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# Community gardens unite neighbors, feed needy

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August zucchinis overcrowding local community gardens aren't just symbols of urban land put to good use, they're feeding the needy.

From Yonkers to Port Chester and Valhalla to Haverstraw, community gardeners are harvesting thousands of pounds of vegetables this summer for food pantries and charities. The gardens are also bringing neighbors together, educating children and rehabilitating troubled individuals.

The beneficiaries of this bounty include People to People in Nanuet, which received 1,277 pounds of fresh vegetables between June 1 and Aug. 1, all of it donated by community gardeners and individuals. That translates into about \$3,000 worth of food for the agency, said Diane Serratore, People to People's [executive director](#).

"Having fresh produce is a real benefit to us. You can't get any more basic than food from your backyard," Serratore said.

The Food Bank for Westchester in Millwood hopes to eventually grow 10,000 pounds of vegetables a year in its five gardens in Bedford Hills, Pleasantville, Valhalla and Yonkers. While it is still far from its goal, between starting its gardens in 2006 and last June, the agency's [volunteers](#) grew 11,982 pounds of produce.

"The Food Bank is very committed to nutrition, not just calories, so

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Kyana Fernandez, 21, of Yonkers helps construct garden beds as part of a Groundwork Hudson Valley project at Cottage Place Gardens in Yonkers. The goal is for neighborhood children to learn how to grow,

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Nyimma Bartee, both 14, harvest vegetables at the Garden of Love community garden in Haverstraw. / Tania Savayan/The Journal News

Written by Ernie Garcia

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we have really focused on produce," communications manager Jeanne Wilcox said.

Some of the Food Bank's gardens are in schools for troubled children and at the Westchester County Jail, giving students and adult inmates a therapeutic outlet, said Wilcox, who has spoken to the young people about their projects.

"Many of them said to me that their grandmother or some relative worked in their garden, and it did bring back fond memories," Wilcox said.

The Council of Community Services of Port Chester, Rye Brook and Rye Town moved its community garden to Port Chester Middle School last year from Goshen, N.Y., to attract local volunteers. The quarter-acre garden's summer bounty is given to the needy by the council's faith-based partners, said Daniel Lipka, the council's executive director.

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