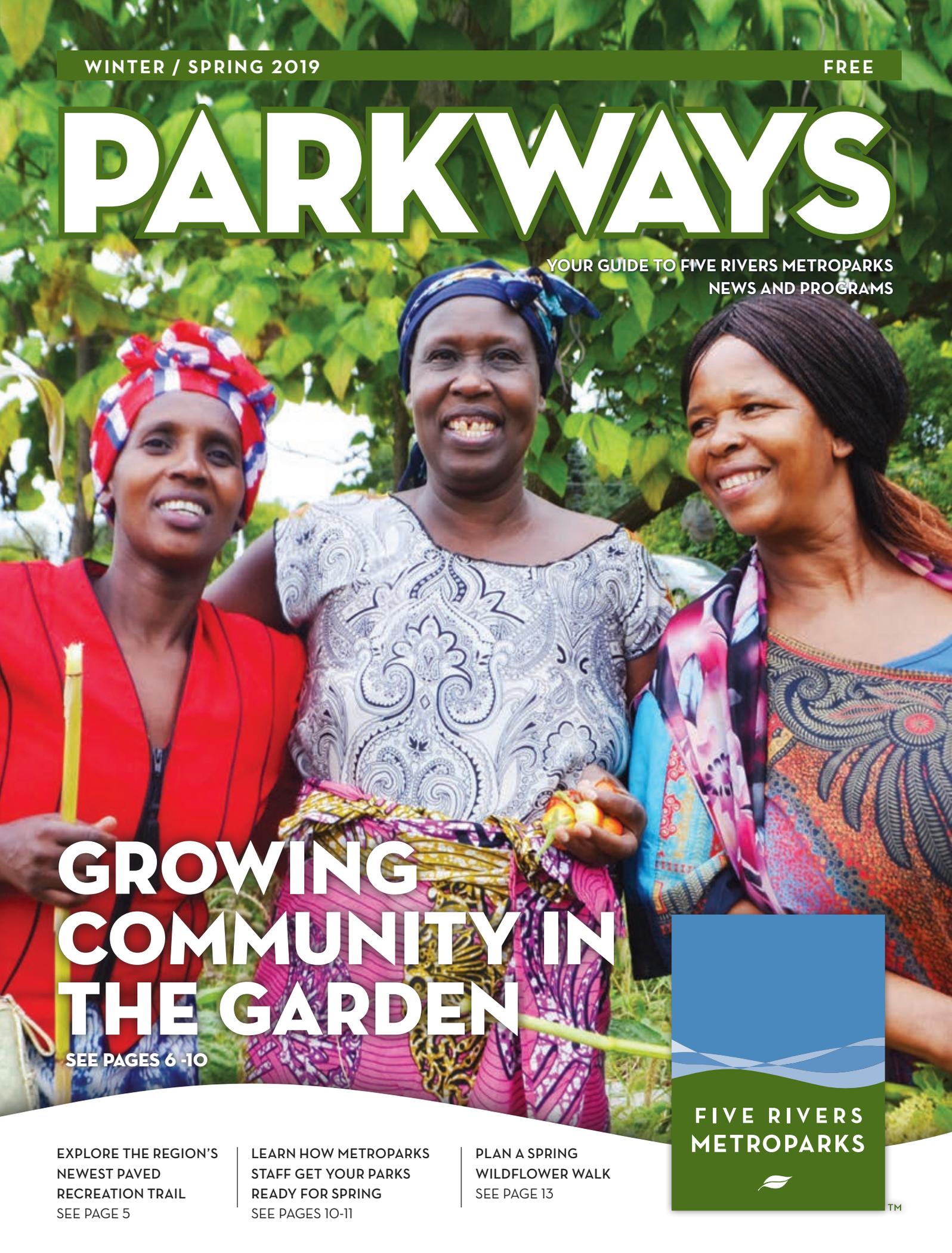


PARKWAYS

YOUR GUIDE TO FIVE RIVERS METROPARKS
NEWS AND PROGRAMS



GROWING COMMUNITY IN THE GARDEN

SEE PAGES 6 -10

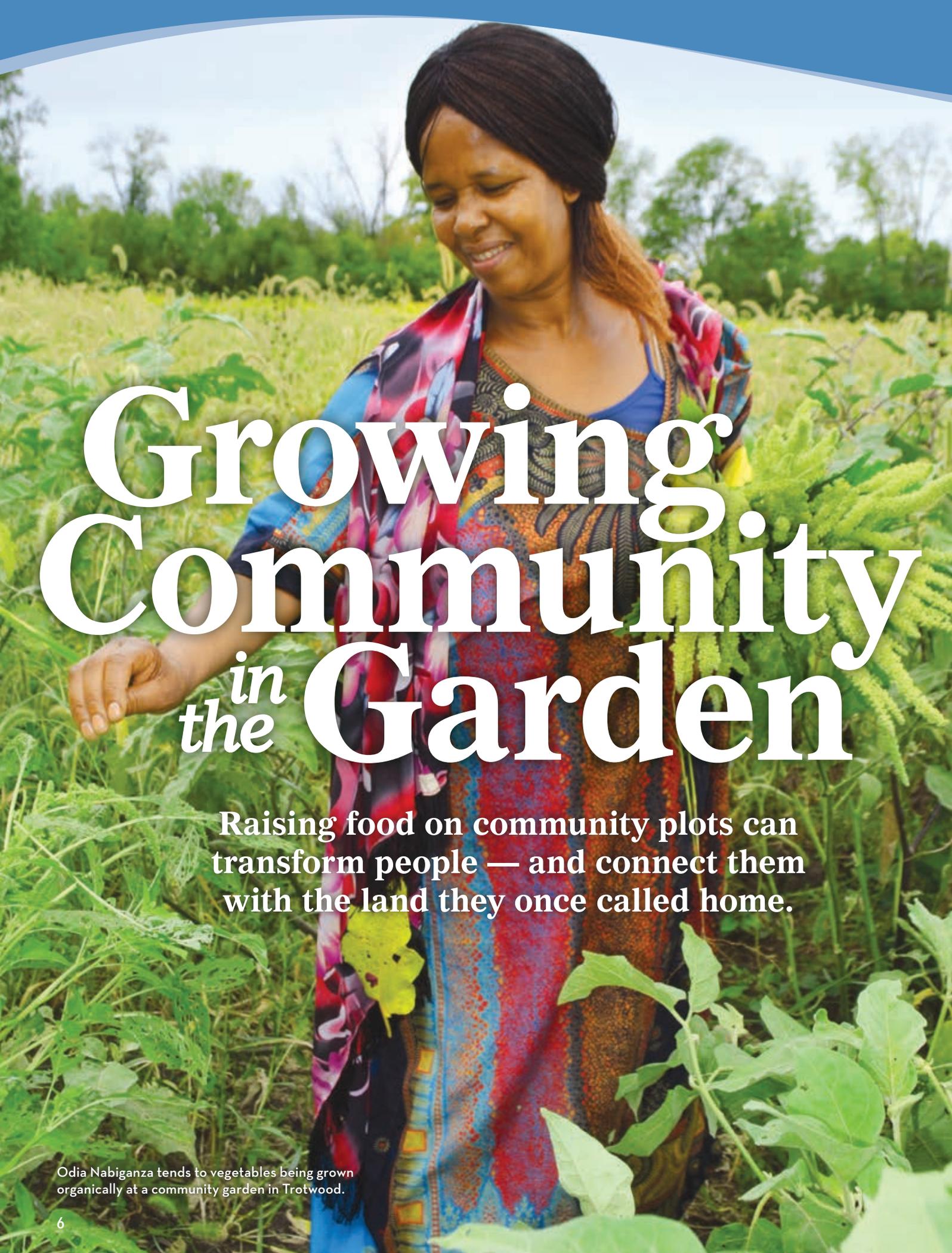
EXPLORE THE REGION'S
NEWEST PAVED
RECREATION TRAIL
SEE PAGE 5

LEARN HOW METROPARKS
STAFF GET YOUR PARKS
READY FOR SPRING
SEE PAGES 10-11

PLAN A SPRING
WILDFLOWER WALK
SEE PAGE 13

FIVE RIVERS
METROPARKS



A woman with dark hair, wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned dress, is smiling and looking down at a plant in a lush green community garden. The background is filled with various green plants and trees under a bright sky.

Growing Community *in the* Garden

Raising food on community plots can transform people — and connect them with the land they once called home.

Odia Nabiganza tends to vegetables being grown organically at a community garden in Trotwood.

After spending 15 years separated from his family while they lived in different refugee camps, **Rumenge Mbonigaba** is now working side-by-side with his parents at a community garden.

Located on six acres of land in Trotwood owned by the Sisters of the Precious Blood, it's one of nearly 100 community gardens located throughout Montgomery County that your Five Rivers MetroParks supports. In this case, MetroParks staff tilled the land and provided compost.

"The gardens we support get people outside and active," said MetroParks education coordinator Kaitlyn Lowry. "They also provide several small oases of habitat and biodiversity in the region – all while growing food."

Mbonigaba and his parents were born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They're among many Congolese people who fled war and violence in their home country, spending between 10 and 20 years in refugee camps before being resettled in Dayton. They're also among many new Daytonians who are finding peace while working a piece of land, who are connecting with people while growing veggies.

Some, such as African eggplant, aren't readily found in grocery stores. It's smaller and rounder than the type usually grown and often



Rumenge Mbonigaba (right) and Sister Mumbi Kigutha (left) of the Sisters of the Precious Blood lead a group of new Daytonians who are growing organic vegetables, including some from their homeland of the Congo.

mixed with tomatoes and onions when preparing African dishes.

"It will keep you strong and thin," said Dieudone Makombe, who worked with farmers when he lived in Africa. During the growing season, Makombe works in the Trotwood garden for a couple of hours before heading to his day job.

While working with newly resettled families, Sister Mumbi Kigutha recognized a need for access to fresh vegetables. She worked with the sisters, who agreed to let the group farm the land. Rumenge Mbonigaba then found the gardeners, who are using only organic methods.

"It was a big challenge to adapt to the diet here," said Sister Mumbi, who's from Kenya. "It's highly processed, and the African diet is primarily green, leafy vegetables. I had my own struggles with weight gain, and organic food is expensive."

Dieudone Makombe envisions the land housing a greenhouse and supporting full-time jobs for the new Daytonians.

"This brings the community together to do something," he said. "Once we get more supplies, materials and time, we can do even more. We can eventually feed our Congolese community and feed the Americans, too. We can all benefit from the organic food."

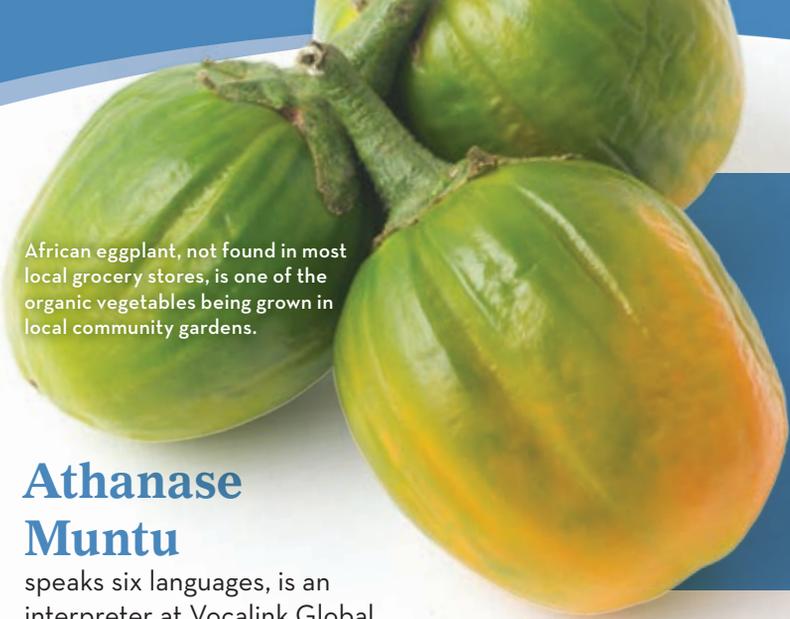
Yet the community garden in Trotwood is about more than food.

"The gardeners work side-by-side in the garden and have a communal place where they foster the spirit of taking care of one another that's so culturally important," Sister Mumbi said. "They have agency in the garden that's unique to their experience in Africa. They're in charge in the garden, and they have a sense of freedom and purpose they often don't feel in a predominately white society."

Indeed, Mbonigaba sees the garden as a place where people from different tribes, often separated or even at war in their home country, can learn to live and work in peace.

"There's a lot of political division in Congo, but when we're here in the garden, we focus on doing something together," he said. "This builds social connections that go beyond the boundaries that separated us back in Congo."

"We will not be held back by our past," added Mbonigaba, who thinks about one day returning to his homeland and applying American farming practices to fight against hunger – and anger. "We all saw tragedy, but we are safe now and can think beyond where we came from."



African eggplant, not found in most local grocery stores, is one of the organic vegetables being grown in local community gardens.

Athanase Muntu

speaks six languages, is an interpreter at Vocalink Global Language Services and earned a master of public administration degree from Wright State University since being resettled in the Dayton area in 2012 from Zimbabwe. But like the gardeners in Trotwood, he missed African eggplant.

That's just one of the veggies he and his family of seven have grown in a garden in Dayton.

"Like other immigrants of African descent, my family finds relief and the sense of positive change in gardening," Muntu said. "Also, it allows us to produce fresh vegetables for our kitchen, something that enhances our self-esteem as we strive to provide for ourselves. Basically, our kids are growing in a totally new environment that may require parents to impact them with some African cultural values linked to labor-intensive activities and the sense of producing and accomplishment."

Muntu first farmed in the garden in summer 2017 as part of his work with local nonprofit Cross Over Community Development, which used it as a demonstration project to test the feasibility and profitability of urban garden farming. The Gospel Mission leases the land at no cost as part of a ministry to support new Daytonians' social and economic transformation. The city of Dayton provides water, and Five Rivers MetroParks tills the land and provides seeds and fertilizer as available. Together, these services have helped Muntu and his family grow a lot of their food.

"Apart from the production of preferred foodstuffs, we embarked on gardening as an opportunity to change the lifestyle," Muntu said. "The health benefits of gardening are among other objectives that pushed my family to garden farming. The routine of work and school schedules often has negative effects on our health. To alleviate health-risk factors like obesity, high blood pressure and physical inactivity, gardening allows changes for better health."

Help These Gardens Grow

Want to contribute to Five Rivers MetroParks' community gardening efforts? Are you interested in connecting with an existing garden or starting a community garden of your own?

Contact education coordinator Kaitlyn Lowry at 937-275-PARK (7275) or by email at kaitlyn.lowry@metroparks.org.

Kaukab Husain,

who founded the Muslim Sisterhood of Dayton and works closely with its youth group, also has experienced firsthand the powerful effects of community gardening.

For the past three years, student members of Muslim Youth Outreach have helped new Daytonians from Africa to garden a plot of land in Dayton. MetroParks also has tilled this plot and provided compost. The students help with planting, and the new Daytonians maintain the garden.

"It's a good experience for the students, too, because they're learning how people survive in the world, Husain said. "There's a lot of empathy in them now."

When the group first started helping in the garden, they needed a translator. That's not true anymore.

"We are like a family to them," Husain said of the gardeners, who were born in such countries as Tanzania. "They are so resilient and so proud. They have a lot of dignity. They didn't want anything from us – we have given it to them."

Kaitlyn Lowry agreed the benefits of gardening often go beyond the end result of fresh, local food.

"One of the ways people connect to nature and the outside world is through community gardening," she said. "Community gardening helps drive home the benefits of living a healthy, active lifestyle. When people are out in the garden, they start to notice native plants and creatures, and they start to gain a greater appreciation for them. That exposure to the natural world, however small, leads people to care more about environmental protection. It's a win-win for nature and for people."

Joanna Ching

has worked the land year round in the community garden plots at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark for 10 years and calls herself a “very adventurous gardener” who uses organic methods.

But when she started, Ching had never gardened before.

“I came in with no idea what I was doing, but I spent \$4 on seeds and read a lot,” she said. “I’m from Singapore, where we make the best use of all available space, so I grow long and tall.”

Ching started with one year-round plot and now has four as her hobby has grown. “People in my office call my garden my ‘Eden,’” she said.

Park technician Brandon Wilson said the best part of his job working with MetroParks’ community garden plots is getting to know gardeners such as Ching. He also helps with such tasks as tilling, flagging plots, providing gardeners wood chips to control weeds and manure to use as fertilizer, and maintaining the green spaces alongside plots. Wilson said he receives lots of questions from gardeners that education and horticulture staff help answer.

“I also tell people to ask their neighbors,” he said. “It’s a community garden, so it should include working together.”

People come from as far as Troy and Centerville to use the plots at Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark, where they grow everything from tomatoes to Jerusalem artichokes.

“This is a place you can come and reboot – and you get food out of it,” Wilson said of the community gardens at Wegerzyn, which are surrounded by a prairie and tree-covered ridges, quiet even in an urban center. “No one realizes this is back here.”

Joanna Ching agrees gardening is therapeutic.

“You get instant gratification from seeing things grow, and there’s very little risk,” she said. “During the growing season, you can get seeds from MetroParks, and people are always willing to help. People should just give gardening a try. Digging around in the dirt can be quite fun.”

Rent a Five Rivers MetroPark Community Garden Plot

Garden plots are available on an annual basis at Wegerzyn Gardens and Possum Creek MetroParks.

Find out more on page 23.



Growing the World Garden

Betty Hoevel, MetroParks education coordinator, will be adding an international flair to the Children’s Discovery Garden this spring when she plants a World Garden. During a free May 16 program, families can help start the garden and are invited to bring seeds from plants grown in other nations.

“We want to focus on the common things often grown, such as onions, peppers, tomatoes and potatoes,” Hoevel said. “The idea of being a community means not only people but also plants. All plants need pollinators. They all need good soil. Different cultures use the same plants in different ways. This will help people learn to appreciate gardening and the garden as a way to relate to other people.”

GROWING THE WORLD GARDEN

Thursday, May 16 • 6 to 7 PM

Wegerzyn Gardens MetroPark, Skeeter’s Shelter, 1301 E. Siebenthaler Ave.

Share seeds or plants to help MetroParks create a true community garden during this free program.