

Abstract

Essence magazine published an article in 2020 titled, "How Black Women Will Survive the COVID-19 Crisis," stating that "Growing food...will help serve our physical and mental health." Thus, this research takes a look into the rationale and motivation for starting a garden during COVID-19. For research purposes, I intend to explore food deserts in Charlotte, the benefits of gardening (not only reaping and sowing), and having access to the time and tools needed to establish and maintain a successful garden such as land and fertile soil. *The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools third grade science curriculum requires that students know how plants survive in their environments and how environmental conditions determine how well plants survive and grow.* I currently teach at Mountain Island Lake Academy (MILA) in a self-contained, third grade classroom. MILA is a *title one* school and over 60% of the students are Black. In an effort to study this topic, I conducted interviews through snowball sampling and explored pre-established social media pages and groups such as Black Girls with Gardens. What I have found thus far is that gardening brings calming and nutritional benefits to Black women. In addition, these social media groups have created networks for women to ask questions, share, and motivate one another during a time in which people have found themselves isolated. Gardening seems to be a new trend now that many people are forced to work from home and perhaps cook more than they would have prior to COVID-19.

Methods

To gather participants for this five week study, I posted on social media accounts asking if any Black women had started a garden during COVID-19. Participants either commented on the post or were tagged by a mutual friend. A survey was sent to all participants via email. The survey consisted of ten questions including:

1. Did you eat "healthy" prior to COVID-19?
2. Where do you go for advice on how to maintain your garden?
3. Do you feel that gardening gives you social and/or emotional benefits?
4. Do your children (if you have any) in your gardening?

Quotes

Participants responded to the question of, "Do you feel that gardening gives you emotional benefits?"

- "Peace of mind"
- "It is Calming"
- "A great stress reliever"

Social Media Groups

In 2020, many people are connected through social media. In fact, with gardening, there are groups established to show progress, ask questions, and encourage one another. Examples of Social Media groups include...

Facebook groups:

- Black Girls with Gardens
- The Black Gardeners
- Edible Gardening By Black Girls with Gardens

Background Information

According to Essence, the answer to Black women surviving the 2019 COVID crisis is growing plants and using herbal remedies. Gardening, releases hormones which make a person feel happy such as serotonin and dopamine. "Growing food and herbs for both nutrition and medicine will help serve our physical and mental health while possibly releasing us from a capitalist system that makes accessibility of care taxing for marginalized populations" (Lewis-Giggetts, 2020).

In an article released by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, gardening has effects on the body and mind such as the ability of sunlight to lower blood pressure and increase vitamin D levels in the summer, and "digging, raking, and mowing are particularly calorie intense" (Thompson, 2018).

Findings

At a time in which restaurants and businesses have either been forced into closing their doors, cutting staff, and/or cutting their hours. Furthermore, with the unprecedented pandemic, quarantining, and social distancing, many Black mothers have begun growing their own foods. For many of the study participants, the nearest grocery store is less than five minutes away, yet, they choose to use their own seeds, soil and hands to grow produce. Some of the participants live in apartment homes which resulted in smaller gardens, but all of the participants stated that if they had a bigger space, their garden would be bigger as well. In addition, many of the participants include their family members (fiance and children) in their gardening process. The title of this project, "Grow Girl, Grow," touches on both the physical plants which come from a garden (tomato, corn, cucumber, etc.) and the social and emotional benefits that come from being outdoors, growing one's own food, and spending time in solace or with the ones you love. In a time of chaos, confusion, and uncertainty, one thing that is almost 100% certain is that when you plant a seed and nurture it, you will be able to watch it grow. Lastly, participants used social media platforms and internet sites to help enhance their gardening skills. For example, there are facebook groups such as Black Girls with Gardens that were founded with the idea to inspire and educate Black women on gardening.



Images sent via participants of their outdoor gardens.

Additional Questions

1. Does Social and Economic Status affect one's ability to create and sustain a garden?
2. What effects does gardening have on children and teens?

Lessons on Ecosystems

3.L.2 Understand how plants survive in their environments

Day 1

3.L.2.1 Function of plant structures as they relate to the survival of plants in their environments:
Roots, Stems, Leaves, and Flowers.
(Parts of a Plant Powerpoint)
Activity: Color and Label parts of a plant

Day 2

3.L.2.2 Explain how environmental conditions determine how well plants survive and grow.

Day 3

3.L.2.3 Students know the distinct stages of the life cycle of seed plants (seed, germination, seedling, adult)
(Life Cycle of Plants Powerpoint)
Activity: Draw and label each plant of the life cycle

Children's Gardening Literature

- *Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Ehlert
- *If you Hold a Seed* by Elly MackKay
- *Green Bean! Green Bean!* By Patricia Thomas



References

Lewis-Giggetts, T. M. (2020, March 27). Just Bees And Things And Flowers: How Black Women Gardeners Will Survive In The COVID-19 Crisis. Retrieved from <https://www.essence.com/feature/black-women-gardeners-survive-covid-19-crisis/>

Thompson R. (2018). Gardening for health: a regular dose of gardening. *Clinical medicine (London, England)*, 18(3), 201–205.
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