

**PDX Garden Stories**  
**Interviews with participants in Growing Gardens Home Gardens Program**  
**Portland, Oregon**

**Interview with Maria**

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Portland State University, Urban Agriculture & Food Systems Capstone, Spring 2016  
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(00:00-6:30) (... discussion about apartment living, hunger in America etc...)

(6:57) **Interviewer:** Is this [community hunger] one of the reasons that brought you to Growing Gardens?

**Maria:** Definitely, because I wanted to know more and I wanted to share my wealth of knowledge about growing food and making things stretch. When you're a mother, a single mother of three, and you have to feed them on you know, a work steady job? And so food stamps have to pay the rent, you know because there are no subsidies there to pay the bills, there's nothing left to make ends meet. So yes, I wanted to bring that wealth to people because some people are just not knowledgeable about those things; where to find food and how to look everywhere for food and make it. Because I don't want people to be hungry. That is one of the worst feelings in life, to have an empty stomach, you know and you hear it growling and you're just thinking about food and it's the only thing that occupies your thoughts is just... food... hungry... I want to eat, I want more, you know? So that's why I got involved with Growing Gardens, and also because of the lack of bilingual-ness that sometimes people need, I know my community needed, you know, someone that was from the culture, was from the language that they're familiar with, and knew the language that related to gardening and how to encourage them and not make them feel scared or alienated- that there was someone they could relate to and have confidence and feel trust and be open to that knowledge. So that's my other reason for doing that. And as you get older you want to give back, and even when I wasn't older I was still looking for ways to give back because I know what it was like when I came- there was no programs to help, ESL programs, nothing was available. I had to go and help myself figure out a way to get what I needed on my own. Sometimes you need someone to open those little doors that people don't know are there. It's amazing how many locked doors there are, or a lack of knowledge of those things that are available.

(9:14) **Interviewer:** What was the impact of having a garden?

Maria: The impact?

Interviewer: Like how has the garden helped you? How has it impacted your life?

**Maria:** Well the impact gardening has had on my life, basically, the results have been like 'look what I have accomplished, what I grew, look what I almost like, made'. You don't make it, but you make it happen. It's that sense of accomplishment, that sense of satisfaction. That sense of, just like, it puts a smile on your face. That sense of hard work, and how good it feels to be tired and go to bed just going,

oh yes it hurts but... you're not really complaining because it gives you pleasure. At least for a person like me it gives me great pleasure to do that. But that sense of accomplishment is what I've always thrived on. When I graduated from college I said, I finally did it! I did it. I told myself I would and I accomplished it. Same thing for everything- that's what gardening does for me. That sense of joy, and the biggest joy I get is that once I created this, not only does it give me pleasure and feed me, but I can pass it to my neighbor next door and say, 'Here, how would you like some tomatoes? I have so many I can hardly keep up with them so have some' and they go, 'wow'. Same thing with my eggs, you have no idea how long I have fed my block, 'Please take these eggs, I have too many eggs!' It's not that way anymore because they're old [chickens]. Anyway, but that's the way it's been with my tomatoes, my zucchinis, my greens- different kinds that I grow. That's the greatest thing; it creates a sense of community, a sense of neighborhood-ness. It connects you with your neighborhood- you get to meet your neighbors, and that sense of community that I so longed for all the time. Its building a social network within your own block and that way it opens up, keeping an eye out for each other's places and whatever your little lot grows, and sharing information, it opens up so many other doors and that's what I love about gardening. Plus it makes your back yard look nice and green, and you have all this stuff growing and the bees are there and the birds are there and you get all this wildlife coming in to visit you because you have this wonderful garden. There's nothing more pleasurable than that, you don't even need to go anywhere, you can just sit there and enjoy and that's what I often do in the summer time. I pull up my chair and I bring my tea or my coffee and my Ipad if I want to play a game, or the newspaper or my endless gardening books and study, and just listen to nature, listen to the birds. Watching the hummingbirds; that's what they love in the summer time when my yard is in full bloom, the hummingbirds just bombard me. They're buzzing all the time, dodging them all the time like, 'Oh here it comes!' because they want your plums and they want whatever, it's just all of this *life* that comes to your back yard. Along with the vegetables it's the flowers, it's just such joy to me. That is the highlight of my whole year, when everything is in peak. When I'm planting it to watching it go into peak and go 'Oh!'. The not so good part is the having to clean it up afterwards, but even that you can just leave it, like in the olden days people didn't usually go and clean it all up because tomatoes regenerate themselves. You can have endless tomato plants if you planted one and the next year you just let them come into bloom and fruit. A lot of other things reseed themselves. You put in the effort once and you'll always get something even if you don't do anything. So definitely, it's lovely, bring some music out there and what more do you need to be complete? You can build a little fire in a little fire pit you have there... there's nothing better. I equate it with going to the beach for the day. That kind of thing is that joyful to me.

(13:55) Interviewer: How has the garden affected your health?

**Maria:** On my health? Well, it gives me exercise for one thing. It also allows me to eat healthy organic food which is better for me. It allows me to prevent those blues, the depression that comes in sometimes, you know, it's just natural to not always be 'uppsity'. There are always reasons to get out of that: my chickens, just the fact that I have to go and feed them and take water to them and interact with them and look for their eggs like, 'where'd you put them this time?' because they never lay in one spot, 'is it under this pile of hay?' you know, that kind of thing. Or when I let them out they like to fly into my garden beds and lay them. So I play like I'm having an Easter egg hunt almost every summer. Looking, "what are you doing?" my grandkids ask, and I say "I'm looking for eggs! Because with my chickens you never know". One time I found a whole dozen of them underneath a pot right here on the side of the

house. I said, "Now I don't know how old these eggs are" and my grandson says, "I saw on the internet it says if you put them in water and you watch to see how they float, if they float they're no good. If they float they're still good." So that's what we did with twelve of them and he was right! They were all good. Emotionally, the benefits are wonderful to me. It's better than going on antidepressants for me anyway. Did I answer that question okay?

**Interviewer:** Yeah that was great

(15:49) Interviewer: Who else works in your garden?

**Maria:** Who else? Ninety percent of the time it's me. The other half sometimes it's my son, who helps me turn over the soil or put some compost in. But ninety percent of the time it's me, on a little stool with my kitchen tools that I have plus my shovels and stuff that I have. I only need my son when I have him go get me some compost or manure bags from Home Depot, and he holds them in there because I can deal with the rest, I just crack open a bag and little by little I put it in the... [trails off]. Or when I have the chicken coop cleaned up by one of my daughters. Other than that I'm the sole worker of that. The only thing they had helped me with was putting the garden beds together, and that was my daughter. My two daughters that went to Home Depot and I paid the bill and they put them all together. A lot of hard work, but I designed it and I told them what kind of wood to get and everything.

(17:00)

**Interviewer:** What are the challenge?

**Maria:** Yes, when you first start and then you over your nutrient and put too much nutrient on your land or your soil, then you are wondered "oh, I was wondered why my carrots did not produce. They were beautiful at the top and no carrots at bottom." Then I had to go research why did that happen? You know it is interesting now you find the rich of the soil; you know "I tried different composes and maybe the minority did not work but chicken did. Sometimes I used the bone meal, blood meal and all this lime that you have to put in there and do that. Sometimes it has different effects from different things and learning those and try to correct the fault because why did I get anything? You know "I am like what is going one" and investigating why did that happen? So, it is not that I have lab and they come and check my soil because they don't and it is all I am trying to figure it out on my own but also that (challenges) is the fun of it. You know and then sometimes well I don't have energy to investigated it but what I did get out of this was great enough and maybe I don't have 100% but I had gorgeous outcome where everything was luscious and green, where thing mass produces but it is not always the case. Sometimes bags are heavy and eating my stuff and trying to deal with that. Those are the big things and spraying pepper and figure out the nature.....

**Interviewer:** What would you tell someone who is interested on gardening?

**Maria:** I would tell them to keep it up and to really reach for help if they need it. And would let them know what resource are available there and I would give them this support and encourage them that they need and that's what they need. I think when you get good success from it and I would let them know that it (garden) would not feed your neighbor and it would not feed all of you completely but it will give you enough to supplement your meals and it will give you an opportunity to learn about garden, your soil and it will help you to reduce your food bill. So the most it will give you a good connection with your neighbors and a lot of pleasure that your planting and doing something for

yourself and that is accomplishment that you are doing something for yourself. Yes, I would encourage them and it is great opportunity for young parent to involve their children as it connects them to the land and garden should be part of their education. It makes the appreciate the mother earth and it makes you think that you can do a lot and as kid you know that there are a lot of thing that you can do. You are planting something and watching them growing that makes you to think about yourself as individual.

**Interviewer:** How long have you been gardening?

**Maria:** I have been gardening ever since I was kid. One ..... I was 14 years old and I lived in Salam and Oregon..... I had big garden of carrot and I remember someone give me big bag of carrot seed and then I went to store and bought another package of seed. So, I planted carrot and I planted tomatoes and I planted them not in shady area and they need more sun. so the carrot did okay but they were little. And that was only garden I got watch grow to the end year but the year before I planted tomatoes in a big pot that I found and we had to move just before they grow and I must be 14 or 13 years old at that time..... that is how I started being around dirt.....

**Interviewer:** What is your future plan for your garden?

**Maria:** I don't have any expectation of increasing or lowering my garden and I am just trying to maintain what I have and I want to be more selective of whatever that I want to grow. And try to fill my bat with whatever I have and I want to keep the plan that I don't need to replant every year that's why I like the leaks of the garlic, mint because I don't to replant them..... And those kind of things and I just having one bet for being my lettuces and make sure I have my salad..... think about what I can get out of my garden more economically. I want to more focus on what my family like and what I like to plant and those are my future plant..... I like to focus on how to use my land that can feed me and does not need a lot of work.....