

Food for Thought at the Somerville Public Library

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People in Somerville, Massachusetts, love to garden. But in a city with more than 80,000 residents packed into just over 4 square miles, the safe and affordable opportunities to do so are pretty limited. Wait list times for a community garden plot can take as long as two years! We wondered: could we transform some of the library's green space into a teaching garden, and build programming around it to promote health and wellness, teach practical life skills, and build community?



In 2018 we applied for, and were awarded, a Library Services and Technology Act grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, administered by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, and in 2019 we began an urban gardening initiative at the Somerville Public Library (SPL), which we named "Food For Thought".

Using the grant funding and partnerships with local businesses and organizations, SPL created a raised-bed teaching garden on the Central Library lawn to provide residents of all ages with the opportunity to learn about and experience hands-on planting, harvesting, and maintenance of the garden, and to develop their capacity to garden at home in containers and the small green spaces available in Somerville. Supporting programs and activities included hands-on gardening workshops throughout the growing season, an Arbor Day and Urban Gardening Fair and a harvest festival, urban gardening lectures, cooking workshops, mobile library pop-ups, and children's programming.

The Arbor Day/Urban Gardening Fair is a great example of the power of community partnerships. The fair was a community event that took place during the City's SustainaVille week (SustainaVille is home to the City's programs and initiatives to reduce the community's

contribution to climate change). The program was originally slated to be a community planting day to celebrate the Library's new gardens, but we were able to widen the scope to become a mini-sustainability fair by partnering with the Somerville Office of Sustainability & Environment and the Somerville Urban Forestry Division.



Our event included not only planting of the raised bed gardens, but also crafts and activities for kids (the worm bin was a huge hit), tables from local gardening and environmental organizations, and tree planting at a nearby park.

Based on the success of the program and building on the foundation afforded by the LSTA grant, we're very excited "Food for Thought" will continue into its second year in 2020!

