

## Food Pantry Gardens: a Healing Ministry

Growing gardens to provide fresh produce to food pantries is a growing ministry in many congregations in Iowa.

Some call it a healing ministry. It's a way to heal the body by improving access to fresh produce for low-income families. It heals the soul by renewing our spiritual connection with God in creation. And it heals Earth by absorbing greenhouse gases that cause climate change. It's a win-win-win!



### Healing the Body

There are many food pantry gardens in the Des Moines area. The Faith and Grace Garden is located by [St. Timothy's Episcopal Church](#) at 1020 24th Street in West Des Moines. It covers one acre between 24th Street and 28th Street on Ashworth Road. In 2014 they donated 8,000 pounds of fresh, organic fruits and vegetables to feed hungry people in the Des Moines area.

Volunteers come from area churches, schools and some are refugees from different continents.



From Cinco de Mayo celebrations to the regular weekly Friday night potlucks for volunteers, to educational events for all ages, the Faith and Grace Garden provides an opportunity for connections and community building; between volunteers and those who eat the produce, students and mentors, and the spiritual connection between soil and soul.

The Agape Garden is a one-acre plot located by Faith Chapel of [Ankeny First United Methodist Church](#) at 7384 NW 16th Street in Ankeny.

In 2014 they donated two tons of vegetables to pantries including Des Moines Area Religious Council.

The Agape Garden also grows flowers, which are cut each Saturday morning and delivered to the two nursing homes in Ankeny.

## Healing the Soul

Garden volunteers say working in the garden is a spiritual refuge. “This is my time between me and God,” says Art Decker, co-chair of the Agape Garden. “I can sit out here and reflect as much as I want to.”

Tim Goldman, co-chair of the Faith and Grace Garden likes to tell the story of Abraham’s hospitality as a way of making the connection between caring for the soil, for the people who volunteer, and those who eat the produce. “We take care of the physical needs and trust in the work of the Holy Spirit.”



## Healing Earth

Not only are these gardens producing tons of needed vegetables, they are also avoiding green house gas emissions associated with lawn mowing and applications of lawn chemicals. When mowing, watering and applications of lawn chemicals are all taken into account, conventionally cared for lawns actually produce more greenhouse gas emissions than they soak up.



The hummus created in the soil in organic gardens as plants die and get turned under absorbs carbon from the atmosphere, reversing the process of global warming. Plus the produce travels far fewer miles than most to get to the table!

So gardening is a healing way to use the spacious green lawns around a congregational facility. Heal the body through feeding the

hungry, heal the soul through connections with Earth and God’s creation, and heal Earth by reversing global warming, all in one fun activity!

To learn more and see when to volunteer at Des Moines area food pantry gardens go to <http://www.growthefood.org/about-us/>

More links to gardening resources:

Eat Greater Des Moines <https://www.eatgreaterdesmoines.org/>

Community Garden Start Up Guide

<https://www.eatgreaterdesmoines.org/community-garden-start-up-guide>

List of 15 Faith based food pantry gardens and contact information

[https://www.eatgreaterdesmoines.org/locator?field\\_location\\_type\\_tid\[\]=2&field\\_location\\_type\\_tid\[\]=7&field\\_location\\_type\\_tid\[\]=8&circle\\_op=%3C&circle\[value\]=30&circle\[unit\]=miles&circle\[location\]=Des+Moines%2C+Iowa](https://www.eatgreaterdesmoines.org/locator?field_location_type_tid[]=2&field_location_type_tid[]=7&field_location_type_tid[]=8&circle_op=%3C&circle[value]=30&circle[unit]=miles&circle[location]=Des+Moines%2C+Iowa)