

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Community Gardens & Greenspace Program Overview

Community Gardens Bloom in 19 Counties

Through the Community Gardens & Greenspace Program, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy partners each year with 4,000 volunteers and dozens of community organizations and businesses to plant, maintain and support 140 gardens and greening projects in 19 western Pennsylvania counties. More than half of the program volunteers are children and youth.

WPC's community gardens have become a signature image of the western Pennsylvania landscape. Appearing in many varied locations with many different configurations, the gardens provide a backdrop and enhancement for other cultural and civic assets. The gardens also serve as a hallmark of the region's beautiful landscape and quality of life.

Using PennDOT statistics, an estimated 3.5 million people traveling in vehicles view WPC's community gardens daily. Each year, more than 200,000 flowers are planted by volunteers—enough to make a flowerbed stretching from Pittsburgh to the West Virginia border.

Helping Communities Connect Green Spaces

In addition to the very visible community gardens program, WPC is involved in “greening” projects such as the partnership with the Mount Washington Community Development Corporation in Pittsburgh to develop a “Master Implementation Plan” for managing Mount Washington's green spaces. Supported by The Heinz Endowments, the plan included a thorough assessment of existing green spaces, opportunities for landscape and ecosystem enhancement, needs for restoration, and places where residents and visitors could have more enjoyable access to green areas.

WPC found that there are major opportunities to enhance the forests on Mount Washington, and there are numerous partial trails that could be developed to increase access. The study also identified ecologically sound techniques for managing hillside vegetation to reduce the current practice of severely cutting trees that obscure the views of the city below, leaving unhealthy and unsightly plants on the mountainsides.

The report recommends replanting hillsides with low growing native plants that will rarely need pruning. The action plan will take a decade or more to implement, but now the Mount Washington community has science-based tools to guide the creation of an “emerald link” connecting all the neighborhood's green spaces. Since the report was issued in late 2005, the community has convinced the Pittsburgh City Council to declare more than 250 acres of undeveloped city-owned land on Mount Washington to be a new city park.

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