

## COMMUNITY GARDENS

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Spending a Saturday morning with your neighbors, working the land together....

Collecting water from the rain barrels and carrying it to the well and pump for irrigation...

swapping seedlings and trading two of your best tomatoes for three heads of lettuce.... Does this sound like something of days past? Something that happens on rural farms, in faraway places?

Well, would it surprise you to know that these things actually happened last Saturday in the heart of downtown Saint Petersburg? In fact, it all takes place at the Bartlett Park Community Garden.



[Bartlett Park Community Garden](#)

A community garden is a piece of shared land, either public or private, where the residents of a neighborhood work together to cultivate it and share the fruits and vegetables that it yields.

According to the Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington, “community gardens promote healthy communities and provide food security.” They also “enhance community bonds”, “create recreational and therapeutic opportunities for a community”, “promote environmental awareness and provide

community education” (MRSC 1). In addition, they create

sustainable, native vegetation in urban settings, something that is crucial to the health of the different local environments in every part of the world.

The Bartlett Park Community Garden is located at 1443 Highland Street South, less than ten blocks from the University of South Florida. It is run by a local nonprofit group called Green Florida, whose Executive Director is Andrea Hildebran. Green Florida works in partnership with

the Twigs & Leaves Nursery, a native plant center that specializes in local plant species and



sustainable yards. In general, environmental sustainability refers to “any development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Geneseo 1). Coal and traditional hard

woods like maple and oak are not sustainable because it takes hundreds of years for them to grow and be formed naturally; it also takes many man hours to

yolk the energy and only minutes to burn it up. Wind and solar power, bamboo, soy, and even hemp are very sustainable because

they are non-invasive processes that can be generated and re-generated without harsh consequences to the planet (World



Japanese Bamboo Forest

Nuclear Association 2-10). At Bartlett Park Community Garden, sustainability is the name of the game.

Volunteers meet every Saturday from 9am – noon to work on landscaping, gardening and



irrigation; they can also tend their plots throughout the week.

Membership dues are minimal- only \$25 per year or \$3 per month. \$100 makes you a lifetime member. Members can sign up for individual plots, and the fruits and vegetables can be taken home, traded with other gardeners or sold at the

garden’s booth at the Saturday Morning Market.

In addition to rain water collection and an emphasis on organic, native vegetation, composting is another important part of garden maintenance. According to RecycleWorks of San Mateo County, composting is:

“nature’s process of recycling decomposed organic materials into a rich soil known as compost. Anything that was once living will decompose. Basically, backyard composting is an acceleration of the same process nature uses. By composting your organic waste, you are returning nutrients back into the soil in order for the cycle of life to continue.” (RecycleWorks 1)



Compost Bin

Sadly, food and yard waste make up 30% of the waste stream in landfills and garbage plants (RecycleWorks 2) but these valuable, organic fertilizers should never even make it in to a garbage can!

In a garden, compost is an excellent pest control and a clean,

natural fertilizer; it even improves the nutrient content of the fruits and vegetables that it fertilizes (RecycleWorks 3).

Aside from the logistics of composting, irrigating and cultivating, another important part of the Bartlett Park Community Garden is the *Paris Gardens* program, started in 2009. A Paris Garden is a front yard garden planted by volunteers from Green Florida, using donated plants and soil from the Twigs & Leaves Nursery. The gardens use native, sustainable Florida plants that conserve water and provide food for households. Among the many species planted are beach sunflowers, coral honeysuckle, pineland lantana, Spanish stopper, sunshine mimosa and tropical sage (Perez 1). It is important for all Florida residents to understand the importance of keeping native vegetation in their yards. These plants attract wildlife and pollinating insects, add nutrients to the soil, require less water and



Paris Garden at 885 Newton Ave.



no chemical fertilizers (Perez 2). In essence, they “create ecology” in our own yards and neighborhoods.



But perhaps the most important thing about the Paris Gardens is their namesake, Paris Whitehead-Hamilton, an eight year old girl who was killed by gun violence in Bartlett Park on April 5, 2009 (Perez 1). The Paris Gardens are a way to beautify the neighborhood, take back the streets, and remember an innocent soul who was taken too soon in a local tragedy.

The Bartlett Park Community Garden hosts many events throughout the year, including a semi-annual “Seed Swap”, and the Spring and Fall Equinox parties. For more information on membership, volunteering and events, check out the Green Florida website at [www.green-florida.org](http://www.green-florida.org).

Community gardens like the one in Bartlett Park are just one small way that Saint Petersburg residents can “think globally” and “act locally” - one more way that YOU can help the **GREEN SCENE** in Saint Petersburg!



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