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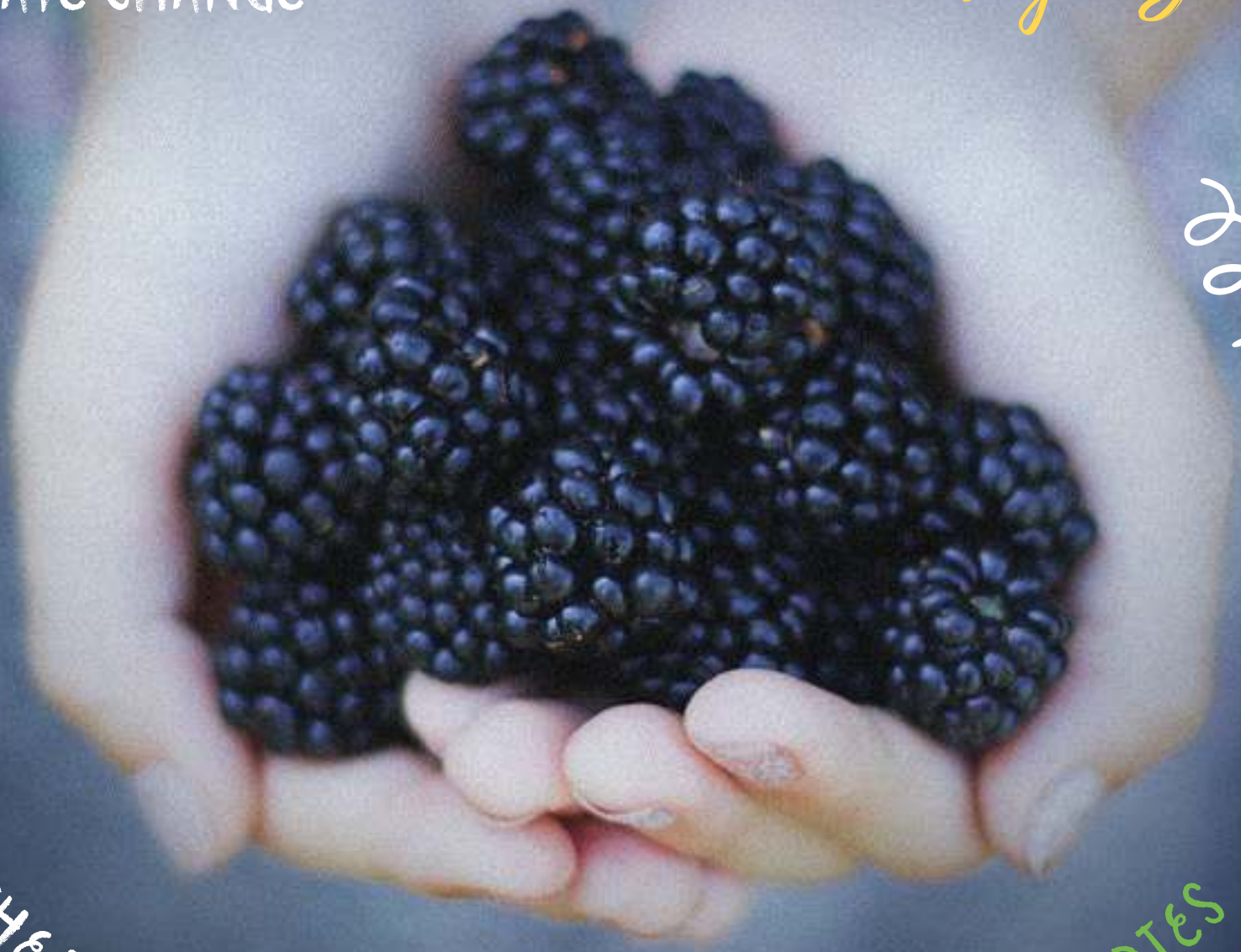
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Vegan Magazine

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COMMUNITY GARDENS

Growing food and friendships

By Honey Morris

I am extremely fortunate because I have food choices. I grow some of my own food and I also have easy access to a variety of farmers' markets and supermarkets. However, this isn't the case for everyone. In fact, for some it's literally quite the opposite.

Imagine living in a food desert. A food desert is an area where food choices are severely restricted, where people have limited access to affordable, fresh and healthy food and they are usually found in impoverished areas.

According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, an estimated 23.5 million people in the U.S. live in food deserts. More than half of those people (13.5 million) are low-income. Sadly, with their food choices so restricted, people in food deserts often have little choice, access or knowledge about alternatives and are restricted to cheap "fast" food to feed themselves and their families. This diet high in saturated fats, salt and sugar, brings with it a multitude of health problems.

The introduction of community gardens by inspiring individuals and charitable organisations is really helping empower the food choices of those living in food deserts. It's literally grassroots activism at its best.

A community garden is essentially a plot of land maintained by a group of people with the common goal of growing and harvesting fresh food, and it creates so many benefits. It brings people from all walks of life together, encouraging cross-cultural interaction and in turn, helping to break down cultural barriers. So, it's not just about growing food, but also growing friendships.



The people who tend to a community garden are rewarded not only by the feel good vibes of being more connected to each other, the earth and nature but also by sharing in the delicious fresh produce that is harvested. There's a really magical and uplifting feeling that comes from the joy of a successful harvest and it's even more special when it can be shared with others.

The Food is Free Project, launched in 2012, began when they encouraged their neighbours to connect and line their streets with small gardens. This strengthened their sense of community and provided them with an abundance of free food. Today the

Food is Free Project has inspired and transformed numerous neighbourhoods, installing gardens at churches schools and other small businesses. They encourage anyone with an abundance of home-grown produce to share it freely with those in their neighbourhood.



Setting up a community garden

If you're feeling inspired to create a community garden, here are some suggestions as to how to go about it. Firstly, do some research. Do lots of research and visit some existing, fruitful community gardens in your area. Communicate with your neighbours and your larger community, discuss and explain your vision and encourage others to contribute their ideas and become involved.

The biggest challenge will be choosing a suitable site. I would recommend liaising with your local council/shire and also, local gardeners and/or landscapers. It may be necessary to apply to your local council/shire for permission to use the land that you identify.



It's also well worth looking into the availability of grants and sponsorship to alleviate some of the financial burden, especially in regards to set-up costs. A Well Fed World accepts and reviews applications for project grants throughout the year and awards successful applicants with financial assistance on a quarterly basis.



Once you have a potential site in mind, you will need to take into consideration things like how accessible the site is, the condition of the soil, the history of the site and also think about how much sunlight the site receives throughout the changing seasons.

Be patient; creating a successful community garden will take time. Don't rush the planning stages, be thorough and this should ensure the smooth running once established.

A well-managed community garden is a successful community garden. I would recommend agreeing a set of guidelines and rules and putting the same in writing so everyone understands, not only the goals they're working towards but also what is expected of them.

If you're still looking for inspiration, check out the wonderful work of Ron Finley. The Ron Finley Project is all about bringing culture and community together. Ron, having grown up in south LA, and experiencing its lack of fresh produce, set out to rectify this problem.

Initially, Ron made use of the small curb side area outside of his home, planting and nurturing vegetables, and what flourished was a revolutionary project. Ron is educating and inspiring people, youth in particular, to grow fresh and healthy food.

Finally, always remember, your food choices really can change the world.



Honey Morris —

Honey Morris is the creator of Handmade by H-Monster. Handmade by H-Monster is about all things crafty but mostly crochet. Honey donates a minimum of 25-50% of the profits from the sale of her creations to not-for-profit animal rescues. Honey lives in picturesque Western Australia with her husband Stu and the rescue animals they share their life with. When she's not crocheting, or cooking up a vegan storm in the kitchen, you'll usually find Honey burning incense while reading a good book, tending to her veggie patch or taking a dip at the beach. Honey loves sharing her passion for animals, nature and veganism.

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