

Topic Page: [Gardens](#)

Definition: **garden** **1** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

 [pronunciation](#)

(13c) **1 a** : a plot of ground where herbs, fruits, flowers, or vegetables are cultivated **b** : a rich well-cultivated region **c** : a container (as a window box) planted with usu. a variety of small plants **2 a** : a public recreation area or park usu. ornamented with plants and trees [a botanical ~] **b** : an open-air eating or drinking place **c** : a large hall for public entertainment

gar·den·ful \- fùl\ n

Summary Article: **Gardens**

From *Encyclopedia of Environment and Society*

GARDENS ARE IMPORTANT elements of human–environment relationships. Historically, people have managed gardens for food, medicine, income, and ritual reasons, as they do today. The continuous, and most likely early, existence of gardens attests to their usefulness in multiple environments. Spatially, gardens represent intensive management of social and biophysical areas and provide insight into human knowledge systems and environmental adjustment capabilities. T. Killian defines gardens as the “polycultural mix of cultigens and useful economic species grown on small plots where the cultivator focuses on individual plants and their microhabitats by small inputs of labor on a continuous basis.” C. Kimber claims that gardens are a vegetation type that “is a cultural–biological complex that can tell us much about people as they express themselves in the plant world.” The species cultivated or protected in gardens reflect an individual’s and a culture’s decisions about which resources are valuable and deserve labor.

Biophysical relationships are not the only operative forces in garden use and change. A garden that produces needed food or medicine affects a household’s future allocation of resources, providing families the ability to use cash resources for out field fertilizer, a child’s school supplies, housing improvements, or other needs. Thus, the garden, by allowing households more latitude to allocate resources than nongardening families in similar settings allows a family to affect land-use decisions. Plant productivity, both in gardens and in remote fields, affects the strategies that households adopt for well-being. For example, catastrophic erosion in a field can make garden production more important than previously, engendering higher labor needs and more intensive management schemes.

Demographic and economic factors also affect gardens. As J.F. Eder explains, “continued rapid population growth, coupled with the filling in of many remaining agricultural frontiers, has significantly diminished farm size in many of the world’s agricultural systems and this trend is likely to continue.” Thus, garden production, carried out on small plots holds current and future promise for agricultural production. Within commodity production systems gardens serve either to augment cash earning or to lessen the need for the purchase of agricultural products, thereby reducing costs to households. By providing space and resources for diverse activities, gardens optimize the limited land available to rural families, at times being the deciding factor in household success. B.L. Turner and W.T. Sanders explain that “gardens . . . are spaces for the cultivation of multiple species used for additional or emergency caloric and nutritional needs, medicinals, ornamentals, and other exotic production.” In addition to

growing needed crops, gardens create spaces for the education of children, experimentation with plant types and cultivation techniques, and family social activities.

In the developing and developed world, gardens are components of human landscapes. The utilization of space surrounding people reflects political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of societies. These pressures act on gardeners to ensure that each garden varies significantly from others. Spatially, gardens may be located near houses or at more remote locations. Garden areas nearest houses, however, tend to receive the most attention, both in terms of intended care and unintended influence from household members and visitors. Those near house spaces are not only places of production; they are places of occupation as well. People in or near gardens select certain crops over others through use, conscious and unconscious seed dispersal, and the elimination of unwanted plants or those that grow in human activity and footpaths.

Worldwide urban gardens garner considerable interest. Nestled in unpaved, open spaces, city dwellers use gardens to produce needed food, provide a connection with nature, and create social connection with other city dwellers. In parts of two-thirds of the world, for example, gardens in large cities to alleviate economic impoverishment, in space eked out of median strips, destroyed houses, or other spaces. In the economically rich areas of the world, gardening can occur for alternative reasons, for example to avoid pesticides or genetically modified organisms. While gardens produce needed resources for families, they also provide space for social activities where children play and learn about nature, create space set apart from the outside world, and enhance the sense of community or family solidarity.

Although agricultural intensity studies demonstrate that high labor inputs often bring lower outputs per unit of work, Eder notes that “intensive garden production may not bring lower labor productivity, due to the benefits of continued harvesting and associated ‘fine tuning’ of management strategies.” Where climatically possible, gardens are in continuous production that take very little effort on a given day but receive high levels of input when taken over the entire growing period. Measuring garden productivity in terms of production of cash or volume ignores other factors that gardeners consider important. Gardens also return variety, reduce risk, grant prestige, and preserve land races of crops. Gardens possess a wide range of cultivars both within individual and across multiple gardens. The crop diversity found in gardens owes to economic, cultural, and ecological relationships, often inseparable from one another.

Importantly, gardens are sites of experimentation and learning for plant production. Gardeners, with nearly everyday contact with their plants, notice variation and encourage preferred changes. Gardens are thus in one sense traditional, in that they have a long history with the human species, but are also fully modern in the nearly constant change and adjustments made to them.

Singapore, the Garden City

The concept of turning Singapore into a “Garden City” had its origins in 1963, when the Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, initiated a large-scale tree planting campaign. Singapore became an independent country two years later, and two years after that, a plan to turn Singapore into a Garden City was formalized. This coincided with major infrastructure projects throughout the country, and public, municipal and statutory bodies were encouraged to incorporate parks, grass verges, and

trees into their building and landscaping plans. The result was a dramatic improvement in the aesthetic environment of much of the country. The Botanic Gardens and other places had ensured that long before the Garden City concept, Singapore had many flowerbeds and greenery. However, from 1967 there was a concerted effort to beautify the city with trees planted along roadsides, and flowerbeds constructed along many sidewalks, under overpasses, and outside shopping arcades.

Singapore has always been known for its orchids. To make the country a “Garden City,” flowers from Arabia, East Africa, India, and Latin America were introduced, including the flamingo flower from Colombia, the crossandra from India, and the peacock flower from the Caribbean, which are all now quite common in Singapore. In addition, the frangipani tree and the lantana remain popular, as does Singapore’s national flower, the Orchid *Vanda* “Miss Joaquim.”

SEE ALSO:

Community Gardens; Food.

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Dr. Eric Keys

Department of Geography University of Florida

APA

Chicago

Harvard

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