As we have reached the end of our 9th growing season, we remember long summer days, cool mornings, community meals, and harvesting hundreds of pounds of food. As we settle into winter, into a time of reflection, we feel connected through cause and calling. We work side by side, in gardens big and small, trying to make an impact on each other's lives. In troubling times, our connections with others and the land bring us comfort. In times when we think the world is caving in on itself and there is little hope to find in the systems we have in place, we find comfort in the small acts and interactions of friends and strangers. We learn to cherish those small moments of sharing food, of hauling compost, of sweating in the sun, and of weeding in the rain. We want to share the food we grow and we want to share our stories.

The Growing Project continues to grow, both food and community. Our 9th season has been our best and biggest yet, growing more food, feeding more mouths, and connecting with more people of many different walks of life. We end our 9th season with hope and pride but we walk away with many lessons learned.

We are listening to what this community wants and are doing our best to create resources and resilience for everyone who wants to grow their own food or who wants to be a part of a community that is connected through this act. We look forward to what we can change and create in our 10th year as an organization and we look back at our accomplishments, knowing that we still have so much to learn and still have so many ways in which we can grow.

Thanks to our community of friends, volunteers, and supporters for an amazing growing season.

Peace, love, and produce,
Dana Guber
Executive Director
Garden Time

Garden Time integrates gardening, cooking, environmental education, and nutrition education with horticultural therapy to serve at-risk and disadvantaged youth ranging in age from 4 to 16. This program partners with organizations such as The Boys and Girls Club and The Family Center/La Familia. Participants gain basic knowledge of horticulture and nutrition through teaching plant parts and their function on the plant and as food. Other activities include nature walks, plant and insect identification, integrating art in the garden, helping run free market stands for families, and pre-vocational skill training.

In 2017, The Growing Project held a total of 118 sessions with over 85 unduplicated youth in the garden through our Garden Time program.

Program Highlights

- Youth at The Boys and Girls Club and The Family Center had the opportunity to harvest produce from the Growing Project Educational Garden for a free market stand at each facility. The kids promoted the market, collected donations, and shared their knowledge about vegetables and gardening with over 125 families.

- Older kids at The Family Center had the opportunity to mentor the younger kids as “group leaders” during Garden Time.

Success Stories/Testimonials

“My favorite garden activity is picking plants and picking up worms. Our garden is important so we have veggies for breakfast and lunch and snack. I tried 8 new things and learned what a cilantro seed looks like.”

-Youth Participant, age 9, The Family Center/La Familia
One of our most energetic kids at The Family Center with developmental challenges has shown an incredible propensity to destroy the garden in the past. Today I observed him using incredible self-control skills as he repeatedly thought about pulling plants out of the ground and then changed his mind. He still makes mistakes and gets ahead of himself, but I see tremendous growth in him.

-Growing Project Horticultural Therapist

"I made dinner for my family from the veggies I took home from the free market." - Melissa, age 9, Boys and Girls Club

"I want to have a garden when I grow up!" Daniel, 11, Boys and Girls Club

Every week a Growing Project intern helped up to 7 youth set up the free/donation-based market stand in front of The Boys and Girls Club. The kids were always excited because just a few hours before the market, they were out at our educational garden harvesting the very produce they were about to give away. They were always really proud of the harvest and would brag about and share their knowledge about all the vegetables to the families who used the market. One week, the Growing Project intern brought a surprise produce crate full of GIANT heads of broccoli that he had just harvested from the field without the kids. The kids went crazy over the heads of broccoli, so excited about how big and beautiful they were. They all wanted to take them home and started arguing in good humor about who got to take which broccoli head home and how many! The intern told the rest of the Growing Project team later, "I have never seen kids literally fighting about broccoli! They all wanted to take it home and eat it, that seems like the opposite reaction of most kids toward that vegetable!" Boys and Girls Club staff had also observed the "broccoli incident" and told Growing Project staff how great of an impact their time in the onsite garden and the educational garden has been to encourage these kids to eat their vegetables.

-Growing Project Staff
Urban Foods Outreach installs community gardens in low-income areas and at nonprofits. The Growing Project (TGP) provides the materials, education, and volunteers to help interested residents learn to grow their own food. Some gardens are used for specific youth activities such as garden and nutrition education. TGP partners with mobile home parks, Fort Collins Housing Catalyst and other nonprofits to identify neighbors/organizations that would be interested in receiving a garden build scholarship. Over the past 9 years, TGP has built over 20 gardens and continues to expand with 1-2 garden build scholarships each year.

In 2017, The Growing Project worked closely with 12 gardens through the Urban Foods Outreach program. Each garden had between 2-24 resident gardeners and produced between 50-500 pounds of food each.

Program Highlights

- The Growing Project installed a brand new garden at Lago Vista Mobile Home Park.
- The Growing Project partnered with The City of Fort Collins and the Audubon Society to plant a TON of perennials and install a shade structure at The Murphy Center Garden.
- Residents at Stonecrest Mobile Home Park asked The Growing Project to help them gather materials for a patio/sitting area for the community garden. The residents built a beautiful flagstone patio with a barbeque, and now the neighborhood has a place to gather and cook together.
TGP staff, Adam, and residents Michelle and Jacob maintain and harvest from the garden. They have been passing out the produce door to door in the neighborhood. Adam said “I have found that the people in back of the park are separated culturally from the people in front and this experience is a chance for neighbors to meet each other.” Afterwards, they bring cilantro to the nearby taco truck and have dinner together. Michelle also spearheaded making a patio and sitting area that neighbors now use on a regular basis. Jacob said “This is actually really therapeutic. This garden has gotten me outside and talking to people. I'd forgotten how to talk to people before the garden.”

“This garden has changed my life. I have lost 15 pounds, I eat vegetables now. I didn't do that before. You have also pushed me to know my neighbors. Thank you.” - Jacob, 32

Murphy Center for Hope

“Today was an example of how incredibly different people can come together in a garden. We had homeless volunteers weeding, harvesting, sampling things they've never eaten before, laughing, telling stories. There were people who have been coming back to the garden for years alongside people who had never stepped foot in the garden. A lot of people reminisced about good garden memories from their pasts or bragged on what they've grown. We ended with 8 or so people gathered around the picnic table doing taste tests of lemon basil with carrots, or making salsa in their mouth by popping a cherry tomato in with a nasturtium seed. It was wonderful. “

- Growing Project Staff
The Growing Project

PROGRAMS

Nature Rides

Nature Rides connects youth from The Boys and Girls Club, The Family Center/La Familia, and The FoCo Cafe Breakfast program to natural areas in Northwest Fort Collins for activities related to the watershed and local ecology. The Growing Project works with The Fort Collins Bike Co-op to secure bikes and bicycle education for youth participants to ride from their facilities to the natural areas with Growing Project staff.

Program Highlights

- The Fort Collins Bike Co-Op donated 15 kids bikes to support the Nature Rides program
- Each session began with a circle to review bike safety and traffic laws. By the end of the summer, the kids were experts at the rules of the road including hand signals and voice commands.
- Most youth expressed great excited to ride bikes and go to the river, activities that they normally don’t get to do!

In 2017, Nature Rides hosted 23, two hour sessions with between 7-14 youth each time.

Stats
Nature Rides
Success Stories/Testimonials

"My son always wants me to sign him up for the bike trips with The Growing Project. I feel safe knowing that he is biking in a supervised group and that he is learning the importance of bike safety; plus it gets him outside and active." - Rachelle Mawle-Jones, Boys and Girls Club parent

"I liked the new foods we learned about, they taste different then anything I have ever had before. I think the fruit out here is way better than the fruit we can get in the store! I am thankful for all the food that the wilderness provides for us" - Cullen, 9, The Family Center