2023 GROWING TO GREEN IMPACT REPORT
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It has been a tremendous year for the Conservatory’s Growing to Green (G2G) program and community gardening in Central Ohio. Engaging in this initiative has allowed us to witness the power of collective effort in fostering sustainable urban agricultural practices, building connections, and nurturing a sense of belonging within the community.

Moreover, the vibrant tapestry of Columbus’s community gardens reflects the diversity of its residents. These gardens are more than just spaces to grow fruits and vegetables; they are hubs of learning, collaboration, and empowerment. Through the G2G program, the Conservatory has played a pivotal role in providing resources, education, and support to individuals and groups eager to cultivate green spaces.

This support has been driven by a dedicated team – Sean McKay, G2G Coordinator, and Lauren Preston, G2G Educator, along with the help of Conservatory Volunteers and Women’s Board. As you will see in the annual report, this team has profoundly impacted the gardening community. It goes beyond the numbers served – teaching classes, providing technical assistance, pulling weeds, planting seeds, and harvesting crops; it’s about cultivating relationships and a shared sense of purpose.

Working side by side, we exchange knowledge, ideas, and stories, transcending barriers and fostering a deeper understanding of one another. It is a privilege for us to be a part of this community and to serve so many. We look forward to amplifying our work and “growing greener” in 2024!

Keep on gardening,

Bruce A. Harkey,
President & CEO
Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens
The Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Garden’s Growing to Green (G2G) is a free community garden program for all of Central Ohio. The program includes advocacy, education, technical assistance, volunteerism, financial resources, recognition, leadership development, and networking for all community gardens. These spaces include, but are not limited to; schools, donations, allotment, pollinators, educational, urban farms, cooperatives, workforce development, therapy, demonstration, and city beautification gardens.

Research shows that “The benefits of community-based gardening projects likely extend beyond food security, as gardens provide fresh vegetables, and the process of gardening involves physical exercise. Community gardens contribute to community wellbeing by influencing the nutritional and social environment.” (Carney & Hamada, 2011; Egli, Oliver & Tautolo, 2016).

“We’ve become a family. Helping each other, sharing seeds, and plants, watering other’s gardens when not available to do so, all tools needed to work with, other than spoon feeding us. Growing to Green has been very helpful to the gardeners!!!”

- Franklin Park Community Garden Plot Holder
People directly impacted by the Growing to Green program through advocacy, education, technical assistance, volunteerism, financial resources, recognition, leadership development, and networking.

7,909 Garden visits

43 Educational presentations, work shops, and hands-on learning experiences

372 Gardens directly impacted

156 Schools impacted
The Franklin Park Conservatory Community Garden (FPCCG) serves as a model for allotment-style community gardens with 40 annually leased plots. Registration is highly desirable with 36 people on the wait list.

Utilizing our community garden map, we assisted 9 of the people on the wait list to find another community garden in the meantime.

27.4%

Of the plot holders are immediate neighbors to the Conservatory

FRANKLIN PARK CONSERVATORY COMMUNITY GARDEN
TIME IN THE GARDEN

“I like all the opportunities you provide to connect with the other community gardeners.”

- Franklin Park Community Garden Plot Holder

1,667 Hours

Engagement hours recorded by our plot holders. Engagement hours include maintaining their personal plot, maintaining public space in the FPCCG, volunteering on the main Conservatory Campus, and engaging with other gardeners in educational/social/work events at FPCCG.

57
Active plot holders utilize the community garden

13
Zip codes represented in our community garden
Franklin Park Conservatory Community Garden received this recognition at the 2023 American Community Garden Association Conference (ACGA) in Houston, Texas.
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Is a volunteer service initiative to assist community gardens, neighborhood beautification projects and urban farms. Part of this initiative is to further educate ourselves about our communities and the neighborhood leaders who take on these projects. Some time in the garden is set aside to just listen and learn about particular issues affecting neighborhoods and those that are addressing them.

In 2023, 8 gardens throughout Franklin County hosted our volunteers. Community Connections totaled 177 service hours by 59 volunteers. The value of the volunteer time was $5,628.60.

VOLUNTEERISM

“Volunteering with Growing to Green connects me with nature - plants, soil, dirt - and it provides a community for gardeners to connect with each other”

- Women’s Board Member

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS VOLUNTEERS AT EBENEZER CEMETERY BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT
“Volunteering with Growing to Give was such a rewarding experience for our team. Not only were we able to connect with each other while we were giving back to the community, we also learned a lot from Growing to Green along the way.”

- Growing to Give Volunteer

GROWING TO GIVE

In 2023, Growing to Green piloted a similar volunteer initiative to Community Connections. Provide, a Fifth Third Subsidiary, piloted this program volunteering at a total of 4 gardens supplying 20 volunteers for a total of 72 hours of volunteer service. The value of the volunteer time was $2,237.76.
Partnership with the Columbus City Schools (CCS) Farm to School program has expanded by giving resources, on-site technical assistance, and helping hands for the 72 CCS schools enrolled in the program. Many students and teachers have attended our free Communal Garden classes.

In 2023, G2G participated in the development of a new $150K Urban Agricultural Infrastructure Grant in partnership with Franklin County Board of Commissioners and Franklin Soil & Water Conservation District to increase food production and distribution throughout Franklin County.

Other technical assistance include writing letters of support for garden grant applications, presenting about the importance of community gardens to civic and area commission meetings, and garden design implementation.
The Teen Eco Summit hosted by the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium is a free, student-driven program where teams create Conservation Action Plans to help create sustainability and conservation-based change within their schools and communities. G2G attended as an organizational resource partner providing on-site technical assistance, design, plant selection, project resources, and student led meetings.

391 Students attended the Teen Eco Summit

60 Schools in attendance

31 Schools from Franklin County
COMMUNITY GARDEN BUS TOUR

Is an opportunity for Franklin Park Conservatory Women’s Board to experience the amazing community gardens that G2G impacts. 

40 members attended the day trip visiting 4 different types of gardens.

“What an amazing, inspiring day! Thank you! It is so powerful to see the Growing to Green partners in action and to know that our work as Women’s Board helps make it possible.”

- Women’s Board Member

“Great memories of this tour and it was excellent as always. Thank you for a fun, educational and inspiring day.”

- Women’s Board Member
EDUCATION FOCUSED

Feedback from the FPCCG plot holders and general public included the need for continuing educational garden classes. Accessibility to quality education has been a priority. G2G has provided multiple forms of education through classes, workshops, events, presentation, and educational booth outreaches. G2G staff has participated and presented in 6 conferences this year and a total of 43 presentations and workshops.

COMMUNAL GARDEN SERIES

The Communal Garden Series is offered as a free monthly class series for the general public to learn about everything gardening, from seed starting, to cut flowers, to growing mushrooms.

There were 12 free classes offered at the Conservatory with an average of 35 participants in each class for a total of 407 participants. 8 classes were offered out in the community reaching an additional 289 participants.

“We love coming to the Communal Garden classes as a fun night out where we get to learn about a common topic of interest that will directly impact our garden”

- Communal Garden Participant
Growing to Green piloted a four week program for 2nd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 8th grade students were able to have fun and learn using the garden as inspiration. They were able to talk about pollination and hold bees if they were brave. G2G provided tastings using produce from the garden like iced mint tea and pineapple salsa. Students help build green bean tepees and decorate them using marigold flowers. They also planted a salad garden which included lettuce, radishes, and carrots. The students ended up producing over 82 pounds of radishes that were given away at the free weekly farm stand.

SUMMER SCHOOL GARDEN EXPERIENCE

BERWICK ALTERNATIVE K-8 STUDENTS PLANTING POTATOES AND REACHING FOR THE SUN TO GROW

90 students participated
Dear Mr. Sean, Thank you for helping us within our garden. My favorite activity was everything you did with us! I really like doing tasting new stuff.
The Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation, The City of Columbus, and Franklin County utilize a single application hosted by The Columbus Foundation to maximize funding and material resources to gardens and to provide financial and material resources to re-purpose underused land and to create, continue, or expand community gardens and greenspaces to:

- Increase healthy, affordable, and local food access and education, particularly for people in under-resourced neighborhoods;

- Connect individuals to the life-enhancing benefits of community gardens and greenspaces, including health and wellness, environmental, community building, and beautification.

Nonprofit gardening efforts may apply for:

- Up to $3k
- Up to $300 in-kind product donations from The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company

G2G administers $20k provided by Franklin County Board of Commissioners for 20 of the 93 applicants in 2023. Growing to Green hosted an Earth Day Celebration in The Wells Barn parking lot to distribute 25k of wholesale Scotts Miracle-Gro Company products to all of the applicants.

“We are grateful for the support and what it allows us to make possible at our centers for the children and family we serve.”

- Urban Garden Grant Applicant
The Awards honor and celebrate the dedication and hard work of many Central Ohio communities, organizations, and individuals. 8 awards were presented and GreenScapes made a surprise donation of $150 to all 12 nominations for the Bill Dawson Community Gardener of the Year Award. $5,300 was distributed that evening.
The term community garden encapsulates quite a diverse variety of gardens including: school, food pantry, faith-based, allotment, communally-shared, market, pollinator, city beautification, therapy, demonstration, educational gardens and many more.

Creating a cohesive and comprehensive map has been attempted many times before unsuccessfully due to the complexity of high turnover of garden leadership, diverse types, and a lack of centralized organizational structure.

Growing to Green has partnered with the Ohio State University Knowledge Exchange and Extension services, City of Columbus Land Bank, CCS Farm to School Program, and Local Food Action Plan Council to administer this initiative through ARC GIS mapping software and a connected online survey.

The data collected from the survey will be used as resource network, connecting the general public, and quantifiable data collection on points such as how much food is produced, donated, and impact made on the community for more permanent sustaining funds.
SURVEY RESULTS

75,829 LBS
of produce have been grown in these community garden spaces

276 gardens surveyed

48,373 youth are impacted in these gardens

400 unconfirmed gardens expected