



GREEN FROM THE START

a History of Gardening in Greenbelt

Greenbelt has always been “green” and its history has long been intertwined with gardening. Named for the belt of green space that would surround it, the original town was built by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Resettlement Administration in 1937 in the midst of the Great Depression. Its construction not only put people to work who needed jobs, but also provided families of moderate income a chance to escape the overcrowded, unhealthy living conditions of nearby Washington, D.C.

Greenbelt was constructed as a model of modern town planning. Its planners incorporated many of the ideals of the “garden city” movement promoted at the turn of the 20th century. The town’s plan reveals efficient use of land and a careful blend of residential, commercial and green spaces. Plots of land for residents to grow their own food were included from the very beginning and many families used these spaces for gardening in lean economic times. During World War II these plots were used by residents as Victory Gardens. As soldiers returned from the war, and many women returned home from outside jobs, interests turned to all things domestic, including an emphasis on homemaking and vegetable and flower gardening. Gardening in the late 1940s and 1950s could be done for fun, not survival, and green lawns, gorgeous flowerbeds, and garden parties ruled the summers. Greenbelters’ interests in natural foods and organic gardening blossomed in the 1960s and 1970s and continue to grow, as do movements focused on eating seasonal, locally produced foods.

Today in Greenbelt, there are active community gardens, a thriving farmer’s market, and an interest in healthy and sustainable living. From the town’s beginnings to the present day, the community’s “green” focus is not a passing phase, but rather an ideal that was built into the city by its planners and that continues to be preserved and celebrated across the city today.
