

shaker life

NORTHEAST OHIO'S P

Great Shaker Homes:
a South Park Legacy

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a community harvest





BY THE EDITORS
PHOTOS BY ALEX RIVERA

Shaker resident Cissy Holmes, pictured above, collects basil at the First Unitarian Church of Cleveland's community garden. The garden was partially funded by the Shaker Heights Public Library, which received a grant from the State Library of Ohio to help local community gardens prosper.

The Community Gardens of Shaker Heights (gardensofshaker.org) also received funding from the Library. CGSH was formed this year by a group of Shaker residents who started two gardens, one on Rolliston Road on City-owned property, and one on private land on Cheshire Road in the Larchmere neighborhood. Justin Evans, on the opposite page, works in the Rolliston garden.

Community vegetable gardens sprouted all over Shaker Heights this year. It seemed like everybody got down and dirty: Churches, schools, the library, and the City itself, growing tomatoes, bell peppers, mountains of basil and oregano, summer squash, zucchini, broccoli, cucumbers, eggplant... anything with a stalk or stem that can be sautéed or put into salsa, pesto, or marinara sauce.

"It would be hard to say anything that is not in favor of community gardening," says Donita Anderson, executive director of the North Union Farmers Market (NUFM), a non-profit organization at Shaker Square that operates half a dozen high-quality farmers markets: Chagrin Falls, Lakewood, Crocker Park, Cleveland State University, the Cleveland Clinic, and of course the flagship market at Shaker Square.

The impetus behind Shaker's community gardening movement comes from exactly what the NUFM stands for: eating fresh, locally grown food. (Each NUFM vendor has to be certified, which means a NUFM representative inspects their farm. They must show lease or ownership records, seed receipts, the number of acres under production, site location, and approximate harvest.)

"Growing your own food and flowers is a big undertaking that deserves winter planning time," Donita says. "Picking out seeds with children when it is still cold out is a great activity, and reveals the promise of summer."

Shaker Life photographer Alex Rivera captured these images of Shaker community gardens at their peak, right before final harvest. How well we remember.





Right: Lynn Miller, branch manager of the Shaker Library's Bertram Woods branch, relaxes in the Bertram Woods community garden. **Above:** Dominic Liberatore works in the Rolliston garden, while Janet Alter, opposite page, tends to the Cheshire operation in Larchmere. The Cuyahoga County office of The Ohio State University's Extension program contributed money to the Cheshire Road operation.



What Makes A Great Home Garden? (A lot of hard work)

BY DONITA ANDERSON, Executive Director, North Union Farmers Market

To me, the most important part of community gardening is being a good steward of the soil.

Without good soil, the product will not be of the highest quality. A definitive soil test is very important. The test needs to look at the balance of minerals. Moreover, any contaminants would ruin the garden, so soil must be tested for lead and a whole host of other contaminants.

If the soil is contaminated it must be remediated before growing anything. This is a huge undertaking, so it might be better for the home gardener to use pots or raised beds. Still, the soil needs to be the highest quality.

After the soil has been dealt with, the planning and the fun begin. I recommend the book *Square Foot Gardening* by Mel Bartholomew.

We had all the old soil removed from our postage-stamp backyard in Shaker Heights and replaced with organic soil. We have blackberries, raspberries, four cherry trees, three plum trees, three fig trees, and an apricot tree. When the kids were little we grew over a hundred corn stalks, melons, tomatoes, and lots of flowers. It was an enjoyable family activity. I wish all gardeners the same happiness.



In the kitchen at the First Unitarian Church of Cleveland, Paul McClain gets ready to turn basil from the garden into pesto, accompanied by homemade ciabatta bread. Below, Carol Gay is hard at work in the garden itself.

