



HOUSING VS GARDENS?



NYCCGC photo archive.

By Cindy and Haja Worley

Most community gardeners know that “housing versus gardens” is a pointless debate especially in a city like New York where both the need for green space and demands for housing are so great. Not that most of us gardeners don’t know first-hand the perils of securing a decent, truly affordable living space in NYC. However, as community gardeners we also know that the substitutions developers offer—when they do - living walls, roof & vertical gardens, however useful & innovative those may be—are ultimately a poor answer to the displacement and/or overshadowing of community gardens. We need sunlight, we need community, we need land, fresh air, as does all life. We need food and growing our own leaves us with more money for other necessities.

We need to be realistic when we talk about greening our planet: We cannot cover every inch of earth with concrete & expect to have a sustainable environment, much less, a healthful one. Shipping container greens may be healthy & even supply jobs, but we find it hard to believe they provide a healthy environment. What would you rather—a parking lot full of shipping containers, or a thriving community garden? Where will water go if we cement our cities over? Is it really good to be breathing in the sweltering air rising from dusty asphalt?

According to the Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health... “city dwellers have a 40% increased risk of depression and double the rate of schizophrenia.” [than that of non-city dwellers.](1)

Moreover, artificial growing environments aren’t all they’re cracked up to be: “...it’s important to note that general claims about land savings of indoor farming are often incorrect. As a result, often-times, open field produce still has a lower carbon footprint...”(2)

The benefits of community gardens are well documented. They provide much needed respite from our dense urban environment, clean the air, absorb rainwater which prevents overflow of the sewer system, beautifies neighborhoods, reduce crime, etc.

In a city with so little green space, especially in marginalized neighborhoods, it’s an insult to tell us that our gardens should be replaced with housing, especially when most of the units built are barely affordable to most communities to begin with. We ought to be passing legislation



Photo by Magali Regis

to ensure that every neighborhood offers green open space to their community, not just playgrounds and basketball fields.

So where do we go for affordable housing?

For starters, what about the thousands of NYCHA apartments, most needing rehabilitation, that stand empty?(3) What about the nearly 40,000 rent-stabilized units being warehoused in NYC,(4) and those are only the ones reported by landlords. And what's keeping us from retrofitting all the space in Manhattan's unused office buildings?(5) Get this: Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine has isolated over 170 spaces that could be used to create thousands of new apartments—3/4 of them below 96th

Street—and over half of which are already publicly owned, including a vacant federal building on Park Row to parking lots all over the borough owned by the Housing Authority, the NYPD and others.(6) Of course, we need eagle eyes on all the spots identified by Levine, who has always supported community gardens—but we've got to make sure not a single lot identified by his crew includes a community garden! AND we have got to make sure the units built are truly affordable!

Only recently Council woman Kristin Richardson Jordan refused to budge—and won! —on her opposition to the development of two residential towers dubbed "One45", which as planned would have offered only 220 out of 900+ dwelling units (the minimum required under the city's "mandatory inclusionary housing" zoning laws) supposedly "affordable" units. We say "Hurrah!" for Richardson Jordan.(7) Unfortunately, skank developer Bruce Teitelbaum decided all he could do, after his luxury buildings got the ax, was to put a putrid "truck stop" on the 145th Street corner—a spit (literally) in the face of the community as well as Richardson Jordan. We cannot keep allowing developers like Teitelbaum to hold us hostage! This is bullying, pure and simple: «Let me have my billions or I'll asphyxiate you!» This is a disgrace and should never have been allowed. At least half—if not ¾ of all new construction should be affordable! NYC's gears keep running on the backs of the 99%, not the 1%!

Finally, most of us already have experienced in one way or another the destruction, even the collapse of our aged, eroding infrastructure incapable of accommodating dense urban development. Community gardens are the antidote to urban density. Community gardens bring people together, harmonizing, not erasing, our differences, help youths and elders alike to connect with the land from which we come. Our community gardens need to be recognized and preserved, wholly intact, for the immense holistic range of environmental & social services as well as sustenance which they provide.

Community gardens are critical to the survival of our urban population. We say: "COMMUNITY GARDENS AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING! C'MON! IT CAN BE DONE!"

References:

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The mission of the New York City Community Gardens Coalition is to:

1. Promote the preservation and creation of community gardens and community-developed open space in the five boroughs of New York City.
2. Educate the public about the value of gardens and the benefits they confer on New York City residents.
3. Serve as an effective resource for providing information and technical support to community gardeners.
4. Raise the profile of community gardening among elected and appointed officials, the media, the environmental community and the general public.
5. Foster networking and communication among the NYC garden communities.

For more info: www.nycgc.org, info@nycgc.org



How to create a strong neighborhood community garden coalition

LUNGS & the Community Garden District

A conversation with LUNGS president Charles Krezell

By Magali Regis

LUNGS (Loisaida United Neighborhood Gardens) is a local coalition of community gardens located in Manhattan's Lower East Side (known affectionately as Loisaida by the neighborhood's Latinx population). It brings together the gardens of this vibrant, artsy neighborhood.

I thought it would be good to share with gardeners across the city what LUNGS is about. In its second decade, it is a vibrant neighborhood coalition that brings together 52 East Village community gardens. LUNGS organizes many community events throughout the year including the Spring Awakening and Harvest Arts Festival – with music, dance, spoken word and theatrical performances; a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), a summer youth employment program, senior programming, and engagement/networking with other local organizations. LUNGS is the primary sponsor of New York's Community Garden District.

What exactly is the Community Garden District and how did it come about?

The East Village has the greatest density of community gardens anywhere in the City, and perhaps even in the country. We have 52 gardens within a square mile, 52 gardens totaling 7.25 acres. 7.25 acres is not a lot of land per se, but in New York City 7.25 acres is quite a lot of property. The reason we have 7.25 acres is because during the 60s and 70s, due to city disfunction, this area was abandoned, and buildings were allowed to burn and landlords collected insurance money, walked away from their properties and vacant lots were turned into gardens by residents of this community. At one point we had about 60 or 70 gardens here. Unfortunately, we lost some. They were built upon in the 1990s, but we've been able to keep 52 to 54 depending on how you count the gardens in this neighborhood and LUNGS was founded to strengthen this community of gardens and keep them from being taken over by the City. During the Giuliani administration, it was important to solidify as one group. If one garden was attacked, we could all step in and defend the gardens as public property. Even though we're on Parks land, we remain fragile. That was the main reason I started LUNGS in 2011. I realized I didn't know the gardeners down the street. I only knew the people in my garden which I really liked and appreciated and thought our garden was a positive thing in the neighborhood.

I started to reach out to other gardeners to find out what they were about, what they were up to, and see if they had the same feelings I did about coming together as a larger group working together. The response was pretty good and that's how LUNGS started. We slowly built it up over the years.

The first year we had the Harvest Art Festival we had 20 gardens participating. It grew over the years. Now we have over 30 gardens participating. At the beginning the festival took place over a weekend but now the festival has expanded to 10 days, over two weekends now in September or October.

So, to summarize how it all started; you were in your own community garden, and you realized you didn't know the gardeners all around you in these other gardens and wanted to find a way of strengthening all the gardens locally to protect them from being bulldozed as it had been happening in the 90s when Giuliani was mayor.

Exactly; I joined DeColores garden on East 8th Street in 1996 when Giuliani was mayor and many community gardens across the City were being sold off at auctions. They were listed in real estate advertisements as empty lots. I was very aware of that plight, having joined the NYCCGC in the fight to help protect the gardens in the City from being bulldozed.

I realized that within the Coalition [NYCCGC], part of our issue was reaching

out, locating other gardeners in the other boroughs. In my case, I realized that I could just walk around the corner and meet 10 people; and that I hadn't done that. So, that's what I did; I went to the other gardens and introduced myself. At first, meeting new people was kind of intimidating; reaching out and doing that was a big step for me but I had to step out of my comfort zone and do it.

I wanted to meet my neighbors. I needed a rake and wanted to borrow one and some other tools and went around the corner to La Plaza garden and met Ross Martin. I also borrowed their woodchipper, and I broke it, then our relationship became very strong (laughter).

1996 was the first time I participated in a rally to protest the bulldozing and selling-off of gardens by Mayor Giuliani. That was the Standing Our Ground rally at Bryant Park where Pete Seeger came out to support us and sang. It was my first community garden rally, and the rest is history; I've been involved with and speaking out on behalf of community gardens ever since. I had gone to some meetings in Harlem, and we started organizing.

Can you talk about the structure of the organization? It's a 501(c)3, correct?

When you were creating LUNGS, what was important for it to be as an organization? Did you incorporate right away?

No, we didn't incorporate until 2017. We were very loose at first. We organized it as gardens being members [of the organization] rather than people being members. We had to go to each garden to ask them if they wanted to be a member or not. That was the idea; that each garden was a member, and they can send a representative. They could choose to participate or not participate and go along with what we were doing or not. It's up to them.

I totally believe in the sanctity of each garden running themselves. We never tried to impose our will. It's always been about cooperation, about consensus with regards to what we wanted to do. There have been challenges; at the beginning we were just scraping by. We've done pretty well as far as getting grants lately. We've become adept at writing grant proposals at this point, but it's been a struggle. The key to it has always been about meeting people face to face and building up a rapport and trust with people; and come up with solutions that would satisfy a lot of people and come up with a general

not political. You cannot pretend that it's not about property and money in the city of New York. Everything is about that; everything is about square footage and who controls it.

My experience is that you have to build up a rapport in the neighborhood and the community bigger than the garden itself, so that the garden is recognized as a popular place where children can come to, a place where people can come to have a picnic, a place where they can come and enjoy music; and make it an asset to the community and therefore make it popular, and therefore protected from any encroachment by developers, and the politicians are aware of all that. The more you spread your name and become more sustainable as an organization, the more power you have in a way. It's not power in the literal sense of the word, but it's a power to protect rather than anything else. Power because of the presence that you become associated with. That's how we got Gardens Rising which you were at the meetings for. We were being active, and the community board came to us with that project, and it's only because we'd been active and established ourselves. So, once you get to that stage at least the politicians know your name and they are aware of what you're doing. It's important to have that community presence.

Clearly you don't have such a successful organization single-handedly; LUNGS has a large board of directors. How did they come on board and how has their tenure contributed to LUNGS' success?

The board is basically the backbone of the organization. When we plan an event, the board is very responsive, helpful, and supportive and reaches out to their community. Each board member represents a different garden. Right now, we have 19 board members representing 19 gardens. That's a huge amount. It's unwieldy in some ways, but in other ways it's very affirmative.

We are able to call upon different gardeners in gardens to see if they will



plan where people feel that they're protected, or invested in, or feel comfortable as a group.

You said that you became a 501(c)3 in 2017; what was the single thing that made you realized "Wow, we need to be more formal now"?

Money, grant money. We just had to do it in such a way that we could start accepting contributions. At first, we had worked on a very, very low-key level and it was a struggle. With the 501c3, while there are lots of issues with it, it frees us up as far as being able to ask directly for contributions.

Asking for contributions to not just individuals, but also the politicians? Are they easy to approach?

It depends on the year, who's in power. This is all political. The gardens are political. You cannot pretend they are

cooperate in certain ways; if they are willing to host events we're going to have, workshops we are going to have. We've had some school programs and programs for seniors in the past.

Being able to reach out to the different gardens through our board and being in touch with the different communities through the board has been important.

It's a slow but continual process. It can be frustrating, but it can be really rewarding at the same time. It's dealing with a lot of people, but each gardener has that skill because we have to deal with each other all the time in our gardens. It's about a community that is being extended. Initially, the first step is walking in and introducing yourself and talking to people one on one and

That was very difficult because the gardens were closed. For the festival in the fall of 2020, we had entertainers inside the gardens and the public was outside on the sidewalk. We had to give up the SYEP (Summer Youth Employment Program) that year because we just couldn't do it. Many of our gardeners are older; they were more at risk of contracting covid than the younger population.



Photo by Magali Regis

It's like a spider with 19 legs. We each have assets we can contribute. Some people are good at organizing, some are good at bookkeeping, IT, social media, etc. It's about finding a niche for each person which can be difficult sometimes; but it's worked out.

Many of the board members I asked personally to join because I thought they were very valuable people in the neighborhood who were contributing; and I felt that working together, we'd be much stronger as a group.

All the board members are gardeners?

Yes, all the board members are gardeners as per our bylaws.

If other NYC neighborhoods with lots of community gardens want to start a local community garden coalition, what would you recommend they do?

Go meet your neighbors; go to the next garden closest to you and talk to those people, then form a group with two gardens, then three gardens, then four gardens, and so on. Build it up slowly, organically. It's a growth thing, like growing plants in a way.

building relationships. I was able to walk into 10 gardens in a day and talk to 10 different people because our gardens are all so close to each other.

How do you keep LUNGS active and relevant?

I'm always looking for more avenues in which LUNGS can help strengthen and improve the community. It's about the community and the gardens are part of the community. Now we are talking to the Parks Dept. to try and help with Tompkins Square Park. We're trying to get in there as a volunteer group to help them. They don't have enough gardeners. That was a need that was brought to my attention, and we responded and so far, the board has backed us up. We must continually grow and be present in the community otherwise we become irrelevant.

I have a vision for what we can possibly do, and my vision is to turn New York green and make everything sustainable and healthy and help the children here to be strong and more connected to the earth.

How did LUNGS sustain itself during the Pandemic?

How was LUNGS supporting food access during the Pandemic? We don't have many gardens growing food in the East Village, but we have the LUNGS CSA.

We kept up the CSA going through GrowNYC. They connected us with a local farm which supplies the produce. Neighborhood residents can sign up on a weekly basis and get 10 pounds of food for \$10 – affordable organic produce for East Village residents. We kept that going through the Pandemic. Some of the gardens that do grow food like Campos Garden were growing extra food for the neighborhood soup kitchens.

Some of our gardens need help with large tasks during gardening season. Not every garden has people with physical strength that can lift heavy things. The youth employment program is ideal.

Can you talk about the SYEP program?

I started the first year not fully knowing what it meant and how much work it was. I had 12 teenagers working 25 hours/week each. The city pays for the kids' salaries, but I had to supervise them the first year. It was so much work. The following year I had to hire a supervisor to help. You need a supervisor for every six kids, legally.

If gardens in other neighborhoods have a need for that kind of help because some gardeners are aging and they can't do a lot of heavy duty work, what is the best way to sign onto this program?

You have to find a provider. We've found ours through the Chinese Planning Council on Eldridge Street but there are several different providers through the Dept. of Education Summer Employment Program.

Each year we must raise \$12,000 for this summer program to employ the youth. We apply through City Council funding. It's a lot of work for six weeks. The students work in the gardens for

25 hours a week and make \$15/hour. Our supervisors make a bit more.

Is there anything you would like to add that you would want people to know about LUNGS?

I think it's really important work for gardens to connect with one another.

It's also important to connect with and create strong bonds with local businesses and other organizations in the neighborhood.

Exactly; it's a really good thing as far as making the city stronger to have people invested in their community. It's also important for the City to recognize all the good work gardeners do on a volunteer basis for the city we live in and love, and for that, we also deserve respect from the City. That is why we put up a fight four years ago with regard to that terribly unfair, one-sided License agreement the City wanted us to sign in order to garden. We put in thousands of hours every year into the soil here and spend our money and expertise on these gardens. Having a coalition strengthens our position. It also gives us a sense of unity, of wholeness, a sense of wellbeing. It becomes about the larger picture, and not just about this little plot that I'm defending. It's about helping the City being more whole, and helping mother nature really, and having that connection with the earth is so important, especially in New York City.

To find out more about LUNGS visit <https://lungsnyc.org>



A poem to ponder on...

by Ross Gay

A Small Needful Fact
Is that Eric Garner worked
for some time for the Parks and Rec.
Horticultural Department, which means,
perhaps, that with his very large hands,
perhaps, in all likelihood,
he put gently into the earth
some plants which, most likely,
some of them, in all likelihood,
continue to grow, continue
to do what such plants do, like house
and feed small and necessary creatures,
like being pleasant to touch and smell,
like converting sunlight
into food, like making it easier
for us to breathe.



NYCCGC Update

Dear Community,

It's been a while since we've been in touch, and since we've met face to face to discuss what we all hold so dear, our precious community gardens.

The Pandemic took a toll on our organization. Because of Covid we were not able to meet, other than virtually, for a couple years. Yet, even with Covid lurking, we continued to garden, in some cases producing even more in order to alleviate food insecurity, and to help those who lost income during the Covid years.

The Neighborhood Preservation Center which was our home for close to 15 years lost its space at 232 East 11th Street where we had met every month, effectively leaving us without a home for our monthly meetings. They are still searching for a new home and so are we.

We reach out to you now hoping some of you may have access to a meeting space (preferably close to public transport) to hold our meetings when needed. We will resume our monthly Gardeners meetings later in the spring as the weather warms up (either May or June) on the third Thursday of the month from 6:30 to 8:30 PM like before. We are looking for gardens throughout the boroughs to host these summer meetings. If your garden is interested in hosting, please let us know. These meetings present wonderful opportunities to get to know other gardeners, visit community gardens, share, and resolve mutual concerns.

We are also looking to expand our Board and calling on gardeners (especially the younger generations) to get involved. Please join us!

– NYCCGC Board of Directors



Ross Gay is an American poet and professor. Along with a National Book Critics Circle Award for poetry, he is the author of the New York Times best-selling collection of essays, "The Book of Delights."

Steve Frillman

It is with great sadness that we have learned earlier this year of the passing of Steve Frillmann, Executive Director of Green Guerillas for 24 years until his retirement in 2019. His caring, dedication and leadership made a powerful impact on Green Guerillas and the community gardening movement in New York City.

Ena McPherson, gardener at Tranquility Farm in Brooklyn shares this: “The most enduring visual remembrance I have of Steve is his humility, and how he related to us in catering to our gardens’ needs. Although Steve headed a non-profit it was never beneath him to actually take us ladies plant shopping. He would meet us individually at nurseries to allow us to choose specifically what we needed. He would come by our gardens to personally drop off garlic bulbs around Thanksgiving just in time for planting the bulbs. Steve never lost the common human interaction touch, he’d Man the Grill at BBQ events and serve us treats. It was interesting to watch his personality soften over the years. Yet despite his influence and contributions in strengthening the NYC community gardening movement, he always expressed his admiration for us stakeholders as the «real heroes», never, ever did he seek to gain glory for his influences and participation in the definition and strengthening of NYC community gardening movement.

Steve’s enduring legacy is that his life’s work mattered in Tangible Ways. He’ll be missed. May his Soul RIPOWER.”



Photo by Agnes Chen, LaGuardia Corner Gardens

Barbara Cahn

Barbara Cahn was a devoted community gardener at LaGuardia Corner Gardens in Greenwich Village. She fought the good fight to protect her garden from NYU developers for many years. She was also an advocate for all community gardens, attending many rallies and meetings all over the city in support of our beloved green communal spaces. She died unexpectedly on March 17, 2023, at the young age of 70. “A Peace Corps veteran and committed advocate for social and environmental justice, Barbara managed to balance a highly successful career as a ceramic artist, decades as a volunteer producer for WNYC radio, and an active member of the La Guardia Corner Gardens. A kinder, gentler soul has rarely walked the earth. She will be sorely missed.”

– *NYTimes Obituary, March 20, 2023*

Sara Jones, gardener at LaGuardia Corner Gardens shares this: “Barbara Cahn was the beloved Chair of LaGuardia Corner Gardens in Greenwich Village. She was a lifelong environmental and humanitarian activist. Barbara volunteered for many organizations, including the High Line. She also worked in public radio for many years. She was a talented potter. Barbara was a positive life force in our gardening community and will be greatly missed.”



Photo courtesy of Green Guerillas

GARDENS AT RISK

Elizabeth Street Garden

Photos by Magali Regis

Located between Soho & Little Italy, Elizabeth Street Garden has been an open green space since 1991 and a community garden since 2005. The garden is filled with large statues along its paths as well as architectural artifacts in a lush setting. It is the only green space in these two neighborhoods and currently threatened with housing development. Community Board 2 voted to preserve the garden, yet the City Council voted to destroy it in favor of the proposed development even though the garden and community identified several other sites for the housing development.

Elizabeth Street Garden (ESG) is involved in two pending lawsuits to save the garden for the community. The first suit, led by ESG attorney Norman Siegel, was won in November 2022 in the NY State Supreme Court. But the fight isn't over,

and the City is appealing the Judge's decision. The second suit, filed in Housing Court, responds to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development's (HPDs) attempt to evict the garden back in September 2021.

There is still hope in using existing alternative sites for the proposed housing and ESG continues to work towards preserving the garden as a Conservation Land Trust.

For more info visit www.elizabethstreetgarden.com/clt



LaGuardia Corner Gardens

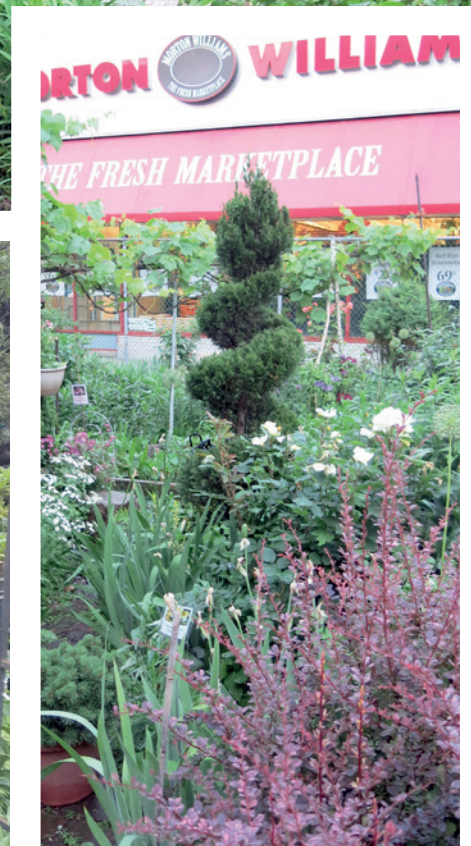
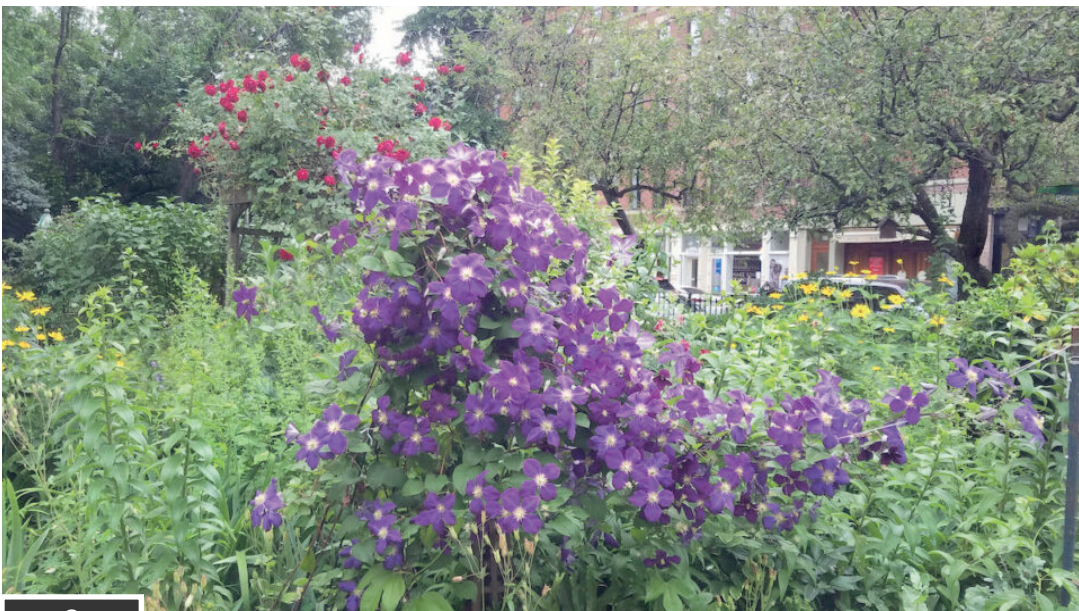
Located at the corner of Bleeker Street and LaGuardia Place in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, LaGuardia Corner Gardens was created in 1981 on DOT land. NYU owns the land to the east of the garden and had been planning to develop it as housing. That plan was scraped. NYU is not going to build there right now, but the Community Board, CB2, is demanding that they turn the supermarket site over to the city to build a school since NYU had

promised to build a public school there as part of a larger building. NYU agreed to give the land to the city if the city will build a school. The SCA (School Construction Authority) is not convinced that it's the right site, but the land is worth circa \$65 million so it's hard for them to refuse. If that happens the garden will be destroyed to use as a staging area for construction equipment. This project will also displace the area's only supermarket. Former council member Alan Gerson,

is heading up a committee to save the supermarket. If the supermarket stays it is likely the garden will stay. The City is trying to locate a place to move the supermarket into, and then the garden will still be destroyed. Members of the garden are engaged in talks with their community board and City Council member to find a solution.

<http://www.LaGuardiacornergarden.org/>

Photos by Magali Regis



community garden composting: SET A PRECEDENT AND SAVE THE PLANET

by Christine Johnson, Pleasant Village Community Garden

Decomposition happens all around us, all the time. In a nutshell, plants and animals breakdown, and along with water and sun, nutrients go back into the soil, which get taken up by plants and eaten by animals, including us humans. This is essentially how the earth's ecosystems recycle nutrients. Because most of us are disconnected from the source of our food and throw our food scraps in the garbage or in a compost bin, we sometimes forget the relationship between how our food acquires nutrients and the nutrients that feed our bodies. No nutrient soil produces nutrient depauperate food.

As populations increase, goods become more disposable, landfills overflow and global average temperatures accelerate at an alarming rate, diverting food scraps and other organic matter (leaves, grass clippings) from the waste stream has become an urgent need. New York City is still struggling to develop a comprehensive plan to get food and yard scraps out of the garbage and redirected to greener, beneficial purposes to cut landfill methane emissions.

Community Gardens have been providing this service for decades. From homemade compost bins made with recycled or repurposed materials to creative hotboxes that speed up the decomposition process, community gardens found a "free" way to feed the soil to increase the nutrient yield in their homegrown produce, sequester carbon in the soil and minimize soil erosion.

In 2011, the community garden to which I belong, Pleasant Village Community Garden (PVCG), applied for and received a Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board / Citizens Committee of New York City compost grant. With a mere \$750 and a donation of used pallets from the Brooklyn shipyards, our garden built a 3-bin composting system on HPD land, which, sadly, we lost to development this year. On this piece of open land, where we built a chicken coop, an enclosed school garden plot and a pollinator field, we started to make our own compost with food scraps and yard waste, plus the scraps we picked up from several local businesses. Shop owners paid for garbage regardless of the amount, therefore, there was little incentive to redirect organic waste from their garbage. But they did.

A Master Composter course at the Lower Eastside Ecology Center helped me to understand the conversion of food and yard waste to brown gold that could pour nutrients into our garden and how to accelerate the decomposition process. PVCG at the time was running as a small-scale garden with garden members happily tending their own garden plots, shared beds, the chickens and the compost bin, so there was no need to adhere to a stricter schedule. Periodic turning of the compost and shifting it over when it was ready to cure was sufficient.

As rumors spread and the COVID pandemic hit, nixing DSNY's organics pick-up program, we began to see a significant increase in food scrap drop-offs, greater than the garden could handle. We needed to increase the scale of our composting program. In 2021, PVCG raised over \$4000 via IOBY to build two hot-boxes designed by Nando Rodriguez of The Brotherhood Sister Sol and a "browns" bin. Our intake of food scraps reached over 7 tons that year. Eventually, we

1. Scale Compost Efforts Accordingly - Decide how much manpower effort you have and scale your compost efforts accordingly. If only a few people can contribute, consider a hotbox where relatively little effort is needed to maintain the system. Partnering with a larger organization that picks up your organic waste and returns finished compost to you can guard your garden from having an untended compost bin that sours and attracts



Hot boxes.

Photo by Saco Yasuma

partnered with Grow NYC to help us manage the quantity of organics we were receiving from our neighbors. Last October, we moved our bins due to the loss of the HPD land, but the bins are still going strong.

Our composting journey has been worth every penny and every minute of effort. With a little effort and a lot of love for our earth and the future of our children, our little garden community is making an impact on the health of our soil and the reduction of greenhouse gasses by redirecting food from the landfill. If a small group of community gardeners can do it, NYC can do it; the United States can do it; the World can do it. We are losing our battle with climate change. A recent report by climate scientists says that by 2030 — that's 7 years — our greenhouse gas emissions need to be slashed by half or the Earth's entire life support system is at risk. If you belong to a community garden and aren't composting, start tomorrow.

Is it easy? Yes and no. Composting in city gardens presents challenges but also great rewards. Should your garden decide to compost, and you should, there are some considerations that will make your efforts rewarding and successful.

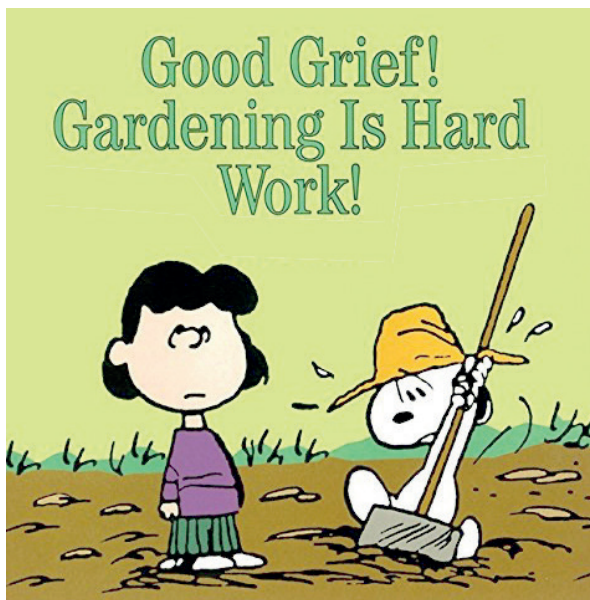
rodents. Forgo the public drop-off bin and keep scrap drop-offs to garden members only.

2. Plan Ahead — Take a bird's eye view of your garden to decide what location for your compost bin will work best. Make sure access to your bin is easy in every season. Your bin should have good air flow and be free of debris to make the bin unattractive animals. In addition, airflow brings oxygen to the decomposing material, although turning the compost or adding airflow pipes is often necessary. Lining the bin with a ¼ inch hardware cloth can also deter rodents, provide airflow and the necessary moisture via rain. Your bin should have several hours of sun and several hours of shade a day.
3. Outreach — Even today, we are disconnected from food and nature. Reach out to your neighbors and the community to help them understand that value of the garden, home-grown food, insects and composting. Having your neighborly support will go a long way. If parents are leery, kids will love it and can be the line to the parent's support.

In APPRECIATION of Aziz Dehkan



Photo by Magali Regis



In this, our post-Covid revival issue, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the 10 years of arduous, often thankless, work of our outgoing Executive Director, Aziz Dehkan. Aziz came to us with a wealth of knowledge and experience; perhaps most of you don't know that Aziz designed and built an award-winning passive-solar house and started one of the first organic farms in New Jersey. In addition to his work with the NYCCGC, Aziz has been with the Coalition for the Homeless, The Fortune Society, and Mother Jones.

As Executive Director of the NYCCGC, Aziz spearheaded monumental projects and fearlessly advocated for our community gardens' protection and preservation despite all the pushback from the powers-that-be. As those of us in cutting-edge advocacy know, not all our battles are won in the short term, but Aziz continues the struggle for social justice, climate change and environmental equity. He writes: "Making climate change an urgent priority across America needs a groundswell of local community support..." As community gardeners, we can be part of that groundswell. We thank Aziz for his tireless work "searching for solutions that support justice, equality, and liberation."

Aziz has now joined the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs as Executive Director.

Thank you, Aziz! We are indeed grateful for all your years of hard work on behalf of ALL NYC Community Gardeners. We wish you Godspeed in your future endeavors, to which you bring your unique eloquence and wisdom—knowing well, as you do, that the mainstream and the entrenched bureaucracies are troubled waters you must fearlessly navigate.

– NYCCGC Board of Directors





benefits to the most-likely-affected neighborhoods. These strategies were not only meant to contribute to resiliency in the event of catastrophic events, but also to local sustainability on a day-to-day basis, amplifying the co-benefits these community gardens already offered to the Lower East Side and more broadly to all of New York City.

In 2016, a Feasibility Study (headed by Landscape Architecture firm WeDesign with the assistance of the gardeners) was issued providing a framework by which sustainability and resiliency goals could be implemented in the 47 community gardens. The opportunity to incorporate the Study's strategies into these community gardens was a pathway to provide a chance to program and design them in a way that aligned with the community's daily operational needs.

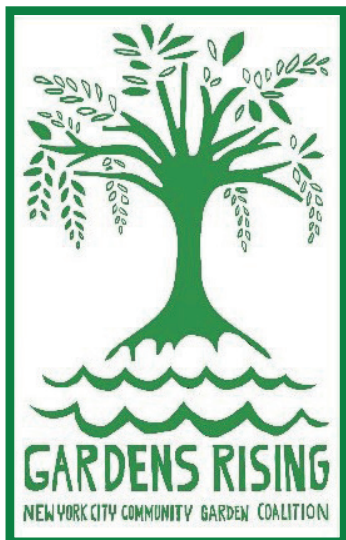
Unfortunately, as the grantor and overseer, GOSR failed Gardens Rising multiple times. GreenThumb also failed Gardens Rising, using the year-long dispute with gardeners over the 2019 license language (which left gardens vulnerable to dissolution), delaying progress and stalling the project for a year, until community gardens no longer able to receive hydrant permits and supplies either relented to signing or saw signing the license as the best strategy. GOSR's delays in finalizing Project Management agreements, denials of procurement, coupled with a lack of agency commitment to Gardens Rising, devolved a two-million-dollar project into a \$30k planting project.

In effect, plant distribution will be the one and only singular project that GOSR will have approved. NYCCGC and the gardeners of the LES are profoundly disappointed that bioswales, paving projects, solar installations, and rain gardens which were proposed in the award-winning Feasibility Study have never occurred.

It's profoundly disappointing that such a visionary and award winning pilot project was allowed to be suspended. Lower East Side gardens, terribly vulnerable to superstorms' water surges, continue to address critical solutions to the climate crisis, incorporating, when they can, the original intent of Gardens Rising, geared to improving the quality of life in NYC's vibrant and vulnerable neighborhoods.

GARDENS RISING

by Aziz Dehkan



The New York City Community Garden Coalition (NYCCGC) GARDENS RISING project was a community-based approach to enhancing the sustainability and resiliency of 47 community gardens in NYC's Loisada neighborhood. Funded through a grant from the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery (GOSR), the project was conceived in response to the tidal surges of Superstorm Sandy

Catalyzed by the effort to address resiliency opportunities posed by the threat of climate crisis-driven flooding in the future, this project assessed how community gardens could provide additional