

B-17

What Grew in My Garden

Since I was in the third grade, I've been fascinated with farming. That's why I started renting a small garden near my house to grow vegetables. When you hear the words "something grew in the garden," what comes to mind? I imagined beautiful, healthy vegetables – organic, fresh, shiny, and delicious. But reality was very different. My garden had cabbages full of holes from bugs, cucumbers destroyed by crows, and spinach that was sick and looked utterly unappetizing. Farming wasn't easy at all. But this small garden gave me something much more important than just vegetables – it gave me a way to connect with the people in my community.

Whenever I struggled, the elderly farmers nearby would come talk to me. They gave me advice based on years of experience – about soil, insects, and how to grow seedlings. Thanks to them, I gained not just knowledge, but also new friends across generations. The few vegetables I did grow well – like snap peas and tomatoes – came all at once. So I shared them with my neighbors. They said things like, "Thank you so much!" and "They were so sweet and tasty!" Because of the vegetables that grew in my garden, conversations and smiles grew naturally in the neighborhood.

There are many benefits of connecting with your local community. According to a government survey on social connection, people who are involved in their communities have better mental health. They feel more secure and emotionally stable. Another survey by the Ministry of Education showed that children who often talk with adults in their neighborhood, tend to have higher self-esteem and stronger social skills. They are also less likely to feel isolated or engage in risky behavior. Furthermore, a study by the Ministry of Health found that elderly people who join local volunteer or gardening activities are less likely to develop dementia or need nursing care.

In short, staying connected with your community is good for every generation, both physically and mentally. Through my own experience, I realized something special: The things that grew the best in my garden weren't vegetables. What really grew was kindness, connection, and gratitude. That's why I want to continue appreciating my connection with the community.

Today, we face many challenges and problems that don't go as we hope. Things like our jobs, rising prices, natural disasters and climate change. Personally, I have an important entrance exam this year, and I'm not sure how it will go. There will always be times of uncertainty. But that's why now, more than ever, we need a system where people support each other in their communities. That's why I will keep working on my garden, growing things like cucumbers and smiles. So now I'd like to ask: How will you build a relationship with your community? And what will you grow in your garden?