for mainly by students. Students learn how to eat and use the food. They decide the plants to go in the garden. The garden is next to an outdoor classroom area with tables and benches. There is a storage shed built by an Eagle Scout that houses garden tools and bikes for the bike club.

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# Appendix B

## Garden Descriptions (if provided)

Garden Name	Description and unique aspects of garden. Responses have been edited for clarity and brevity.
Sustainable Future Center Garden	The Sustainable Future Center community garden is a place to learn gardening by doing. We have volunteer opportunities and plots available. We have built all of our soil on site with wood chips, clay and other natural amendments.
Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church Community Garden	The TVUUC Community Garden is a teaching and reaching out garden. It is about growing L-O-V-E. Harvests from the Donation Section have always been donated. Last year, we changed to selling the harvest at the TVUUC Little Market in the church lobby. Money from the sales is used to purchase shelf-stable food for our TVUUC Little Food Pantry (our zero-barrier outdoor pantry for food-insecure people in our neighborhood, a USDA certified food desert. During the summer, the Community Garden is the children's classroom. Children (and the volunteers) help plant, tend, and harvest, and then they sell the fruit and veggies at the TVUUC Little Market on Sundays. Periodically throughout the year, the children's classes are in the garden. The TVUUC Community Garden is funded by members and friends of the church.
Timberline Neighborhood Garden	Six raised beds in my full-sun side yard, used by neighbors. Vegetables, herbs and flowers. Currently, it's only my across-the-street neighbor and I who are using them.
University of Tennessee Gardens	Public university teaching, research, and demonstration garden with a variety of gardens within the gardens. The variety of plants on display: vegetables, small fruits, pollinator attractors, herbs, edible flowers, ornamental annual, perennials, grasses, trees, shrubs, and vines.



# Appendix C

## Overview of Refugee Gardening in Knox County Provided by CAC Beardsley Community Farm

Knox County has a large refugee population, including individuals with strong ties to agricultural lifestyles. Families from the Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, and Uganda are used to growing their own food, and lack access to specific foods important to their culture. Since at least 2014, there have been refugees growing food in Knoxville, with gardens first appearing on Lonsdale, Mechanicsville (CAC CAC Beardsley Farm), and East Knoxville.

CAC Beardsley Community Farm currently provides space for 41 refugee families to grow food on-site through a program called New Ground Gardens. Each family receives a plot of land that is approximately 15' by 20'. Gardens vary slightly, but most plots contain a combination of intore (African eggplant), lenga-lenga (an amaranth green), beans, maize, and squash. Crops grow symbiotically, and dense plantings lead to big harvests. CAC Beardsley Farm provides a yearly orientation with a paid refugee translator, garden preparation, intore seeds and plants, and lenga-lenga seeds. Refugee families also have access to CAC Beardsley's water lines, hoses, and other resources upon request.

CAC Beardsley also coordinates with Sodela (a non-profit run by refugees that provides a variety of resources for their community), Bridge Refugees Services, Inc., KCDC, Epperson Ministries, and the City of Knoxville's Parks and Recreation to provide resources and help match refugees to about 50 additional garden plots throughout the city.

The program has grown each year since 2015, and surveys and interviews indicate that refugees need more land access and resources to grow food. CAC Beardsley Farm and Sodela are working on a survey with refugees currently enrolled in the program, and of the 22 participants surveyed so far, 86% would like a bigger plot of land for growing food. Answers also highlight the importance of gardens for this community including affordable produce, connection to culture, and the physical and mental benefits of staying connected to the land. CAC Beardsley Farm and Sodela will use data to support grant applications, with the intention that, if awarded a grant, the refugee community will be compensated to lead further growth of the program.