

The Urban Agriculture Landscape

People who garden in Somerville have **access to space** via community gardens or their backyards and/or have the **knowledge and resources** to garden using containers.

Urban growing can play an important role in:

- **Connecting neighbors and building social capital**
- **Supporting mental, spiritual, and environmental health**
- **Supplementing food sources** (as opposed to replacing them)

“The gardening group, I think, is a combination of food and social things. For me, I’m very into the idea that our goal is to actually produce food and make something tangible. But, in terms of practicality, you’re not going to grow that much food in a small box in your yard. So, I have to always remind myself that the goal is about community building as well as food.”

– MAMAS Gardening Collective Interviewee



Through the assessment’s advisory group, Groundwork Somerville connected with the Office of Immigrant Advancement (SOIA) to offer community garden beds to immigrant seniors (right). One gardener there is an expert in growing jilo, an eggplant-like vegetable popular in parts of Brazil (left).

Although not everyone living in Somerville wants to garden or garden on a large scale, the waitlists for community gardens, attendance at library workshops, and the positive reception of the seed library indicate that urban growing remains popular.

Existing infrastructure and resources are insufficient to meaningfully expand urban agriculture in Somerville.



“There are times when I feel stressed or overwhelmed by so many problems, because as immigrants we have two burdens: supporting our family here and our family back home. So, all of that can cause a lot of frustration in our minds. And the garden, I come to the garden, and I forget everything, I start cleaning, I start arranging the plants and it all goes away.”

– Somerville resident [translated from Spanish]

There is interest in more shared garden spaces, but also an acknowledgement that **communal garden spaces need active maintenance and oversight**.

Successful gardening initiatives integrate thoughtful **land stewardship, cultural growing practices, and multi-generational opportunities** to share knowledge and strengthen community bonds.

A meeting of urban gardening organizations and advocates provided a summary of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOT) for the network of growers in Somerville.



Strengths

- Each other/ Volunteers
- Existing partnerships
- Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding
- Educational, workshop, demonstration opportunities
- Somerville Loves Urban Gardening Facebook page
- Rat Czarina in City's Inspectional Services Division
- Gathering space variety
- Pollinator Action Plan



Weaknesses

- Lack of coordinated communication channels
- Missing a priority list
- Land is limited
- Unknown seasonal plan for turning on the water
- Long wait list for community gardens



Opportunities

- Community Food Assessment
- People want community
- School gardens
- ArtFarm redesign
- Gardener on staff at DPW
- Library of Things – has tools for gardening, could purchase more
- 15 garden beds at South Street Farm for community use



Threats

- Federal funding cuts
- Building development
- Climate change
- Rodents

Some residents are aware of the existing organizations and programs to enrich their gardening experience, but many others are not. This gap in awareness is largely due to fragmented messaging and programming across the city.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE GROWING OPPORTUNITIES

- Use this assessment as a **foundation to engage partners in establishing urban growing priorities** that meet community needs while ensuring City involvement is balanced and community-based partners can sustain any expansion.
- Use **community priorities as a roadmap for an updated urban agriculture vision** and a **discussion of financial investment** in staff or direct programmatic funding.
- Publicly share City priorities and **engage community-based partners** in refining them to ensure City involvement is balanced and partners can sustain any expansion.
- Hire or designate a coordinator to **centralize efforts and build a cohesive network across gardens, schools, and community organizations**.
- Increase **public awareness of the urban agriculture network and learning opportunities** starting with streamlining and improving City webpages and community outreach materials.
- To address space constraints, pilot a **community garden plot using a shared space model** to allow access for more people. The City should work with a **non-profit or volunteer group** to ensure the project meets community needs and has investment from the community.

**Want to learn more?
Find the full
assessment here:**

