

# Pocket Parks

2024

## Overview

Pocket Parks are created through the planting and gardening of empty spaces in urban environments. These small, often dense, patches of vegetation provide a space for physical activity, mental and emotional recovery, and social gathering.

## Findings

### What is a Pocket Park?

- The National Recreation and Park Association defines a pocket park as “a small outdoor space, usually no more than ¼ acre in size... most often located in an urban area,” (National Recreation and Park Association).
- A pocket park generally has four key qualities (National Recreation and Park Association)
  - They are accessible. The ability to access the parks as public, common land emphasizes the communal element of the parks (Vanneste and Willemet, 2020).
  - They allow people to engage in activities. Encouraging physical involvement can increase the general health of users (Aleha et. al, 2023).
  - They are comfortable spaces with a good public image. If the space has a bad reputation, such as being a site with frequent crime, users will be less likely to engage with it (Aleha et. al, 2023).
  - They are sociable places. Pocket parks can fill in urban voids and increase social connection withing a community (Vanneste and Willemet, 2020).
- Pocket parks are also sometimes referred to as vest pocket parks or mini-parks.
- Pocket parks usually fill in blank spaces in the urban landscape. These can include empty lots, abandoned areas, and leftover spaces from infrastructure such as roads. Often referred to as “urban voids,” these spaces can serve to socially separate a community if left unresolved (Aleha et. al, 2023).

### What are the Benefits of a Pocket Park?

- Physical health
  - Pocket parks increase the popularity of walking as a means of transportation, increasing physical health and reducing polluting factors associated with vehicular transport (Ghamsary et. al, 2023).
  - Pocket parks can encourage increased physical activity in an otherwise sedentary population with potential to reduce the prevalence of some non-communicable diseases (Aleha et. al, 2023).
- Mental health
  - Pocket parks have been shown to have a measurable positive effect on stress, with exposure resulting in reduced heart rate and blood pressure (Xu et. al, 2024).

- Social connection
  - Pocket parks can increase social connectivity and have a positive impact on building community (Vanneste and Willemet, 2020).
  - Pocket parks can connect with the ecological heritage of a community (National Recreation and Park Association).
- Environmental health
  - Pocket parks can help promote local wildlife and fauna as well as reduce pollution and local temperatures (National Recreation and Park Association).

### **Making a Pocket Park**

- Before planting the park, you should contact your local government to address land use and ownership concerns. Without proper permissions, pocket parks can be dismantled after being established.
- The National Recreation and Park Association suggests the following steps in creating a pocket park:
  - Establish a group of volunteers and generate community support.
  - Choose a site and create a plan.
  - Use the plan to generate funding through charities, local fundraisers, and grant applications.
  - Schedule the first planting day and make plans and provisions for continued maintenance.
  - Plan community engagement events involving the space.
- Other things to consider
  - The color of the park has a disproportionately high impact on the measurable stress reducing effects of pocket parks. Parks that have a stronger prevalence of the color green in their vegetation were found to have a greater impact on stress reduction than parks with less green vegetation (Xu et. al, 2024).
  - Vegetative density has a substantial effect on the stress reducing effects of pocket parks. Parks that had a greater density of plants and canopy were found to have a greater impact on stress reduction than parks that had fewer or less dense vegetative coverage (Xu et. al, 2024).

### **Case Studies**

#### **The Ron Finley Project: Los Angeles, California**

- The Ron Finley project plants gardens in unused spaces throughout Los Angeles. Inspired by its founder's experiences with food deserts, the project focuses on creating sustainable ways to grow plants in urban settings (Weston, 2020).

#### **Pocket Parks: Brussels, Belgium**

- The Brussels pocket park project is working on transforming several unused lots in the city that were created by overlapping junctions of infrastructure. These empty spaces are being converted into community gardens (Vanneste and Willemet, 2020).

#### **Greenacre Park: New York, New York**

- Greenacre Park serves as a canopied public space within New York City. The park's canopy helps maintain the temperature throughout the year and dampen incoming sound from the city (Project for Public Spaces, 2002).

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