



THE GARDEN DISTRICT
ESTABLISHED 2020



2024 IMPACT REPORT



CONTENTS

03

A WORD FROM THE
PRESIDENT & FOUNDER

04

ABOUT THE GARDEN DISTRICT

08

MAIN POTAGER GARDEN

09

BEXLEY COMMUNITY GARDEN

10

WEXNER HERITAGE
ROOFTOP GARDEN

11

BERWICK ALTERNATIVE
COMMUNITY GARDEN

12

LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES
COMMUNITY GARDEN

13

LIFE VINEYARD COMMUNITY FARM

14

NEW INITIATIVES

18

THANK YOU

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT & FOUNDER

Reflecting on the past year at the Garden District Corporation, I am grateful for the community we've built and our impact in Central Ohio. This year, we emphasized the vital role of community-based food production in transforming our food system.

Pope Francis said, "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental." Our mission focuses on promoting positive change in our communities while protecting the environment.

Our farms and gardens cultivate food and foster connections and resilience. Our initiatives have grown, strengthening partnerships and expanding our reach. Each garden has become a refuge of hope and a testament to our collective efforts.

Thank you for your unwavering support. Together, we can make a difference by growing food, sharing knowledge, and caring for one another.

-Take care of yourself and someone else if you can.

SEAN MCKAY
PRESIDENT & FOUNDER





SUSAN & CYNTHIA, THE A-TEAM, HARVESTING BOK CHOI

ABOUT GARDEN DISTRICT

BY SEAN M MCKAY

The Garden District first began as a Berwick backyard garden producing too much food for a two-person household. **700** pounds were donated in the first year, and now has flourished into a volunteer community garden program that is a collection of 8 community gardens and urban farms, supplementing food pantries and local communities with sustainably grown and harvested fresh produce. We strive to nourish our community, strengthen our bond with nature, and increase food security. The Garden District is an LGBTQAI+ led 501(c)3 organization and prides itself as a safe space for all.

"This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. Being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

-George Bernard Shaw, Man and Superman (1902)



OUR FREE FARMSTAND WITH STAFF AND STUDENTS TAKING HOME SOME GOODIES

7,595

people directly impacted by food pantry clients, community garden members, programs, plant swaps, free farm stands, the new Potager Fresh Market organizational partners, volunteers, garden advocacy, and students.

5,012

lbs of produce distributed

40%

production increase from 2023

\$22,832

of produce donated to people experiencing food insecurity



GREEN COLUMBUS VOLUNTEER EARTH DAY EVENT

"The Garden District took over our church community garden in 2024, and we could not believe the transformation! Our church and the surrounding community got the privilege of sharing in the harvest at one of the multiple 'Garden District' harvest days. We have all been impacted by the vision and dedication of the gardeners, and we look forward to a long and lasting relationship with the Garden District."

- Melanie Forsythe-Lee, Lead Pastor at LIFE Vineyard Church

2,751

volunteer hours recorded by our A-Team with a value of the volunteer time of
\$91,635.81

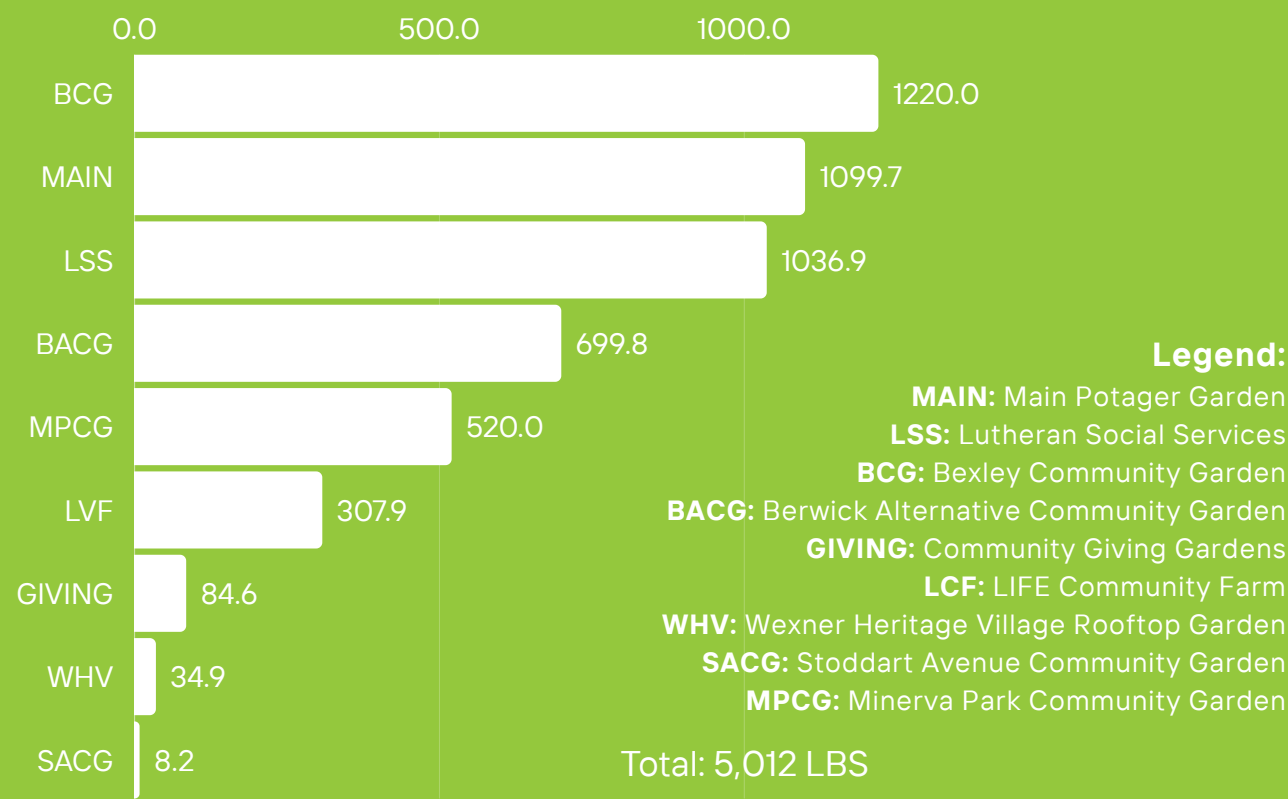
122

volunteers helped make this possible

112

visits to the food pantry

Garden Production



MAIN POTAGER GARDENS



23.6%

Of the produce was
grown in residential
giving gardens

Nestled in the backyard of 1311 College Avenue, the Garden District Headquarters is a vital source of fresh produce, contributing **21%** of the fruits and vegetables we donate and sell. In 2024, we faced challenges as our raised beds began to deteriorate. Thanks to generous funding from the Franklin County Urban Agricultural Infrastructure Garden Grant, The Little Garden Club of Columbus, and the Robert Weiler Foundation, we successfully replaced these with durable, aluminum-coated steel raised beds designed to last over 20 years.

Our headquarters also houses our administrative office and a state-of-the-art germination station with **56** grow lights, enabling us to start more than **85%** of our plants each spring. Additionally, we installed three Microgreen production towers later in the growing season, allowing us to cultivate nutritious microgreens that further enhance our pantry offerings and extend our growing season. This ongoing development underscores our commitment to sustainable practices and community nourishment.



RAISED BEDS INSTALLED FUNDED BY THE URBAN AG INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT

SOUTH BEXLEY COMMUNITY GARDEN

"The Garden District is an integral part of the Bexley Community Garden Giving Gardens. The passion and dedication, found in the gardens is inspiring to so many others. We are so grateful for the partnership." -Mary McMunn, Bexley Community Garden Leadership Team

Giving Gardens

We are proud to serve as the interim fiscal sponsor for both the Bexley Community Gardens. At the South Bexley Community Gardens (SOBEX), we manage the giving gardens. This initiative not only cultivates fresh produce but also fosters a sense of community and generosity among gardeners, encouraging them to donate excess harvests from their individual plots.

Every Monday morning, our dedicated team plants, weeds, waters, harvests, and processes produce grown in the gardens. This year, we successfully donated **687.9 lbs.** of fresh fruits and vegetables to the LSS Food Pantry.



MONDAY WORKDAYS AT SOUTH BEXLEY COMMUNITY GARDEN

WEXNER HERITAGE VILLAGE

Rooftop Garden

In spring 2023, the Garden District Corporation partnered with Wexner Heritage Village (WHV) to transform an underutilized rooftop patio into a thriving garden oasis. With 18 empty raised beds and 42 clay pots, our combined volunteers successfully revitalized this space, enhancing both its beauty and utility.

Looking ahead, we plan to expand this initiative by incorporating vertical towers to optimize growing space and increase our produce yield. This collaboration exemplifies our commitment to sustainable practices and community well-being.

"Our partnership with the Garden District has been transformative at Wexner Heritage Village. They skillfully helped us create a garden that has provided beauty & respite for patients, their families and our staff. Their talented, caring gardeners have brought such joy to Wexner Heritage Village and we are so grateful!"

- Tracey Ballas, WHV Volunteer Coordinator



HARVESTS FROM THE ROOFTOP GARDEN FOR RESIDENTS, STAFF, AND FAMILY



BERWICK STUDENTS GETTING THEIR HANDS DIRTY AND PLANTING POLE BEANS

BERWICK ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITY GARDEN

Founded in 2015, the Berwick Alternative Community Garden (BACG) provides students with an engaging space to explore nature through gardening. After renovating deteriorating raised beds, the Garden District partnered with the Columbus City Schools (CCS) Farm to School Program to transform BACG into a mixed-use community garden. This includes new raised beds for students, communal areas, and allotment plots. This year, we proudly welcomed seven families who rented plots, enriching our community's connection to gardening and education.

CCS Urban Agricultural Pathway Summer Experience

In partnership with Franklin Park Conservatory and The Ohio State University (OSU), Berwick Alternative K-8 School offered an Urban Agricultural Pathway program for all Columbus City School students. This summer school initiative allowed students to explore and deepen their connection to agriculture while actively engaging with the garden. Through hands-on activities, students learned about sustainable practices and the importance of local food systems in their community.

LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES FOOD PANTRY

LSS Champion Community Garden

Launched in 2023 in our partnership with South Side Family Farms, Foreground Studio, and LSS Food Pantry, the Champion Community Garden provides fresh, locally-grown produce to the South Side of Columbus. This year, we expanded our initiative to include in-ground growing alongside our 12 raised beds.

This year, the Garden District harvested **1,301.9 lbs** of produce, all donated to support community-based food production of fresh and locally grown produce to supplement the LSS Champion Food Pantry.

"The Garden District makes our neighborhoods healthier! Seeing our participants' faces light up when they see fresh, locally-grown food available at our pantry means the world!"

- Joel Call, Director of LSS Food Pantries



MASSIVE GREENS HARVEST FROM THE LSS COMMUNITY GARDEN

LIFE COMMUNITY FARM

The community farm at LIFE Vineyard Church, located at 620 Alum Creek Drive, has been transformed from an abandoned garden into a vibrant agricultural hub. After five years of neglect, we renovated the site, removing invasive plants and enriching the soil with **25 yards of Zoo Brew compost** from Price Organics Farm and all-newly installed raised beds purchased from the Franklin County Urban Agricultural Infrastructure Grant.



FREE FARM STAND AFTER SERVICE AT LIFE VINEYARD CHURCH

POTAGER FRESH MARKET **WE GROW NES** Farmers Markets

With the support of WE GROW NES, the Garden District launched its new farmer stand, the **Potager Fresh Market**, at 3 downtown farmers markets, providing fresh produce for sale. The term 'Potager' is French for kitchen, underscoring our commitment to fresh herbs, produce, and cut flowers sourced from our potager gardens. We generated over **\$1,800** in sustaining funds for our operations. Notably, **42%** of our sales came from programs like WIC, SNAP EBT, Senior Farmers Market Coupons, and other government-supported initiatives.

We Grow helps citizens of the Near East Side (NES) grow food for their community by sponsoring, teaching, and advising amateur growers from seed to market. Our goal is to create a fair and sustainable food system within the NES where nutritious food is readily available and fairly priced. We believe by joining together to build relationships with our food, we can help the Near East Side gain food sovereignty and lift up a healthier community.



VOLUNTEERING AT THE POTAGER FRESH MARKET STAND AT FRANKLIN PARK CONSERVATORY



NEW MARKETING BANNER FOR THE POTAGER FRESH MARKET BOOTH



FREE FARM STAND AT THE 2024 SWEET AS HONEY APPLE FESTIVAL



PARTNER GARDENS

Our "Partner Gardens" program offers fiscal sponsorship to both new and existing community garden spaces. In 2024, we piloted the program successfully, providing support to two garden initiatives: Bexley Community Gardens and Minerva Park Community Gardens. If you are seeking fiscal sponsorship for your garden, please don't hesitate to contact us for assistance.

Minerva Park Community Garden

The garden consists of 36 rental plots, 3 elevated boxes, giving garden beds that produce **520 lbs** of produce donated, the Janice Windborne Memorial Garden, a native pollinator garden, an annual flower box, and an herb garden.

Bexley Community Gardens

The North and South gardens comprise two flourishing locations with a total of **100 rented plots**. Managed by the City of Bexley alongside a dedicated volunteer management team. This community garden program welcomes both Bexley and non-Bexley residents.

QUEER FARMERS ALLIANCE

Safe Conversations

The Queer Farmers Alliance is a dedicated space for LGBTQIA farmers and growers to connect and share experiences. This initiative was inspired by discussions that began at the 2024 Ohio Ecological Food & Farm Association Conference. Our inaugural meeting took place in April, where we engaged in an open conversation about the unique joys and challenges we encounter as queer farmers. Looking ahead, we aim to expand our network and explore future partnerships.

"We are excited that the Garden District is a space where everyone can show up freely as themselves and grow together"

- Jerrah Pettibone, OEFFA Beginning Farmer and Land Access Educator





THANK YOU FOR ALL OF THE SUPPORT

FRANKLIN COUNTY & CITY OF COLUMBUS:

Urban Agricultural Infrastructure Grant; The Urban Garden Grant

CORPORATE SUPPORT:

The Robert Weiler Foundation; The Beck Foundation; The Columbus Foundation; The Scotts Miracle Gro Company Foundation; Club Diversity; Price Organics Farm; Green Stalk Garden; Dill's Greenhouse Inc; Lowe's; Rusty Bucket; VegoGarden

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT:

Little Garden Club of Columbus; The Bexley Women's Club; German Village Garten Club; Greater Columbus Growing Coalition; We Grow NES; Ohio Farm Bureau; ECDI; Green Columbus; Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District

IN-KIND SUPPORT:

In Memory of Mike Reisner Fund; Seedmoney Campaign donors; Facebook campaign donations; Individual donations