



The Role of Nutrition Gardens in Combating Malnutrition

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Abstract

Malnutrition is a critical challenge that continues to affect millions worldwide, especially women and children in rural and underserved communities. Nutrition gardens—small home or community plots that grow a variety of fruits, vegetables, and medicinal plants—offer an affordable, sustainable way to improve diets and health. This article explores how nutrition gardens help fight malnutrition by increasing access to fresh, nutrient-rich foods, encouraging dietary variety, and empowering families, especially women. Backed by research from India and other countries, it highlights the successes and challenges of nutrition gardens, and offers ideas for expanding their positive impact through education and supportive policies.

Keywords: Nutrition, Garden, Malnutrition, Food Security, Empowerment, Education, Agriculture

Introduction

Malnutrition affects many people worldwide, especially those in rural areas where access to nutritious food is scarce. It often leads to serious health problems like stunted growth in children, weakened immunity, and anemia. One of the main reasons for malnutrition is a lack of variety in diets and limited availability of nutrient-rich foods.

Nutrition gardens have emerged as a simple yet powerful solution to this problem. These are small plots—often right in the backyard or within the community—where families grow a diverse range of fruits and vegetables. This not only provides fresh food year-round but also teaches families about the importance of balanced nutrition. Nutrition gardens combine traditional farming knowledge with a focus on health, making them a practical way to improve diets and well-being.

How nutrition gardens help fight malnutrition

Boosting Dietary Diversity and Nutrient Intake

One of the biggest challenges in malnutrition is a lack of variety in what people eat. Nutrition gardens encourage families to grow multiple types of vegetables and fruits that provide essential vitamins and minerals. For example, leafy greens like spinach are rich in iron and folate, while fruits such as guava pack vitamin C, which helps the body absorb iron better.

Research shows that families with nutrition gardens tend to eat more vegetables and enjoy more balanced diets. In a study in rural India, nutrition gardens increased daily vegetable consumption by about 90 grams, significantly improving nutrient intake. This boost is especially important for pregnant women, nursing mothers, and growing children who need extra nutrients for healthy development. (Suneetha & Durga Prasad, 2023).

Enhancing food Security at home

Nutrition gardens provide a steady supply of fresh produce throughout the year, helping families avoid food shortages during tough times. When people can grow their own food, they rely less on expensive market options, which can fluctuate in price and availability. This self-sufficiency helps reduce hunger and boosts resilience against economic or seasonal food crises. (Jaleel et al., 2025).

Empowering Women and Communities

Many nutrition gardens are managed by women, giving them more control over what their households eat and how resources are spent. This empowerment can lead to better food choices and improved family health. Some families also sell extra vegetables from their gardens, generating income that can improve livelihoods. Beyond individual homes, community gardening projects foster cooperation, knowledge sharing, and a collective commitment to better nutrition.

Learning through nutrition education

Nutrition gardens work best when combined with education. Teaching families about gardening techniques, balanced diets, and the importance of nutrition encourages healthier habits and keeps the gardens thriving. Education helps tackle food myths and cultural taboos, making it easier for communities to embrace new foods and recipes. (Jaleel et al., 2025).

Challenges that nutrition gardens face

Despite their clear benefits, nutrition gardens also encounter obstacles:

- **Limited Land and Water:** Many families don't have enough space or reliable water sources to grow a wide variety of crops, especially in dry regions.
- **Cost and Supply of Inputs:** Seeds, fertilizers, and pest control products aren't always affordable or easy to find for all families.
- **Lack of knowledge:** Without proper training in gardening and nutrition, it can be hard to maintain healthy, productive gardens.
- **Social and household barriers:** Poverty, workload, and traditional roles may limit some women's ability to care for gardens consistently.

Real impact from nutrition gardens

Several programs in India showcase how nutrition gardens can transform lives. One initiative by India's National Institute of Nutrition provided seeds, training, and support to families in Tamil Nadu and Odisha. Participants reported better nutrition knowledge, acceptance of diverse vegetables, and a desire to keep their gardens growing. Though some challenges like seed variety and time limitations existed, the community's enthusiasm was strong.

Another project in Andhra Pradesh showed that families with nutrition gardens ate more vegetables, earned extra income by selling surplus crops, and saw improved health among children with fewer cases of underweight. (Suneetha & Durga Prasad, 2023).

Recommendations for the future

- To fully harness the potential of nutrition gardens in fighting malnutrition, several steps can be taken:

- Encourage cooperation between agriculture, health, education, and social services to create supportive programs.
- Provide ongoing training and technical support to communities on nutrition-focused gardening.
- Make seeds, water, and gardening supplies more affordable and easier to access.
- Empower women specifically, giving them a leading role in garden management and nutrition decisions.
- Link nutrition gardens to schools and other public programs to reach more people.
- Monitor and evaluate gardening programs to continually improve effectiveness.

Conclusion

Nutrition gardens are a simple but powerful tool to help communities overcome malnutrition. By providing fresh, nutrient-rich foods right at home, improving knowledge about healthy eating, and fostering economic empowerment, these gardens make a real difference—especially for vulnerable women and children. While challenges like space and knowledge gaps remain, integrated approaches that combine gardening with education and supportive policies can expand their benefits far and wide. Investing in nutrition gardens is a vital step toward healthier, stronger communities and a future free from malnutrition.

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