Garden Education

We provide direct support for individuals of all ages and backgrounds through season-long garden education classes, training workshops & webinars, one-off workshops, and technical garden support.

480
Children, adults, and seniors participated in nutrition education workshops in our Mobile Classroom

76
Garden Coordinators trained to support schools and early care centers

680
People attended online webinars and in-person workshops

269
Participants in season-long garden education programs for adult beginner gardeners, residents at affordable housing sites, New American farmers, and seniors in residential care

“I am really excited to start gardening as a hobby! I loved the time I spent in the garden this summer, and am planning to start a garden at home next year. It also made me think a lot more about all that goes into the food that I buy at the grocery store.”

- Participant in the Community Teaching Garden course
“We are overjoyed to have been able to purchase and plant such an abundant number and variety of the trees thanks to this grant. Many of these tree and shrub varieties have fed, shaded, and grown with our ancestors in various locations for generations. The ability to have planted them here in our Vermont home, at the same time that we are putting down roots with our commUNITY Farm, is very meaningful.”

- SUSU CommUNITY Farm

“It is wonderful to bring home food that was alive in the ground just hours earlier, and without a collective garden, I would not have much opportunity to do that. I cannot keep a personal garden going, and I have no space for one where I live. For me, the collective garden offers all of the benefits of gardening but with no stress around the work to be done.”

- Co-op Victory Garden member
Garden Organizing Workshops

We hosted our second online training series this winter. Twenty-seven new and emerging garden organizers participated in this 5-part series. This year we had a special focus on “collective gardening,” including new material and guest speakers to share best practices on this unique model of community-based gardening.

“This training has been a source of inspiration for my garden project and I can’t wait to use these ideas and resources to bring it to life! Thank you!”
- Participant in the Collective Gardening online training series

Grantee Support

Vermont Fruit & Nut Tree Grant

This grant supported the purchase and successful planting and care of trees and shrubs for 20 grantee groups at 54 community growing sites across the state of Vermont. These sites – schools, affordable housing communities, non-profits, community gardens, educational centers, a food co-op, a library, and residences – support people of all ages and backgrounds to grow food, learn about their natural environment, and connect with their neighbors.

“Thanks again for offering this grant to enhance our school yard and make it a place where we can learn about trees that provide food for us.”
- Champlain Elementary School

Farm to School & Child Nutrition Grant Garden Support

In fulfillment of our work with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFM), we offered an online workshop, a mobile classroom visit, and follow-up technical assistance to 12 Farm to School Child Nutrition Grant groups. For the delivery of three online spring workshops, VGN collaborated with Vermont FEED/Shelburne Farms early care and K-12 support staff to provide support and resources around farm to school curriculum and gardening.
Community Teaching Garden Course

The 2022 Community Teaching Garden Course ran from May 4th until October 12th for a total of 24 weeks. The course instructor was Angela deBettencourt and course apprentice was Carolyn Lawrence, a 2021 CTG graduate. We started and ended the season with 21 students. Pair shares seemed to be a popular choice this year with a total of five pair shares. Overall the course was a major success with many students expressing how they feel confident and ready for future garden seasons and how they loved the community that was created.

The design and implementation of the course remained the same as previous years including visits to the Co-op Victory garden, the New Farms for New Americans gardens, and the Learning Garden at Fanny Allen. We hosted a Day in the Dirt event, three work days with the LEAP program, a work day with UVM SERVICE TREK students, and a visit from the students at the Learning Garden.

“The class was great for my mental health, feeling more grounded and connected to the earth and others. It was the highlight of my week and I really miss it.”

- CTG 2022 student

Urban Agriculture & Leadership Program

During this second year of our three year grant partnership with New Farms for New Americans, we revised our 28-week long farmer-to-farmer training program to better meet participant needs and program goals. We added monthly workshops on Saturday mornings, grew more culturally significant crops to expand our seed saving initiative, and expanded the community medicine garden to teach more lessons on herbal remedies and winter wellness. We welcomed two New American farmers, Hadija and Mon, to support the program as teacher assistants, farmer-to-farmer mentors and community liaisons.
Co-op Victory Garden

In 2022, we transitioned the Co-op Victory Garden to move away from being exclusively volunteer-led and funded through ShiftMeals. Instead, we proposed a sliding scale membership structure with generous scholarships and we welcomed three graduates of our CTG program into the role of garden mentors. From early April through late October, 19 garden members staffed weekly work shifts to collectively maintain an extraordinarily productive market garden.

In partnership with the Intervale Center, Burlington Area Community Gardens, and the Agroecology and Livelihood Collaborative at UVM, we facilitated the “Garden Like a Farmer” workshop series at the Co-op Victory Garden. Over the course of five months, we welcomed groups of 8-14 participants at monthly workshops to use our collective garden as an exemplary demonstration site for sharing advanced gardening tips, techniques and tools.

“Collective gardening seems like the way we were meant to garden. Why do something individually when there's so much to be gained from community knowledge, from the give and take of having many people to rely on, when you can share abundance and advice and inspiration more widely!”

- 2022 Garden Member

Gardening for Health

Together with the University of Vermont Medical Center’s Primary Care and Nutrition Services, we offered this comprehensive health program with a gardening focus to 2 groups of 14 people each. Our aim is to improve health by teaching participants how to grow their own food and how to use those fresh, whole foods in simple, delicious, seasonal recipes. The program connects concepts of physical activity, healthy eating and nutrition education with gardening in a supportive environment to encourage social interaction and skill building.

Here is what participants had to say:

“I loved the combination of learning information, actually doing hands-on gardening, stretching/exercises/meditation, tasting delicious and healthy food. This program exceeded my expectations.”

“What truly came through from each of [the instructors] was the link between gardening and freshly grown fruits and vegetables and how much [they] could contribute to our health and well-being.”
Mobile Classroom

In May 2022 we launched the Mobile Classroom program, a retrofitted van that can travel the state and deliver garden and nutrition education workshops to distant corners of Vermont where our interaction and reach has historically been limited. The van visited a total of 31 sites in 2022, delivering workshops to schools, housing sites, senior centers, and libraries. New programming was developed for the Mobile Classroom to focus more directly on nutrition and culinary skills as they relate to health and seasonal vegetable cultivation.

Gardens at Affordable Housing Sites

Our long-running partnership with Champlain Housing Trust (CHT), reached an estimated 112 resident gardeners at 8 different affordable housing communities in Chittenden County. A regional Garden Coordinator supported these communities throughout the growing season in garden management, gardening education, and community-building activities.

This season also marked the third year of this successful partnership with Evernorth and regional property management companies, Addison County Community Trust (ACCT) and Downstreet Housing (Downstreet), and the first year of collaboration with Windham Windsor housing. The 2022 season engaged 100 resident gardeners at 16 different affordable housing communities in Addison, Washington, and Windham counties. All sites received garden management support, guidance and education delivered by three Garden Coordinators and our mobile classroom van.

In the words of resident gardeners:

“Gardening with VGN is important to me because it provides a break from the grind of life, teaches my son patience and care for the natural world.”

“The food we grow in our VGN plot helps feed our family”

“This season I was most excited about growing produce and being with my daughter”
Hands in the Dirt - Senior Garden Therapy

After many years of partnering with HANDS (Helping and Nurturing Diverse Seniors) and significantly expanding our offerings, we transitioned to fully manage the program under the umbrella of VGN. Our programming focuses on empowering seniors through gardening activities to enhance quality of life and health, with personalized offerings that cater to the senior residents and setting of each community. Our summer-long programming at the Ethan Allen Residence expanded this year to include garden design and maintenance, along with two activity mornings every week from June through August. We also coordinated monthly workshops at the C.O.R.E. Senior Center and Elderwood in Burlington, relying on our team’s flexibility and resourcefulness to lead activities suitable for both physically active seniors and wheelchair users.

Looking Forward to 2023…

- Offer grants and technical support for more garden groups planting fruit and nut trees, through or continued partnership with the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program, through the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

- Build an innovative community greenhouse and education program to support people to grow seedlings, while providing space and infrastructure for VGN to start and distribute plants for seniors and low income families throughout Vermont.

- Drive our new Mobile Classroom to even more communities throughout Vermont, delivering garden and nutrition education, seeds, plants and other resources.

- Document our season-long programs (CTG, NFNA partnership, Victory Garden) to better tell our own story on growing food and building community.

“Ethan Allen Residence was so blessed to have VGN Join us again this year! We filled our beds with delicious colorful vegetables and flowers. We learned so much about medicinal purposes of certain plants and had a lot of fun activities to educate us along the way! I highly recommend this program to anyone who is lucky enough to implement it into their facility.” - Programs Director, Ethan Allen Residence
SNAP-Ed video featuring VGN's Mobile Classroom

Collective Gardening at the Co-op Victory Garden, partnership between VGN and Skinny Pancake

Vermont Garden Network

Program Report 2022