

cultivating curiosity in the garden

13

gardens built at
libraries in NYC

62

gardens built at
schools in NYC

25

gardens with Little
Free Libraries

Across New York City, the integration of garden spaces with schools and libraries has emerged as a powerful tool in fostering literacy and lifelong learning. These green, community-centered environments provide more than just a break from the urban landscape—they serve as dynamic, hands-on learning spaces that support reading, writing, and critical thinking. By linking nature with educational programming, garden-based initiatives engage children and families in storytelling, environmental education, and culturally responsive literacy practices, particularly in underserved neighborhoods. In honor of National Literacy Month, we celebrate the ways in which our urban gardens foster curiosity, learning, and literacy.



Bringing Learning Outdoors with the DeKalb Library



Through our Gardens for the City program, NYRP has completed over 300 garden builds and/or renovations to date, 75 of which are adjacent to a school, library, or campus.

In May, NYRP renovated the **Brooklyn Public Library DeKalb branch garden**, thanks to the generous support of NYRP donor Jeffrey Moskin. NYRP pruned and cleaned up the garden and installed perennials, shrubs and more seating areas. The free public community space will serve as a venue for a variety of library programs and events and will now be more accessible and usable for the local community in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

"THE GARDEN IS MAGICAL...CHILDREN LEARN BEST WHEN THEY ARE AT PLAY AND AT EASE, AND THE GARDEN MAKES THAT POSSIBLE EFFORTLESSLY. IT'S THE PERFECT PLACE TO SNUGGLE UP WITH A GOOD BOOK, EXPLORE STORIES TOGETHER, OR WRITE FREELY."

- DANIELLE KING POWELL, FOUNDER OF THE BABY MEET UP

Nurturing the Next Generation

Every Monday morning, **Paradise on Earth Garden (Longwood, The Bronx)** hosts a baby meet up where children and caregivers gather to read, learn, and play in the garden. The Baby Meetup provides free, high-quality early childhood and family programming that promotes connection and education through art, story time, music, movement, and more.





Little Free Libraries in Our Gardens

For New Yorkers with less proximity to a library, volunteer-led Little Free Libraries can increase access to books. These charming, book-sharing boxes invite community members to “take a book, share a book,” fostering neighborhood connection. Since 2020, NYRP has worked with Little Free Libraries to install book boxes in 25 of the 51 gardens we own and operate.

Heather Butts, NYRP trustee and gardener **Westervelt Community Garden (St. George, Staten Island)** coordinated a citywide art contest called “Reading in Color” to decorate these new garden libraries.



“[THESE LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES IN OUR GARDENS] REPRESENT THE BEST WE HAVE TO OFFER, AND THEY ALSO REPRESENT IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY.”

- HEATHER BUTTS, NYRP BOARD MEMBER AND GARDENER AT WESTERVELT COMMUNITY GARDEN

Gardens are A Perfect Place to Read

Spending time in nature has been linked with improved attention spans, memory, and executive function – essential skills for learning and literacy. Literacy is increasingly recognized as a social justice issue, as disparities in literacy rates often mirror broader societal inequalities.

Longtime NYRP supporters Diane and Clyde Brownstone have championed our little free libraries AND community gardens. “[A garden] gives you a place to go – quiet, nice, beautiful. Where you can sit (and) you can rest your mind. Especially people that live in New York and don’t have a lot of places to go that are quiet,” emphasizes Diane.

“This is a wonderful testament to the work that libraries and organizations like NYRP can do together,” says Edward Maxwell, the Director of Neighborhood Services at Brooklyn Public Library, when reflecting on the recent garden build at DeKalb Library. “In a bustling New York City, having a garden where you can be tucked away is a beautiful thing.”

**“THERE IS NO FRIGATE LIKE A BOOK
TO TAKE US LANDS AWAY”**

- EMILY DICKINSON



We treasure our supporters! Thank you for making this work possible. If you are interested in sponsoring a garden renovation or build, please reach out to NYRP Chief Advancement Officer, Robyn Rehak, at rrehak@nyrp.org or 973.202.3466. To learn more, volunteer, or support NYRP’s work, please visit nyrp.org.