

Who are P-Patch Gardeners? *Results from the 2007 Survey*

At long last, the results are in. The P-Patch survey that gardeners completed with the 2007 survey presents a nice snapshot of gardeners. The number of plot-holders remained about the same as 2004 (because of some garden losses). A few more than 1600 returned the survey. Some holes and undercounting are obvious. At Marra the garden is approximately half Latino, but you wouldn't know to look at the survey. Thistle which has almost 70 Asian plot holders registered only 12 survey responses. Alas, always room for improvement.

The numbers of new and returning gardeners vary little from 2004. 355 or 22% are new gardeners while 78% are returning. In 2004, 24% were new and 76% returning. These figures mask quite a bit of difference between sites. In gardens serving primarily immigrant communities turn over is low. The highest turnover in 2007 occurred in gardens, which face external challenges or are in transition, or are transitional gardens where P-Patchers wait for a spot closer to home. These include Judkins, Greg's Garden, Estelle, Evanston, Burke Gilman, all which turned over more than 30% of their plots. The median rate of turnover was 17% which is a little lower than 2001 when it was 21%.

Turnover raises the issue of gardener tenure, which is always interesting because of the perennial discussion between turning plots over to accommodate the waitlist versus retaining experienced caring gardeners who mentor new gardeners and often contribute copious volunteer hours. In 2007 thirty-one percent of returning gardeners had their patch for 2 years or less; experienced gardeners with 3 to 9 years in the P-patch comprise almost half of returning gardeners with 46%. As our program ages, we have gained those with ten to 35 years of P-Patch experience. They make up 20% of returning gardeners in 2007, versus 13% in 2004 and 11% in 2001.

Our gardeners as a whole are evenly divided in home ownership and living situations. The number of renters declined from 49% in 2004 to 44% in 2007. Forty-eight percent of gardeners report living in multifamily situations, while 50% are in single family homes.

The distance gardeners lived from their P-Patch changed little in the last three years. 37% still report living within ¼ mile from their P-Patch. Another 31% are still within a mile of their P-patch, up from 28% in 2004. Gardeners report using a variety of modes to reach their P-Patch: they bike (12% up from 9% in 2004), bus (5%), drive (39%, the same as 2004) and walk (51% the same as 2004).

Gardeners do read the newsletter. Nine out of ten of returning gardeners report reading it at least sometimes. 70% read it usually or always (30% and 40% respectively), and 39% either never read it or didn't respond to the question.

Economically, P-Patchers are as diverse as their community. 55% of P-patch gardeners are low income (defined as earning 80% of median income for Seattle Bellevue area which was \$75,600 in 2007). More than 75% of gardeners earn less than median income. Checking a sampling of sites in different areas of the city, income patterns appear consistent. At two north end gardens in relatively prosperous areas of the city, Interbay and Evanston, 37% and

43% of gardeners are low income, while at two gardens serving southeast, Hillman and Courtland, 69% and 50% of gardeners are low income. As in 2004, six percent of gardeners report using food banks.

Ethnically, the survey shows that P-Patch is successful in its goal to be a community gardening program for everyone. . Program-wide P-Patchers are 80% Caucasian, versus 70% for the city as a whole, 2.1 % American Indian (1% for the city), and 15.2% Asian (13% for Seattle). We have areas for improvement. African Americans and Latinos are not well-represented in P-Patches: 2.7% and 2.5% respectively (although growing from 2% and 1.5% from the 2004 survey), versus 8% and 5% for the city.

The survey demonstrates that gardens are a significant source of food. Program-wide 36% of gardeners get 50% or more of their produce needs from their P-Patch during the months of April to October. By November to March a hearty 11% still take more than 25% of their produce from their winter gardens. The number of gardeners without space to grow vegetables at home remained stable between 2004 (76%) and 2007 (77%).

Gardeners share their produce throughout the program. As in 2004, one quarter of gardeners share produce once a week with fellow gardeners and 38% report sharing at least once a month. Two Cultivating Communities sites excel in sharing. High Point Juneau and Yesler Terrace Ballpark both have 80% of their gardeners sharing at least once a month. Donations to food banks are a source of pride for gardeners, and program-wide 40% of gardeners donate at least once a month, a figure which includes the 9% who give weekly. Encouragingly, and perhaps as result of the hard work of Lettuce Link, the Program staff and the commitment of gardeners, this number has grown from 2004 when only 34% of gardeners gave once a month. Figures vary depending on the garden. At Haller Lake, a stunning 71% of gardeners give at least once a month, and at the big food bank gardens, Picardo and Interbay, 64% and 50% respectively give at least once a month. A testimony about the importance site coordinators play in encouraging donations arises at Snoqualmie where 44% of gardeners donate from this low income and immigrant garden, where the site coordinator arranges periodic donations.

P-Patchers tout the community building benefits of gardens and two questions address the claim. Of the 1100 gardeners responding to the question of how many P-Patchers are typically in the garden with you, 87% report at least one other gardener (70% said five or fewer). To the question of how many non-gardeners visit, 17% of gardeners replied that at least one visitor was in the garden with them. Another 30% reported two to four visitors.

Why are P-Patchers gardening? Growing food is an important reason. “Growing my own food” was the first or second choice of 54% of gardeners, while “the ability to grow organic produce” was the first or second choice of 43% of gardeners. After that gardeners tended to divide their ranking fairly evenly among gardening for a sense of community, for solace, for recreation and for communing with nature. Many described other reasons for gardening. Gardening with children and teaching kids where food originates were important for many, as was learning from others, contributing to the food bank, exercise, and the P-Patch staff personal favorite: “being one with Sandy P.”

We skip 2009 for this triennial survey. Expect the next attempt to track the lives and gardening habits of P-Patchers in the 2010 application form.