

A community garden:

The *Wildwood Community Garden* project reflects a long-term engagement of the Wildwood Mennonite Church community with the broader Saskatoon community. It began in 2008, making use of an otherwise underutilized parcel of land owned by a nearby seniors complex. While initially consisting mostly of members from the church it currently has approx. 75% of its members coming from the wider community. It is one of 55 community gardens in Saskatoon, located on either city or private property.

Today 45-50 people are involved in a very productive and beautiful garden. It offers opportunity for individuals and families to grow fresh produce for personal consumption – sometimes enough to last through the winter. Overall garden management is a community activity, and most are involved in some way to support our composting process, flower beds and raspberry patch. We gather throughout the growing and harvest seasons to support each other, learn from our varied gardening experiences, and celebrate together.



The garden supports local community services like The Friendship Inn, The Bridge, and The Food Bank by requiring each garden plot to supply seasonal produce to these community ventures – thus increasing the food resource to the most vulnerable in our society.

Not insignificantly, the garden also addresses issues of land management, restoration, and environmental sustainability. Members are encouraged to mulch, rotate crops, utilize garden compost and explore pest and weed management without depending on pesticides and herbicides. We meet regularly to discuss these aspects of gardening and seek ways to build up our soil and minimize a negative environmental footprint. Currently we are encouraging no till concepts. Making these shifts takes understanding, patience and education as we all learn more effective ways of sustainable food production. It isn't always easy to change from '*this is the way we've always done it*'.

Recently we established a 'prairie pollinators' and 'monarch butterfly garden'. Woodland and prairie environments allow for a wide range of flowers with their accompanying insects and pollinators. This too will contribute to our gardens environmental health. Our next project is to install a water collection and storage system to utilize roof water runoff and reduce dependance on the city water system.

A not so often referenced but significant contribution of our community garden is that it enables members to build long-standing relationships with each other. This creates the space for many deep and personal conversations as we all navigate our unique and yet common life experiences.

The Wildwood Community Garden is a microcosm of the larger world wherein we learn to collaborate, find common ground, and celebrate the goodness our earth supplies us – while also learning to respect and nurture the soil on which we depend.