



NOMADIC ECOLOGIES



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DIASPORA GARDENERS

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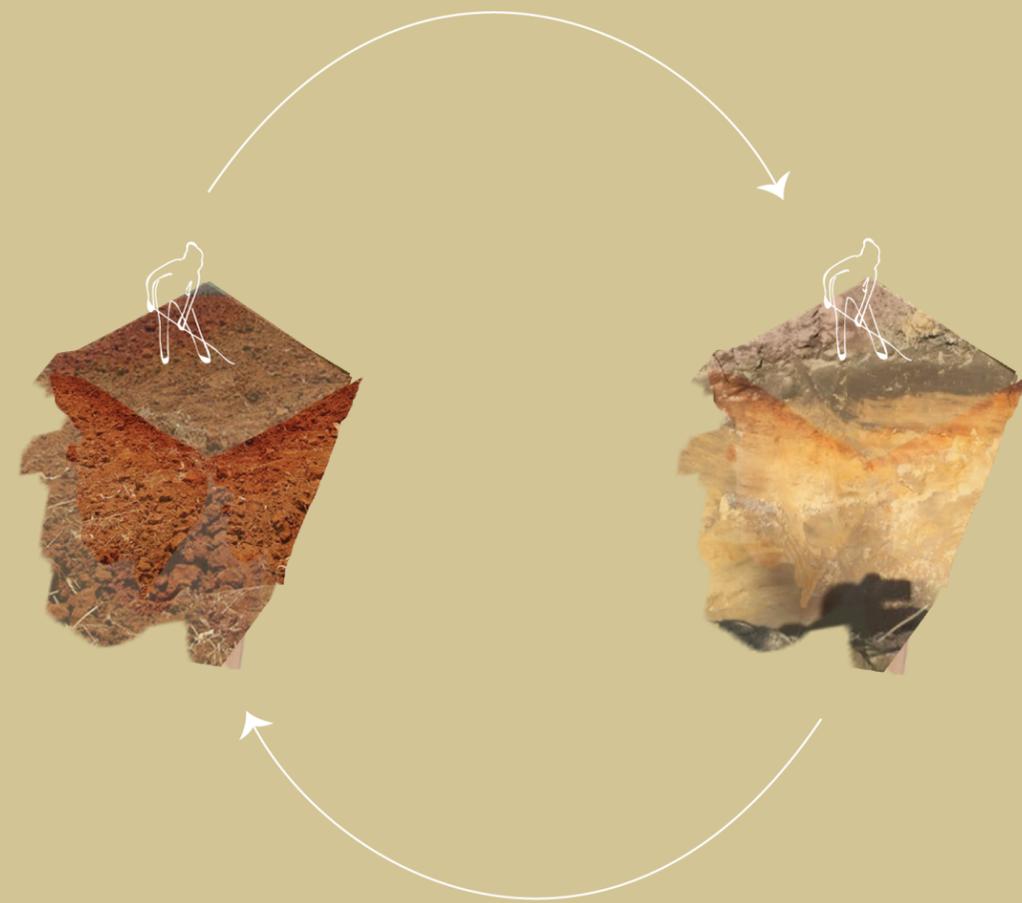
DESIGN SUGGESTIONS



OI

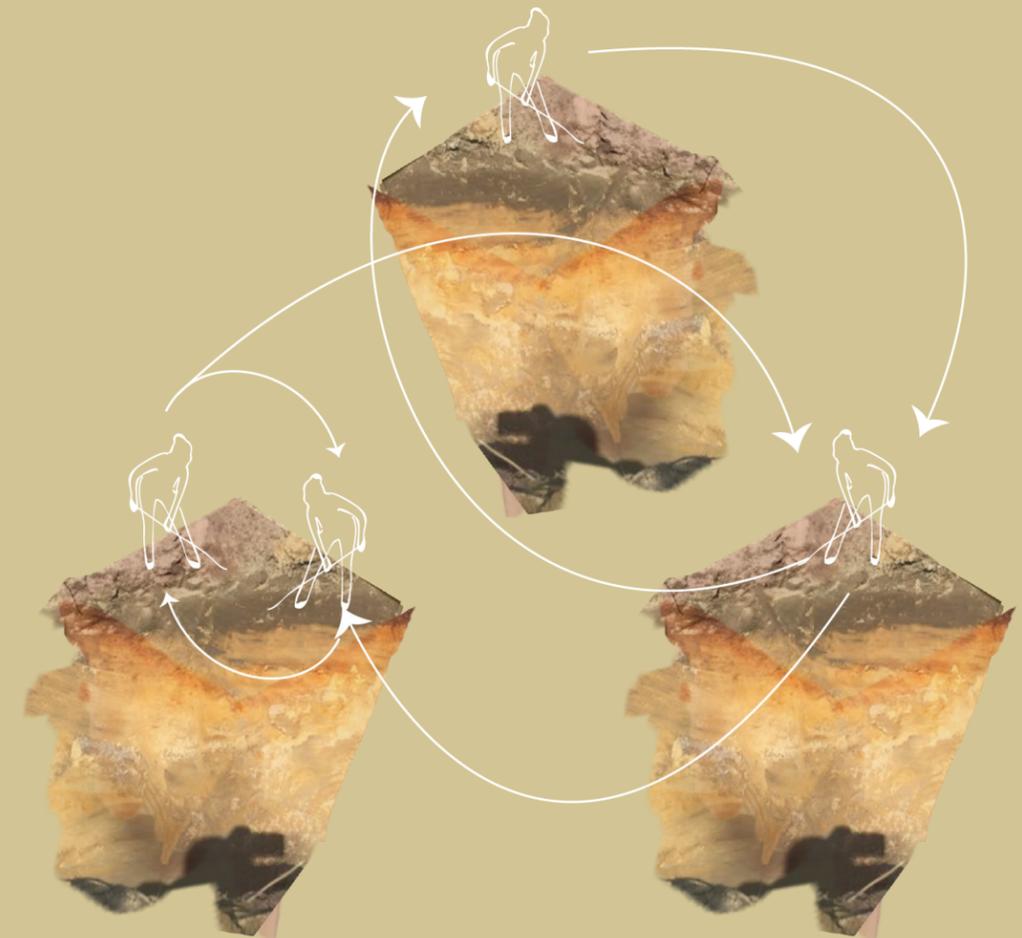
INTRODUCTION

Gardening as a way to relate to ancestral land



While diaspora gardening practices in Detroit may seem driven by a lack of access to traditional city resources like grocery stores, safety, and wealth - they are also driven by an embodied access to non-Western (non-extractive) relationships to land.

Gardening as a way to relate to each other



In a city and culture often marked by scarcity, these gardens create a complex web of abundance. I am curious how, as landscape architects, we can learn from the people who build both soil and belonging in this reciprocal way.

Nomadic Ecologies

ecology (n)

the scientific study of the relationships between living things and their environments

nomadic (adj)

relating to an individual who roams about

nomadic ecologies

a collection of relationships between living things and their environments embodied by diaspora humans.

Soil Loss

1/2

**loss of global topsoil in
the last 150 years**

This is an abbreviation of the complex social and ecological issues I will address in this book.

People Loss

19%

**of the world will be
unlivable by 2070 -
billions of people call this
place home**

My experiences learning and working in the gardening community in Detroit inspired this project. As landscape architects are called to re-think and re-understand our work, I propose centering diaspora gardeners in Detroit as active practitioners of climate adaptation strategies through their diverse relationships to soil.



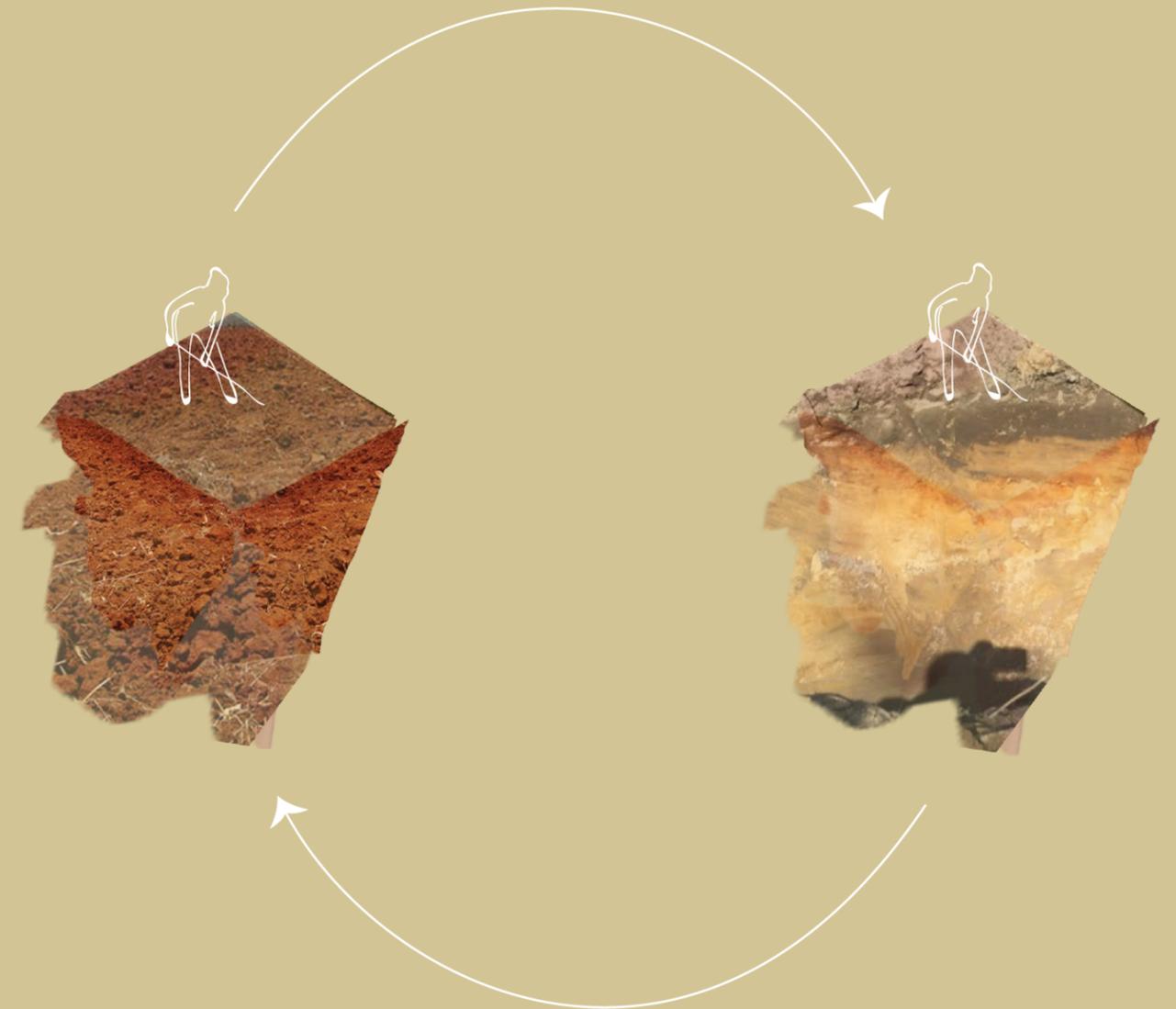
I believe centering diaspora gardeners in Detroit is the best way to address these issues for the following reasons:

WHY 1: Gardeners are inherently accountable to soil



Gardeners are incentivized to support and build healthy soils which in turn help the garden and their gardens thrive. Time spent maintaining the garden over several years allows gardeners to build intimacy with their soil and its needs and figure out how to support that which supports them.

WHY 2: Gardening relates to ancestral land



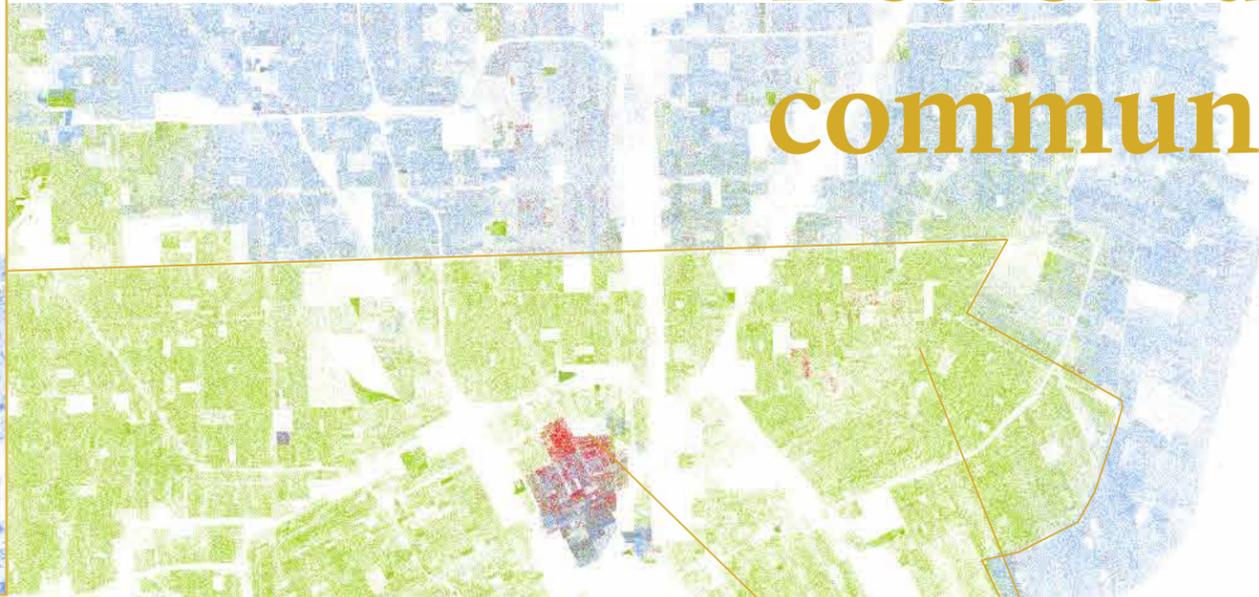
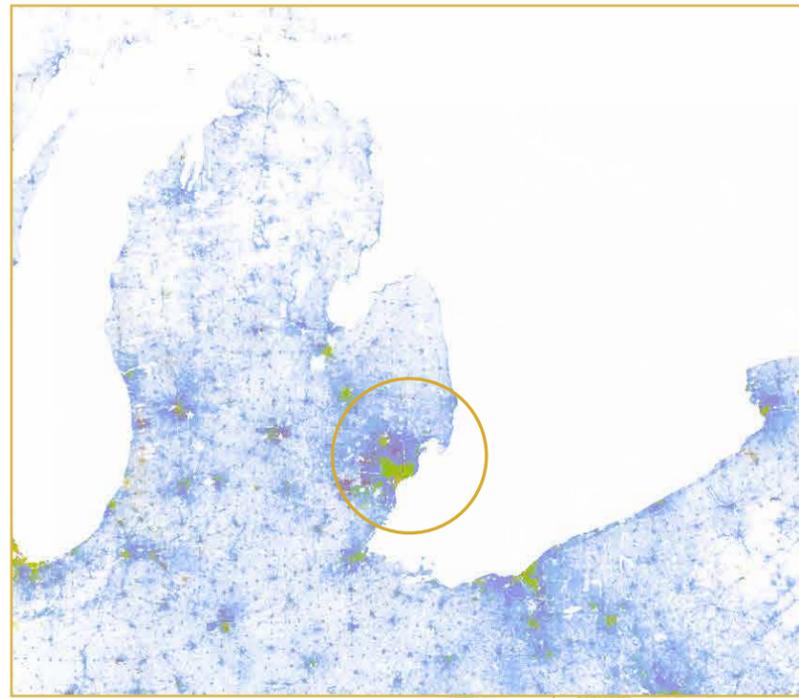
Diaspora gardeners draw on embodied knowledge from their ancestors to practice non-Western relationships. I am curious how this idea relates to our collective futures as climate changes alter landscapes permanently.



02

DETROIT

Detroit diaspora communities



81% Black

1.2% Asian

8.6% White

7.3% Latino

Jamaican	1,189
British	962
Nigerian	758
Irish	380
All other	556,524
Total	559,812

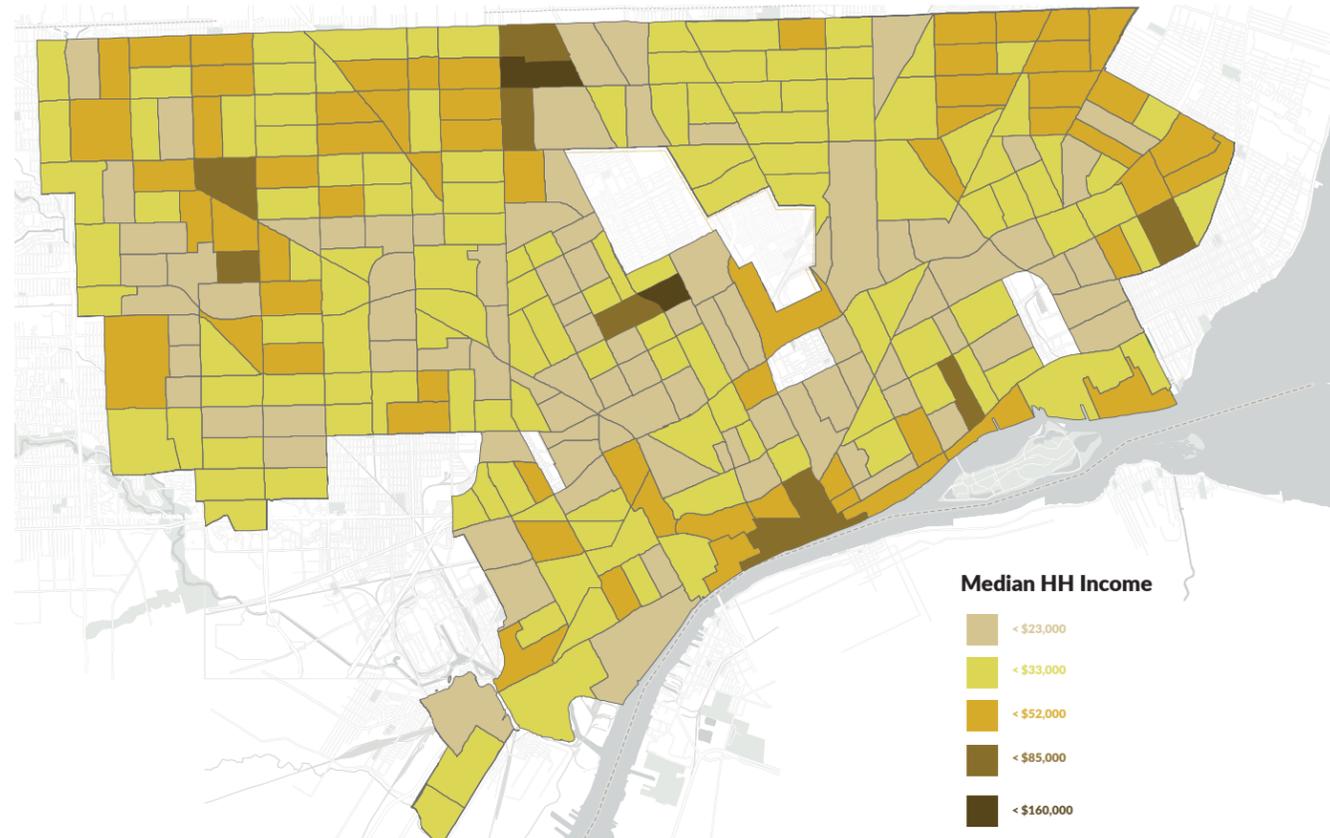
Bengali	2,756
Indian	1,521
Hmong	580
Chinese	447
Pakistani	380
All other	2,728
Total	8,412

Mexican	33,373
Puerto Rican	5,129
Guatemalan	1,161
Dominican	866
All other	11,462
Total	51,991

91% people of color

Detroit is a site of historical, racialized displacement. The city is majority people of color. I see these statistics to indicate a wealth of knowledge of different ways of doing things - and a group of people who also face complex engagement with not belonging in this place.

1/2 population below federal poverty line

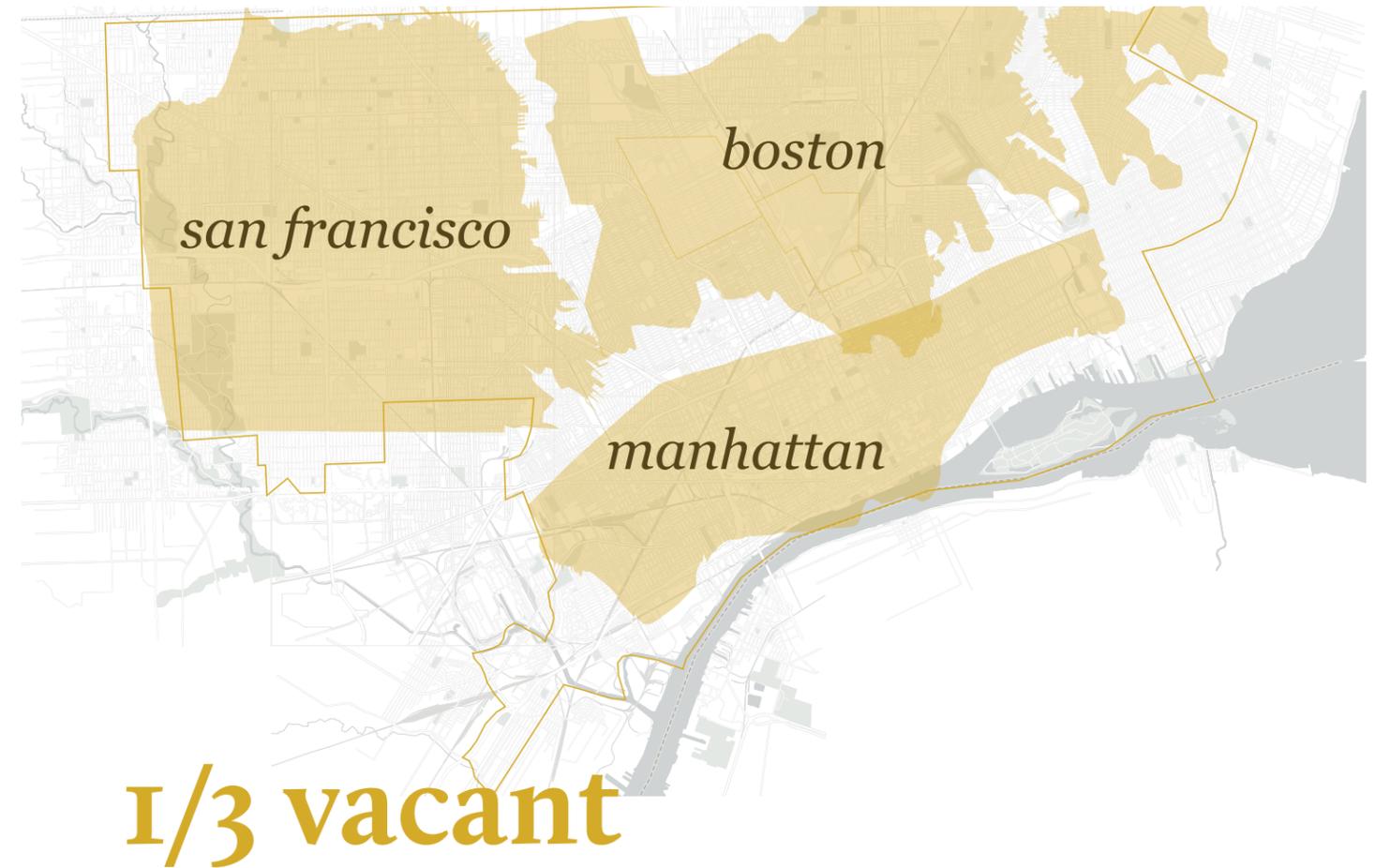


Detroit is relatively low income in that half of its residents live below the federal poverty line. This indicates the city's residents are, and will continue to be most impacted by changing climates. In other words, the stakes are high. '

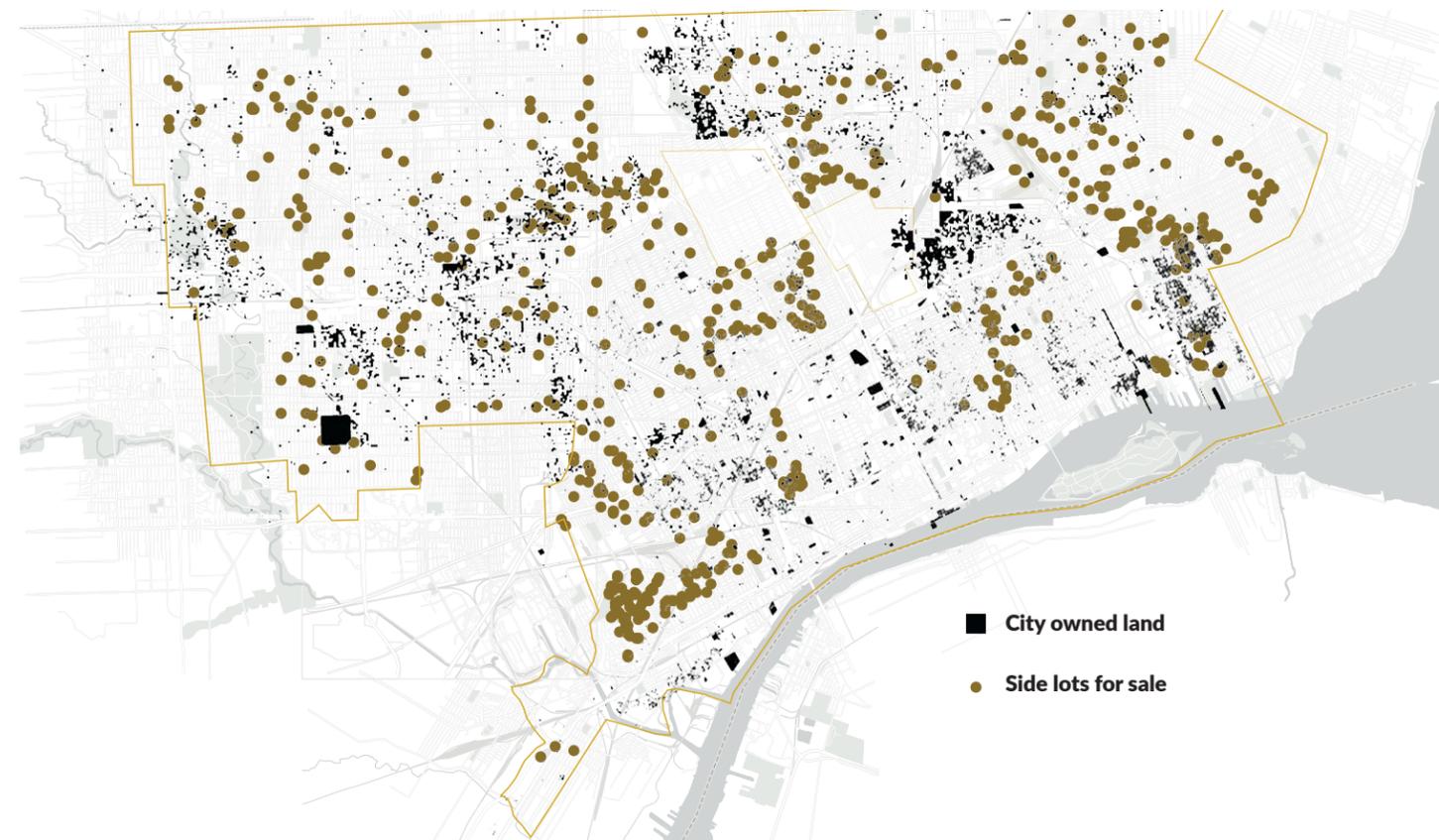
It is also a ginormous city, at 140 square miles it can fit San Francisco, Boston, and Manhattan comfortably inside its bounds.

And 1/3 of that land is vacant. This vacant land is a powerful resource for any city. But it can also entice outsiders, chomping at the bit to "fix" the city, to be inspired and make a name for themselves. As landscape architects, we are likely to be bursting with thoughts and ideas of what this land could be: the potential for the city. I'd like to offer a different way to approach these complex dynamics.

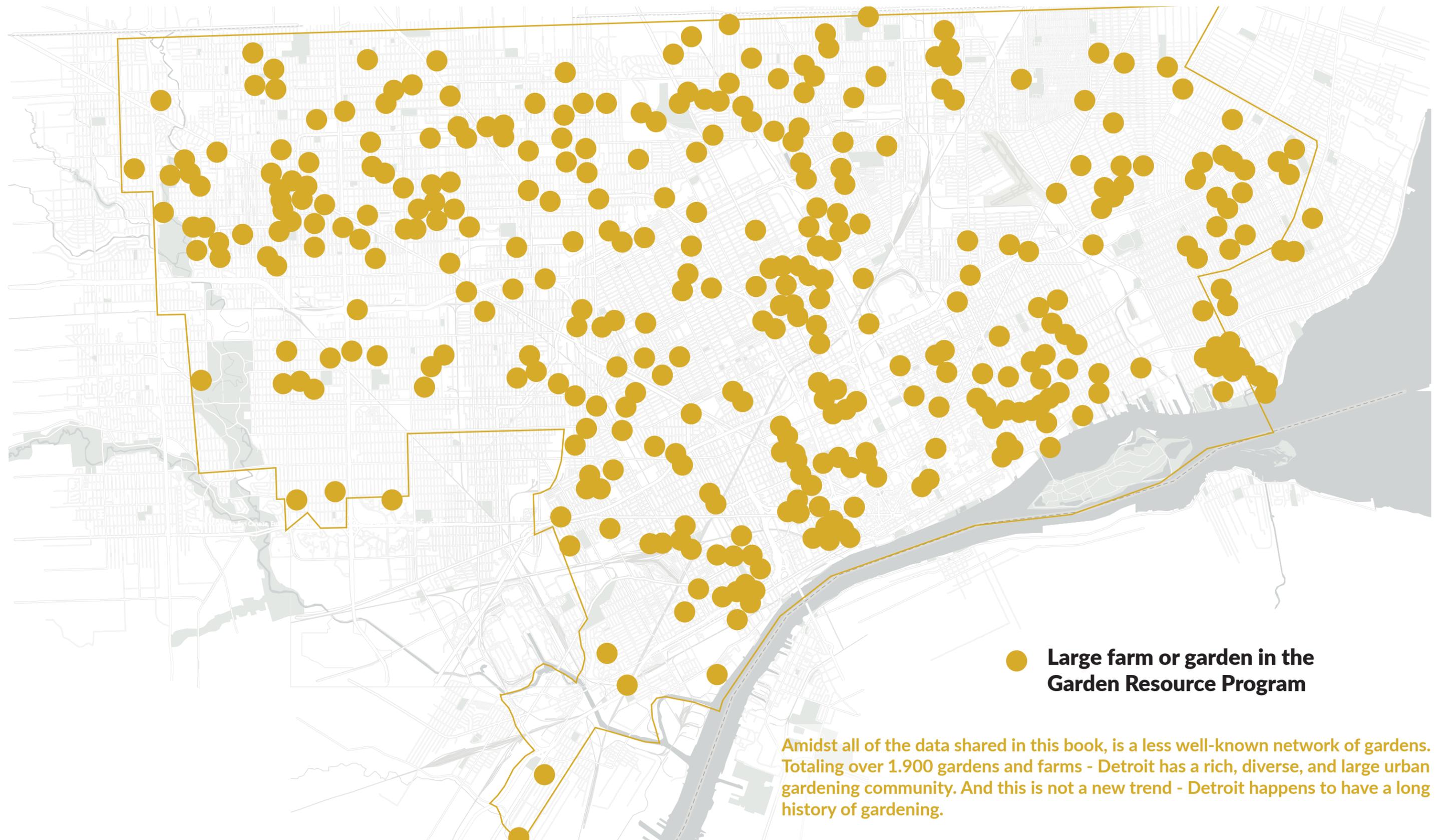
140 square miles



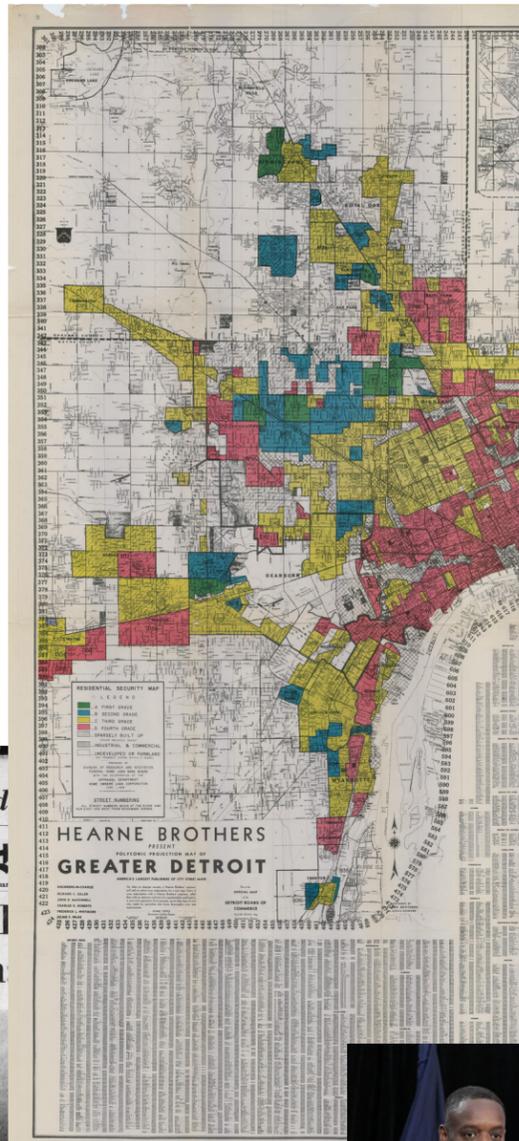
1/3 vacant



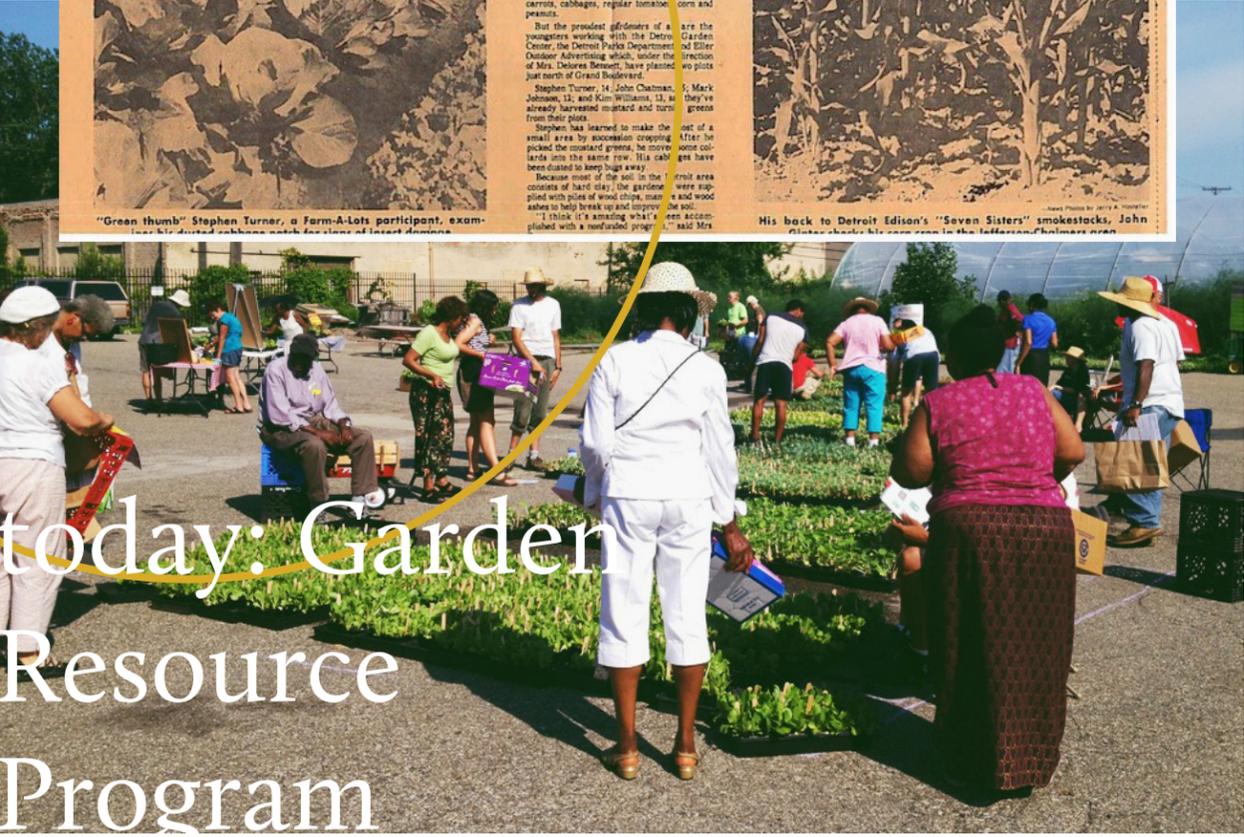
> 1,900 gardens and farms



Rich history of gardening in Detroit



THE DETROIT PLAN—MAYOR PINGREE, CAPTAIN GARDENER, AND OTHERS, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE POTATO PATCHES.



today: Garden Resource Program

Ribbon farms was the name given to the original land grants given by Antoine Cadillac. The lots were typically up to 200' wide and 3 miles in length. During the 1894 Depression, Mayor Pingree of Detroit launched a work relief measure known as his "potato patch plan" which supported the cultivation of vacant lots by recent immigrants.

In 1975, Mayor Coleman Young supported residents with access to seeds and resources to grow food on vacant land left behind by white flight. Today, the Garden Resource Program supports 1,900 gardens and farms with access to transplants, perennial fruit trees, classes, access to markets to sell produce, beekeeping mentorship, and access to a network of growers that support each other.



03

GARDENS

Ecology

Detroit gardens host a unique set of ecologies (again ecology = the scientific study of the relationships between living things and their environments).

Because of the nature of the city and its people, the materials and connections and ingenuity around life are unique, specific, and heterogeneous.





Politics

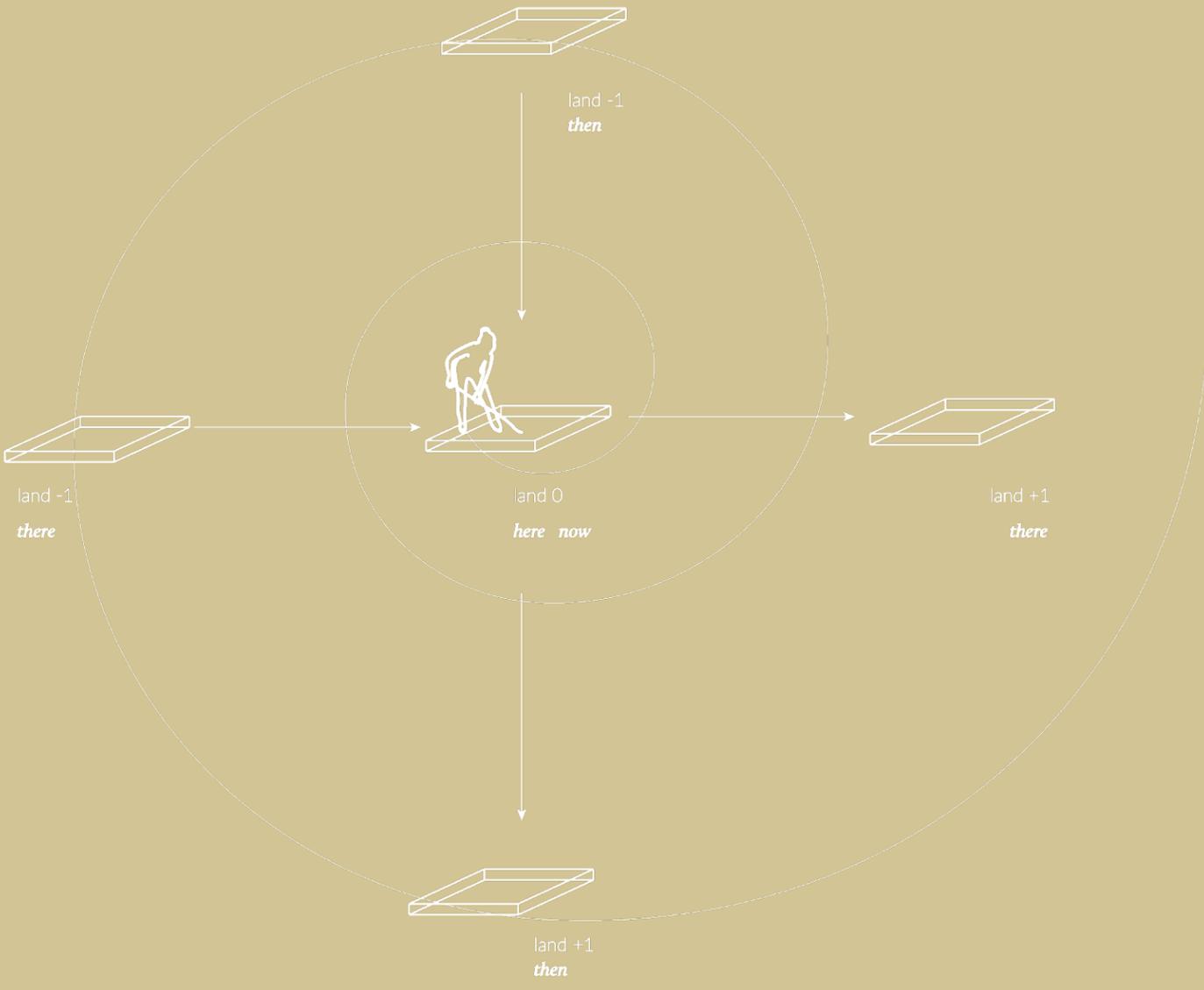
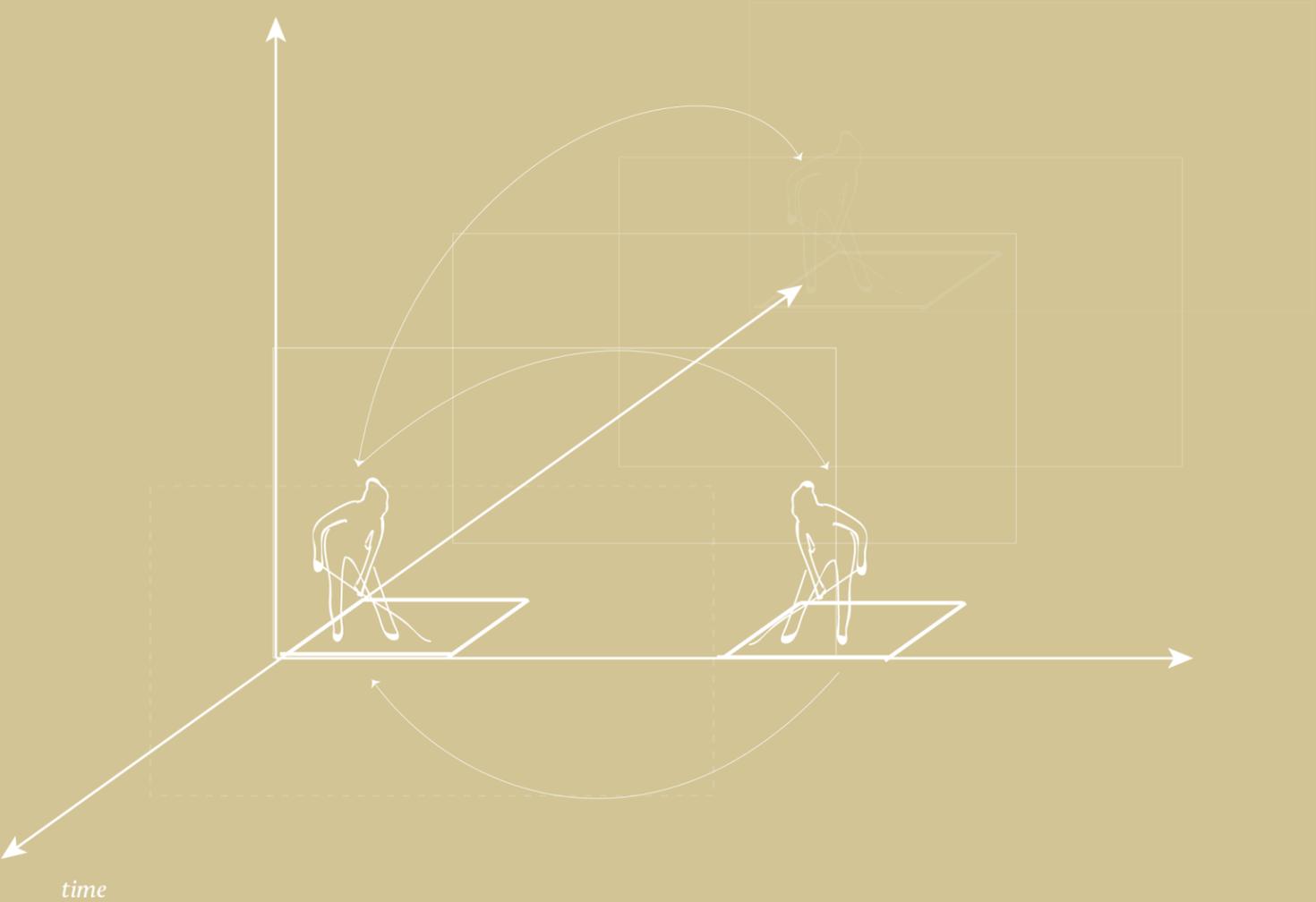
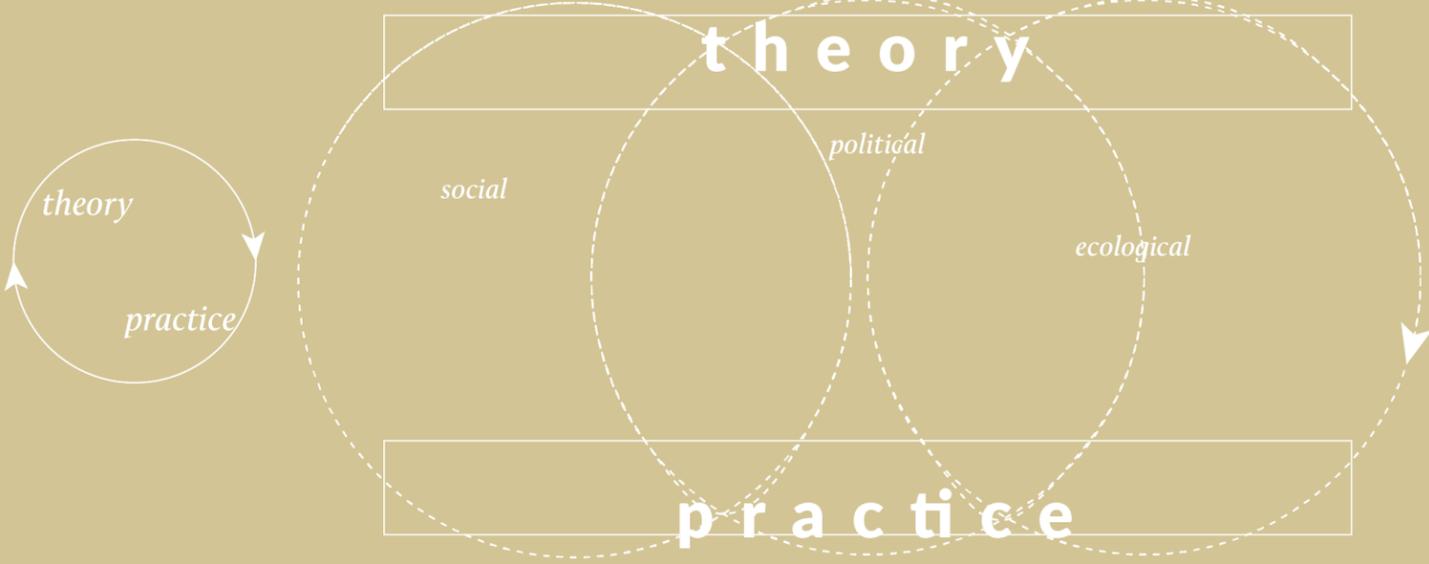
Detroit gardens are an apt series of landscapes to learn about the politicization of urban landscapes. Heterogeneous land use, heterogeneous aesthetics, animal husbandry laws, pride, and agency are highly contested through the medium of land in the city.



People

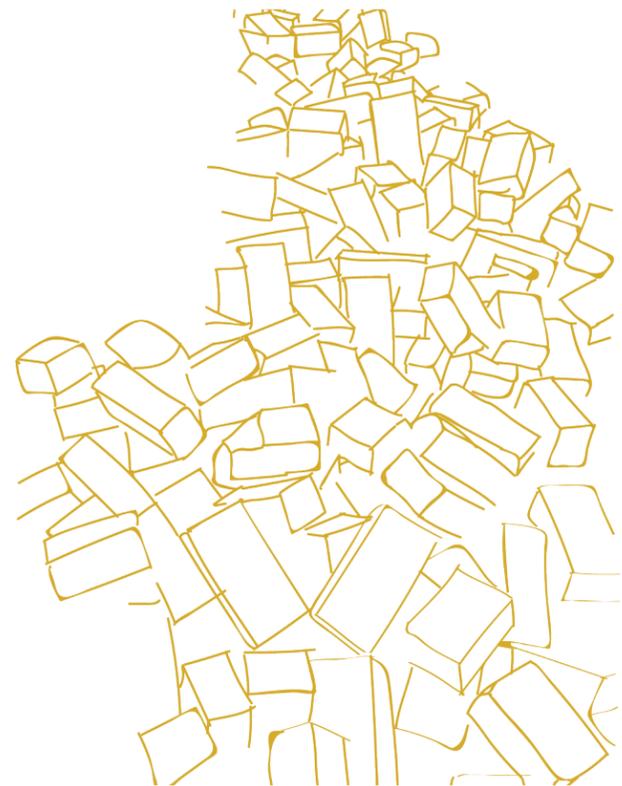
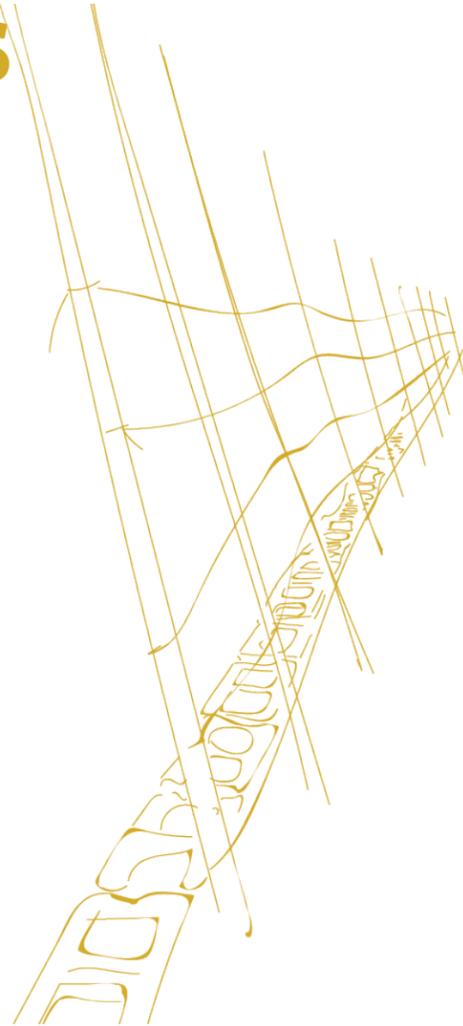
At the helm of maintaining these spaces, events, networks, moments, are the people. Gardeners in Detroit taught me how landscape can be a place for joy, celebration, pride, and time - together.

Garden practices inform and are informed by theory



I see gardens as the ultimate landscape that connects political, social, and ecological theory to practice. In gardens, political theories are reinforced by the gardening practice.

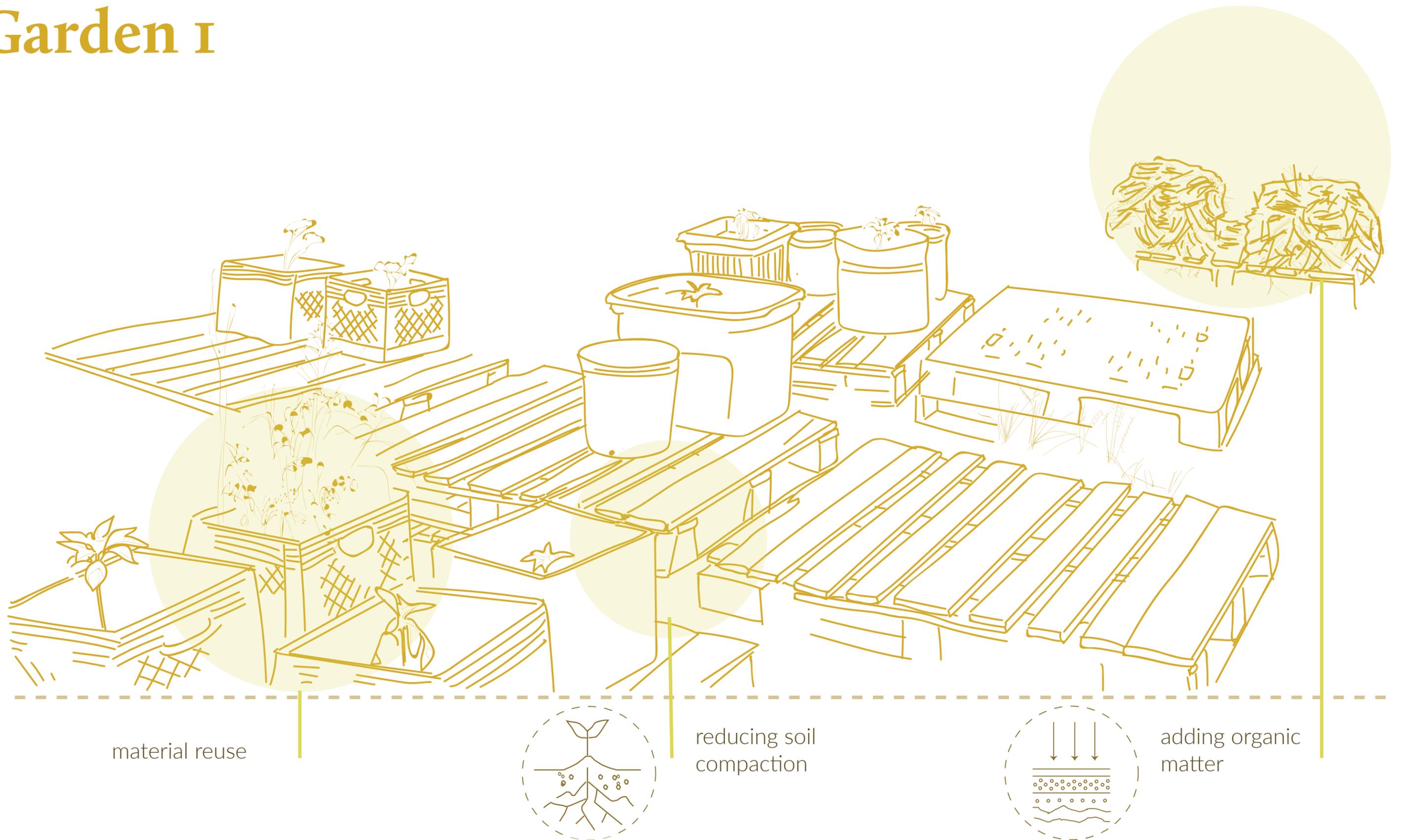
Detroit gardens



I wanted to explore the details of how these gardens practice ideas that we often address in landscape architecture like material reuse, creative use of the built environment, access to tangible relationships to nature, historical knowledge, etc.

I look most closely at how these gardens relate to soil.

Garden I



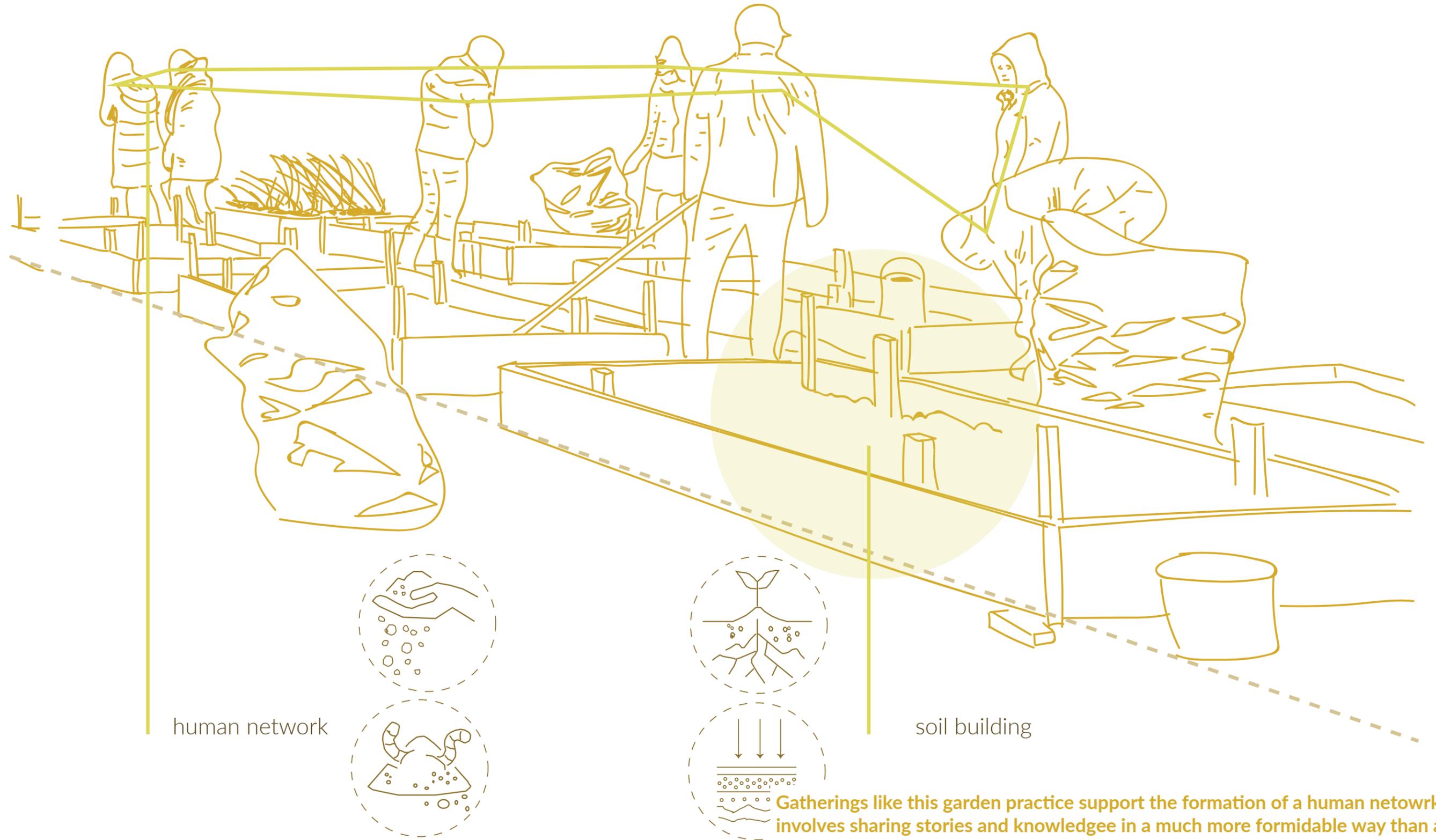
material reuse

reducing soil
compaction

adding organic
matter

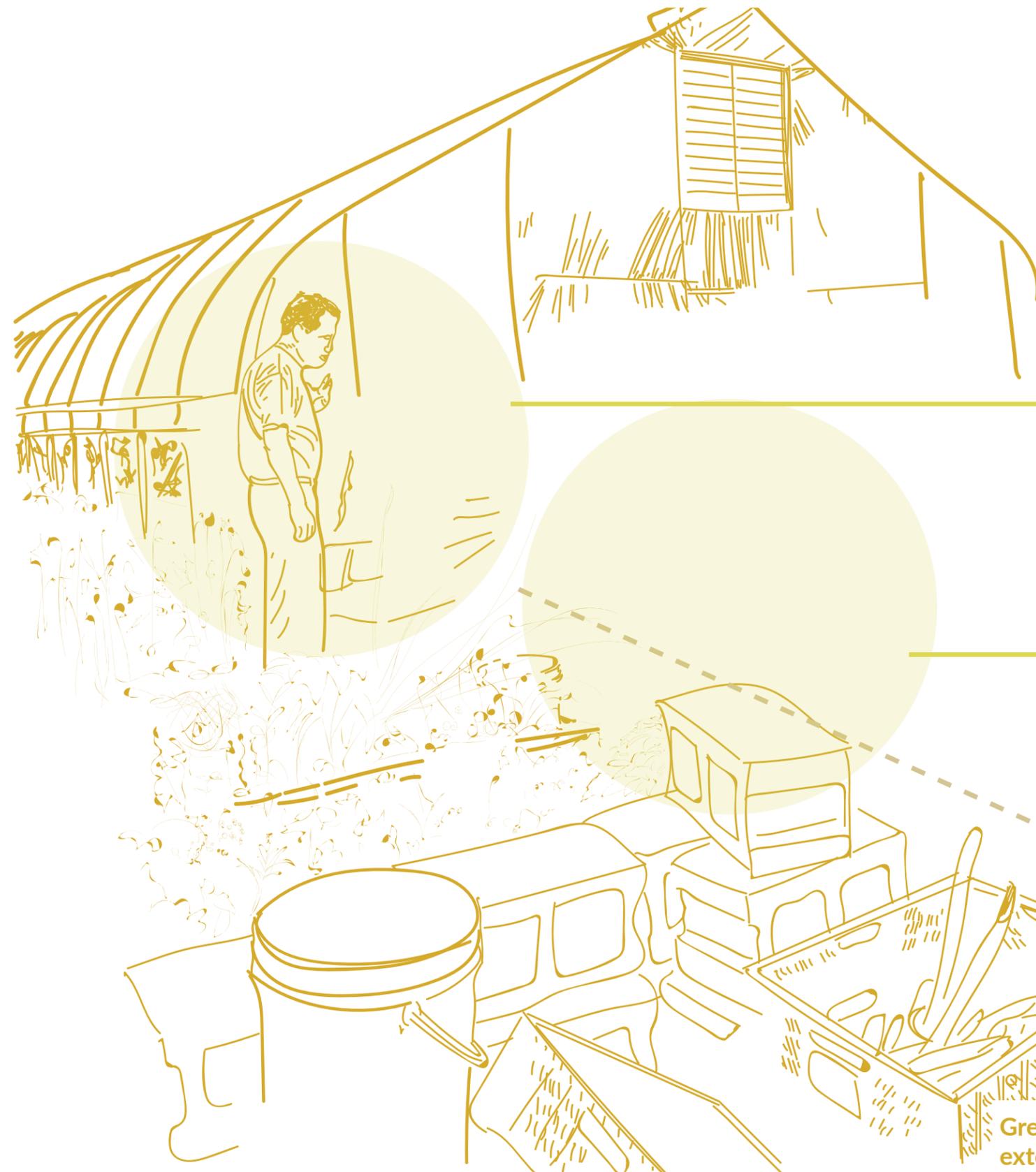
This garden practices using found materials. It reduces soil compaction by lifting containers up on pallets, which also create safe habitat for insects and other creatures. The use of leaves and hay indicate adding organic matter back into the garden's soil.

Garden 2



Gatherings like this garden practice support the formation of a human network that involves sharing stories and knowledge in a much more formidable way than a classroom setting. In addition, the use of raised beds allows for legible, accessible gardens that also build uncompacted soil over time.

Garden 3



longer season for
soil engagement

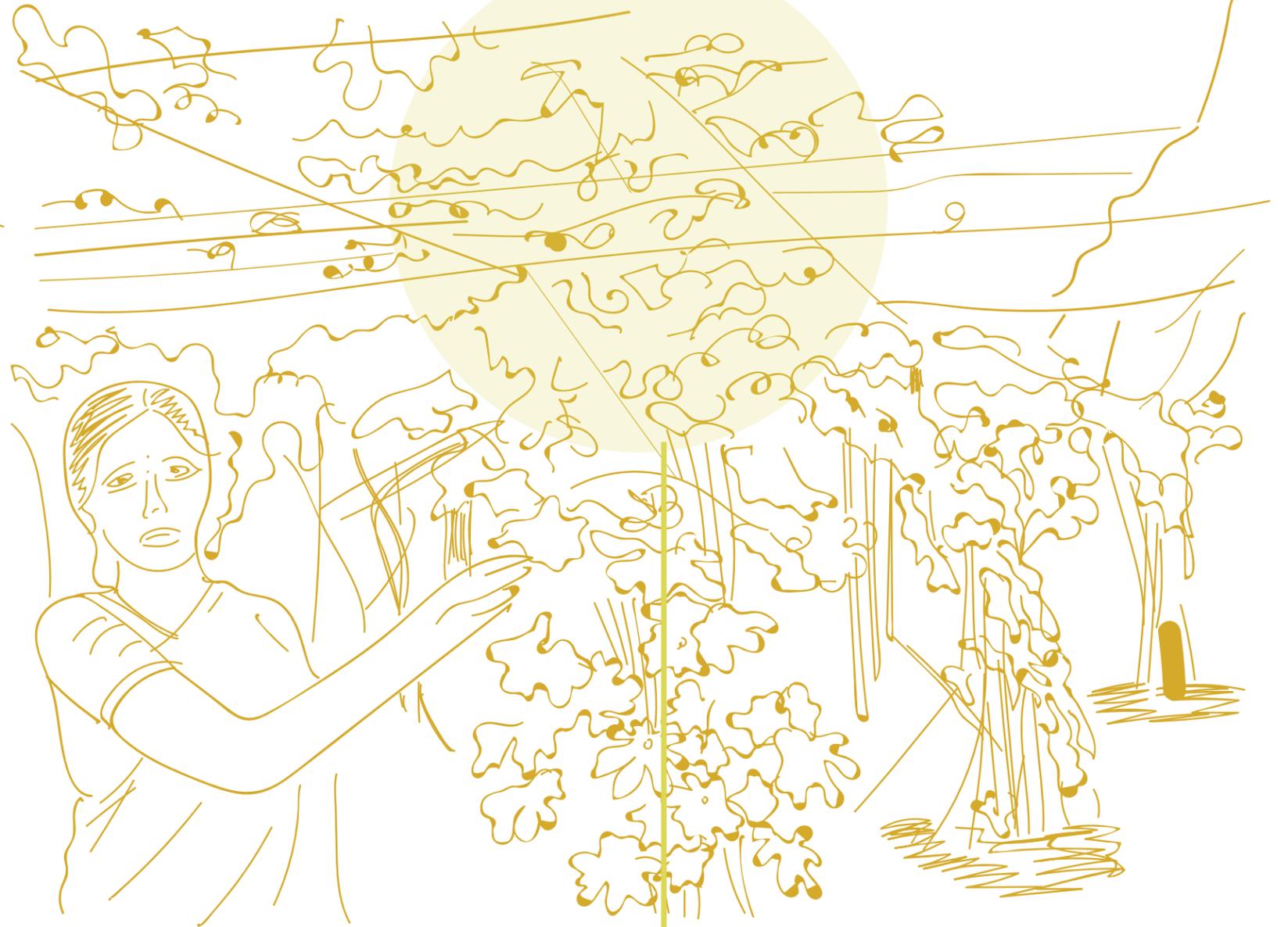


warm space for
diverse soil biota



Greenhouses allow gardeners to start growing early and creates warm space for extended soil biota activity.

Garden 4



creative use of the built environment



creating microclimates & reducing soil compaction

connection to ancestral practices

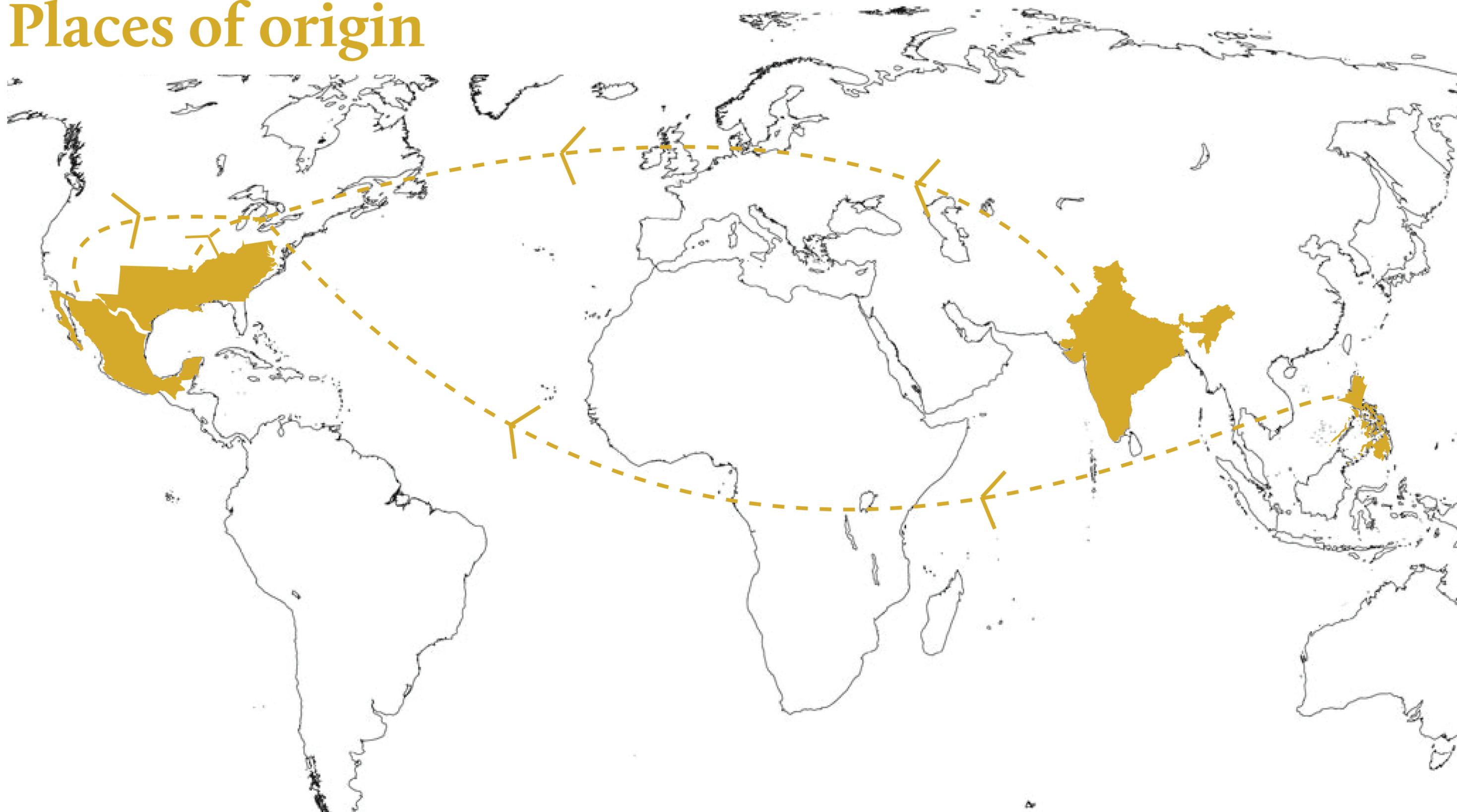
Squash and gourds are grown on trellises and roofs in this garden practice in Banglatown in Detroit, because the plants are sun-loving and they keep the house and garden shaded and cool in the summer. This creation of microclimates is a key adaptation technique that also supports ancestral connection.



04

DIASPORA GARDENERS

Places of origin



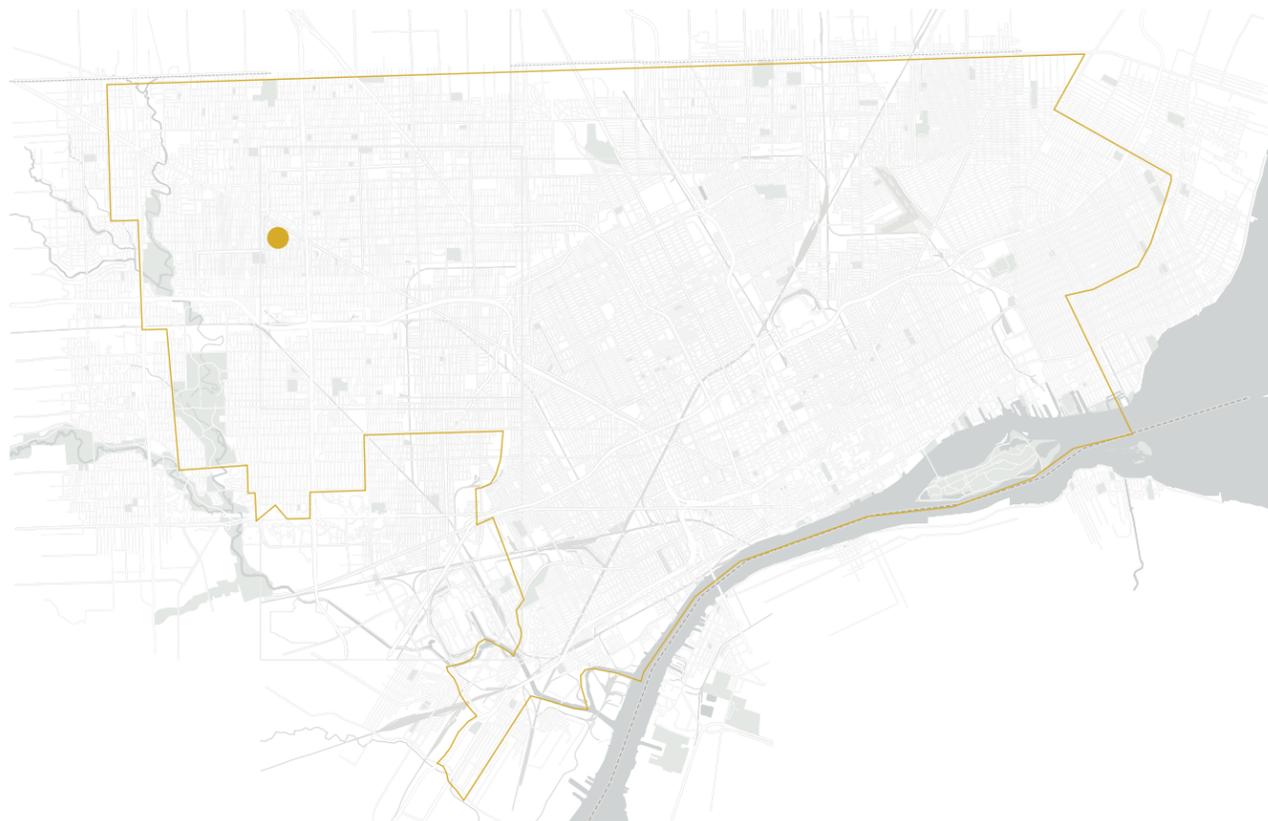
I interviewed four diaspora gardeners to better understand this work of caring for soil and each other on land in Detroit. The people I interviewed are ancestrally from these places including Mexico, the American South, India, and the Philippines.

Naim

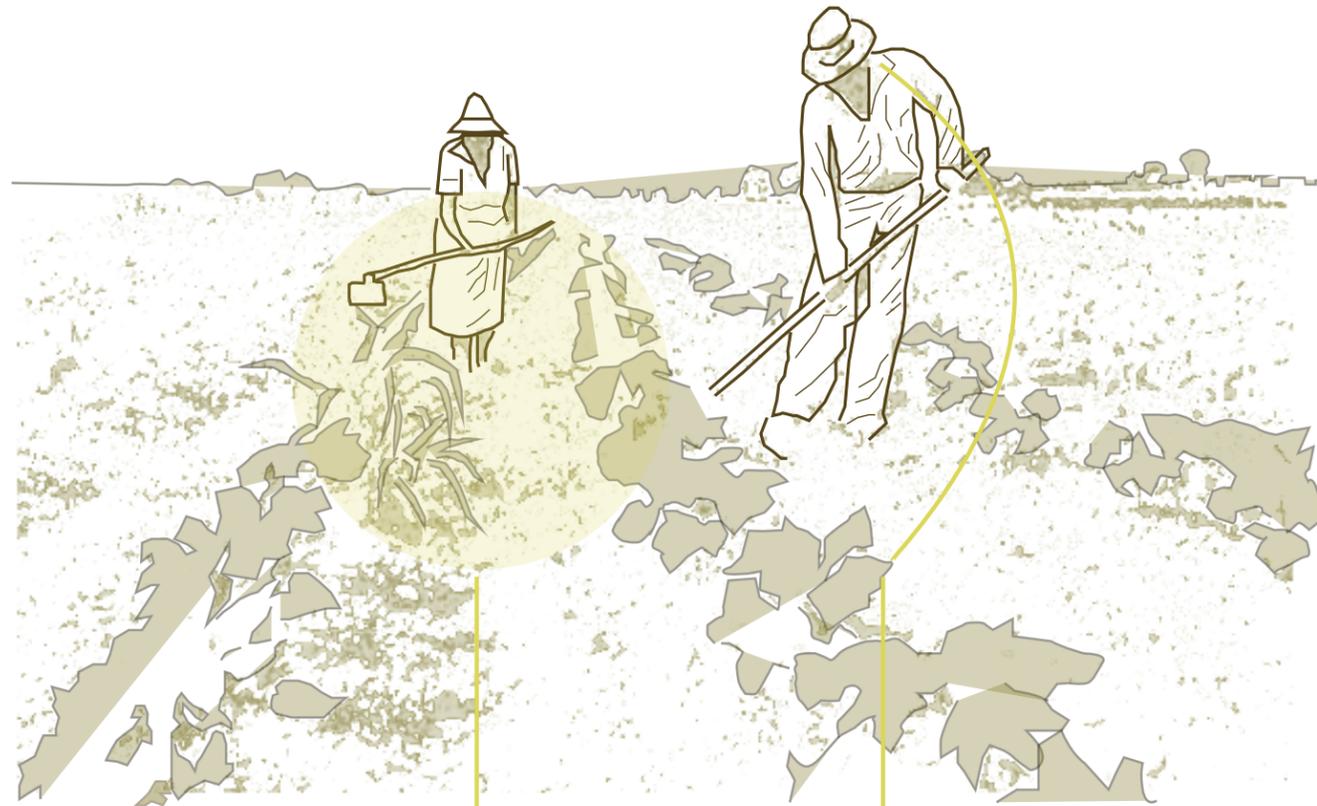


EOS

OK, I'm going to introduce myself. OK, great. Good afternoon. My name is Naim Edwards. I work for Michigan State University and I direct the Detroit Partnership for Food, Learning, and Innovation, which is an urban agriculture research site in Detroit. I'm also Catholic and a husband, son, brother, cousin, nephew, grandson, friend, stranger. A colleague. Person.



Naim- ancestors



extractive farming



traumatic relationship with soil

“They had to grow crops against their will and I can grow crops as a part of my will”

Naim’s ancestors were forced into a traumatic relationship to soil and land

Naim - grandmother



sharing intergenerational knowledge

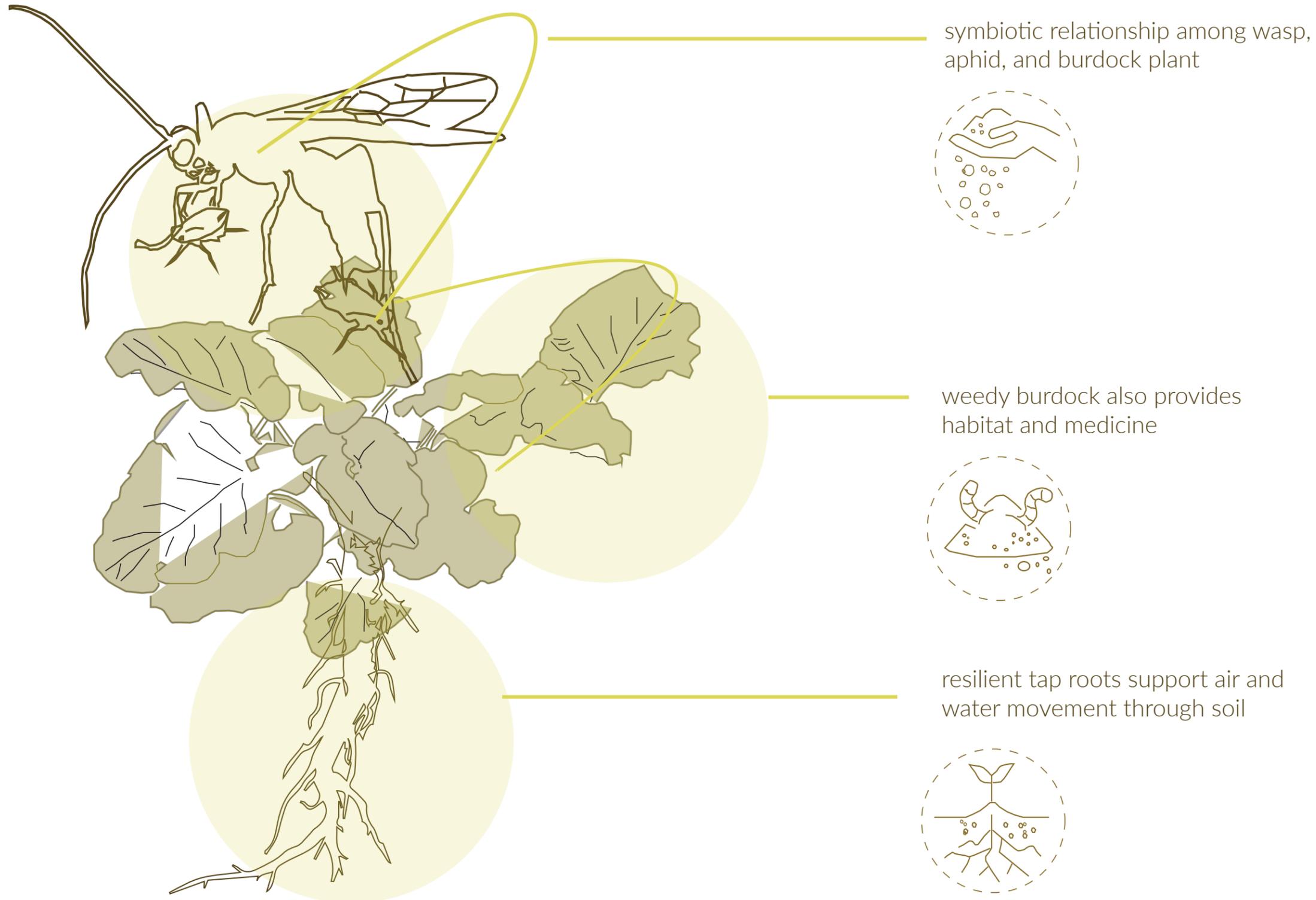


rebuilding intimacy with land

“I used to help my maternal grandmother transplant or repot ornamental plants that she had when I was single digits, maybe six, seven, eight, nine.”

As a child, Naim gains access to a tender rebuilding of that relationship to soil through intergenerational connection.

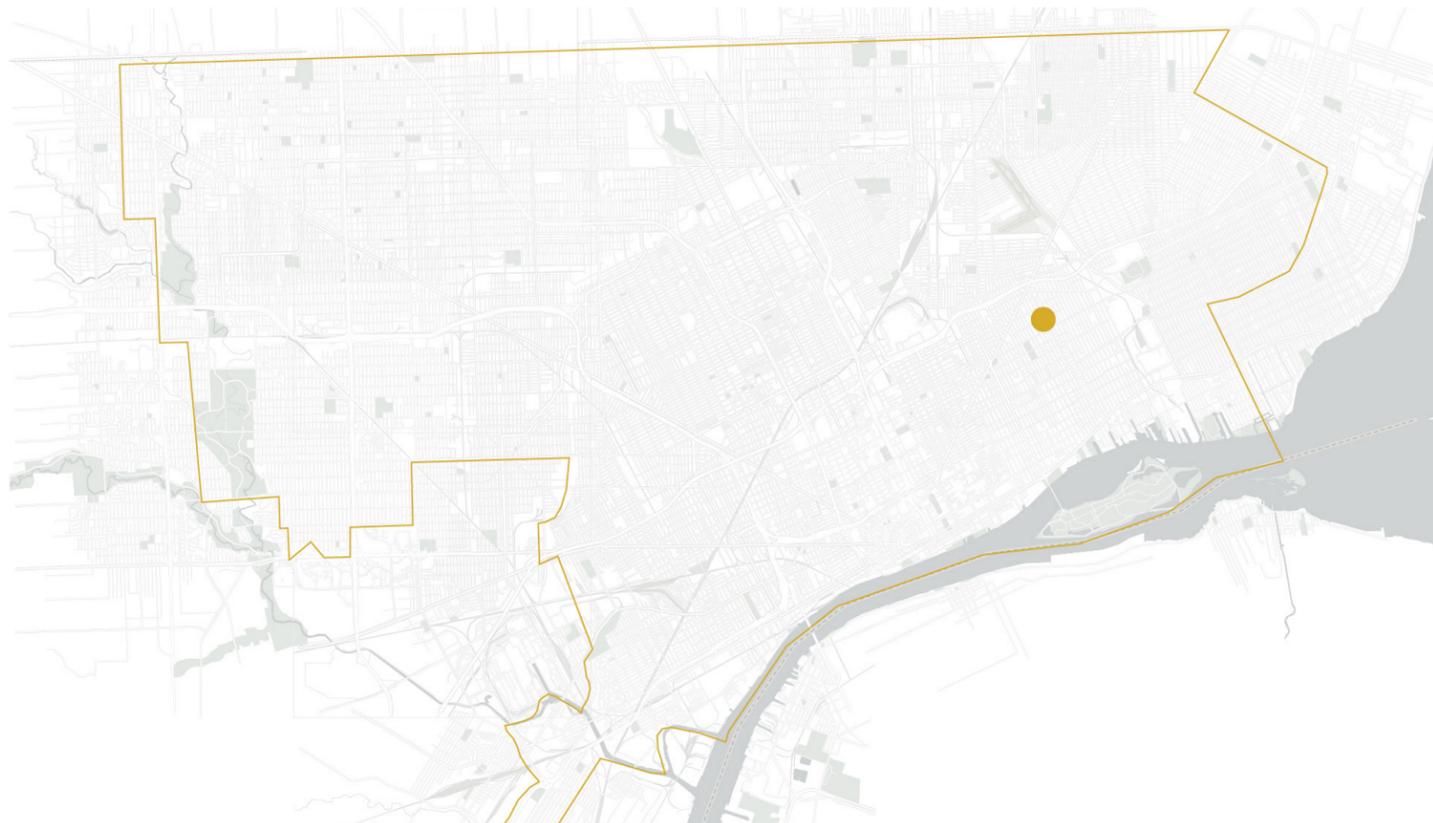
Naim - now: Intimacy with land



“I was simply watching some ants tend to some aphids and then in that process saw a fly or wasp land near them and start to oviposit in them”

As an adult, Naim continues to build this intimacy with land through his work farming in Detroit. His observations inform a different kind of relationship built on symbiosis rather than extraction. He doesn't need anything from this tiny community - the just exist together.

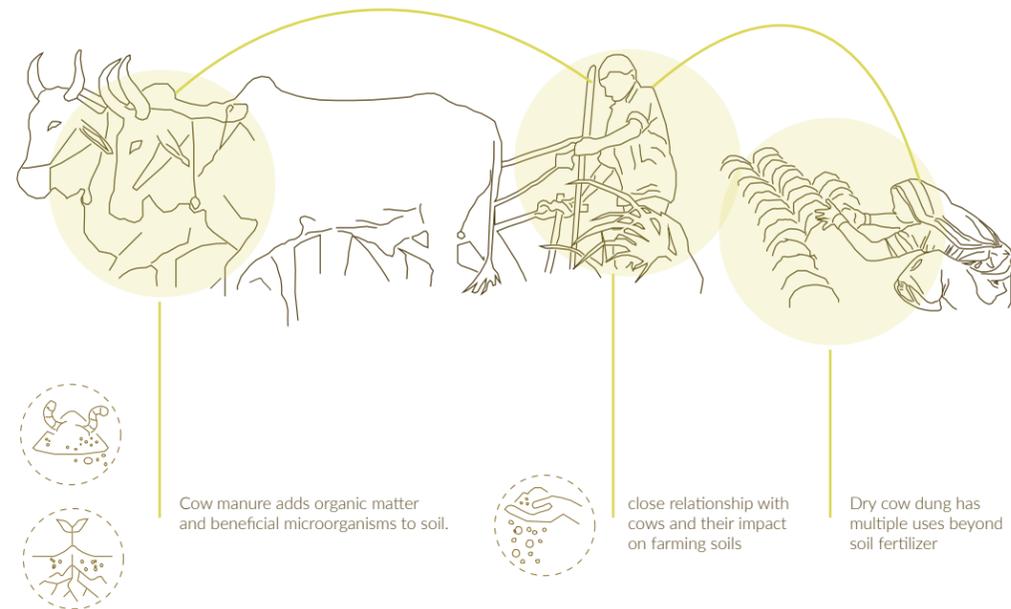
Anita



“So many things make me feel alive. Like community, like being in community and connection to others, and then there’s lots of ways that, like, I get embodied, like riding my bike, for example, I just feel like fully alive. Like I’m just like so happy and just, like, happy to fly through traffic”

Anita is an urban farmer and youth educator. Her farm is located on the East Side of Detroit.

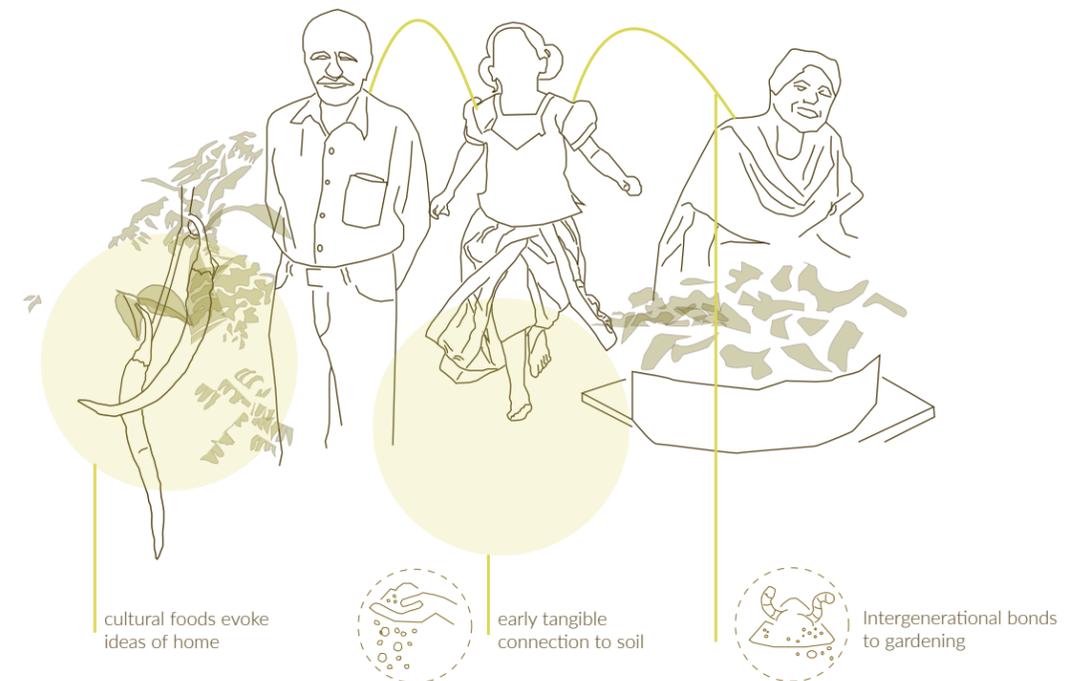
Anita - ancestors



“if you look back at our people, we were prioritized by the British colonizers because we had the skills to use manure to fertilize land. So the Cormie people were brought into clear land and manure the fields, and they were very skilled at growing food in this way”

Anita’s ancestors were tied up in this web of reliance between cows, soil, and humans.

Anita - aunt & uncle



“my earliest memories are just like running through that little field...I remember picking hot peppers with my aunt and uncle, we would pick them and then we put them in the sun to dry because then they would grind it and make chili powder and stuff.”

Anita’s connection to soil began in India. I find these memories of physical, tangible connection to soil to be relevant to design work. Again, intergenerational knowledge sharing, through time spent together, informs her work as an adult.

Anita - now: Mutual aid



so many lessons
in gardening

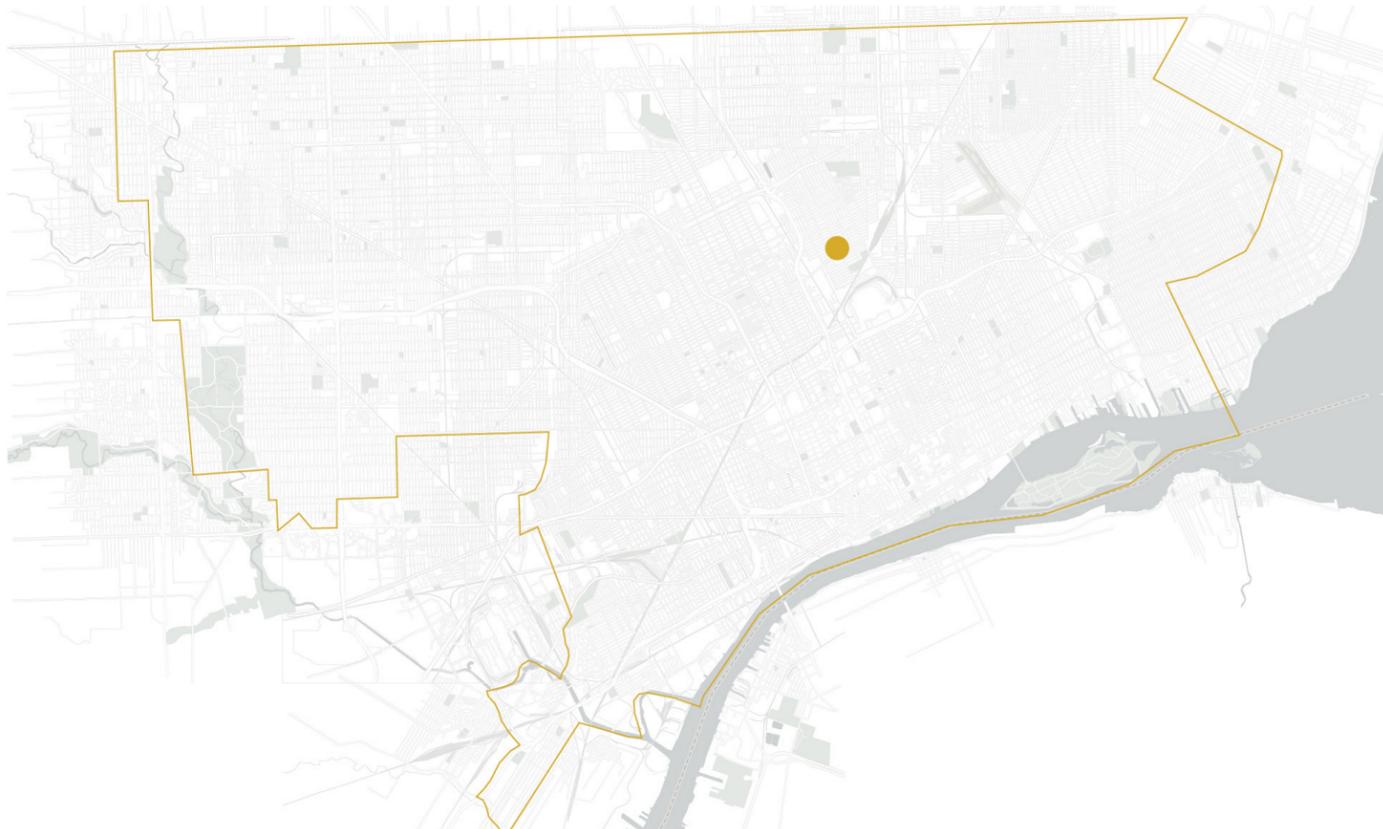
symbiotic relationships
based on abundance

"I do think that we can create
our own worlds in some ways"

"gardening is like the medium to talk about everything else because there's so many lessons that can come out of it and then also it helps people... I do think that we can create our own worlds in some ways, and I do feel like some of the work that I have been doing in my garden is a part of that, because now we have this mutual aid stand in the front of our garden that's been really pretty busy since the pandemic and now it's actually built into the fence and it's a real deal instead of just a cart in front of the garden"

Today, Anita is an urban farmer who cares deeply about sharing magical time in the garden with youth, as she herself has experienced. These embodied lessons inform her supporting a culture of relationships in the community through notions of having more than enough.

Christiana



“My name is Christiana Castillo. I am Mexican, Brazilian, American. Woman, I’m thinking like I’ve been having so many bios for, like poetry stuff, so I’m a Brazilian Mexican-American poet, educator, gardener based out of the greater. I live in Southfield right now. So out of the greater Detroit area, occupying Anishinaabe land. Yeah, that’s me”

Christiana teaches gardening at Dixon Elementary in Hamtramck in central Detroit.

Christiana - ancestors



“My grandma used to grow corn in Southwest Detroit. I can grow corn here. And then it’s like, you know, I’m going to finally do it. I’m going to try to grow my three sisters... this was happening across the US and we get this like ancestral knowledge and I get to use it.... birds can plant seeds and they’re totally fine”

For Christiana, her ancestors are more than the humans she knows about, but include the sisters she grows and the birds that have been gardening for longer than any of our related species.

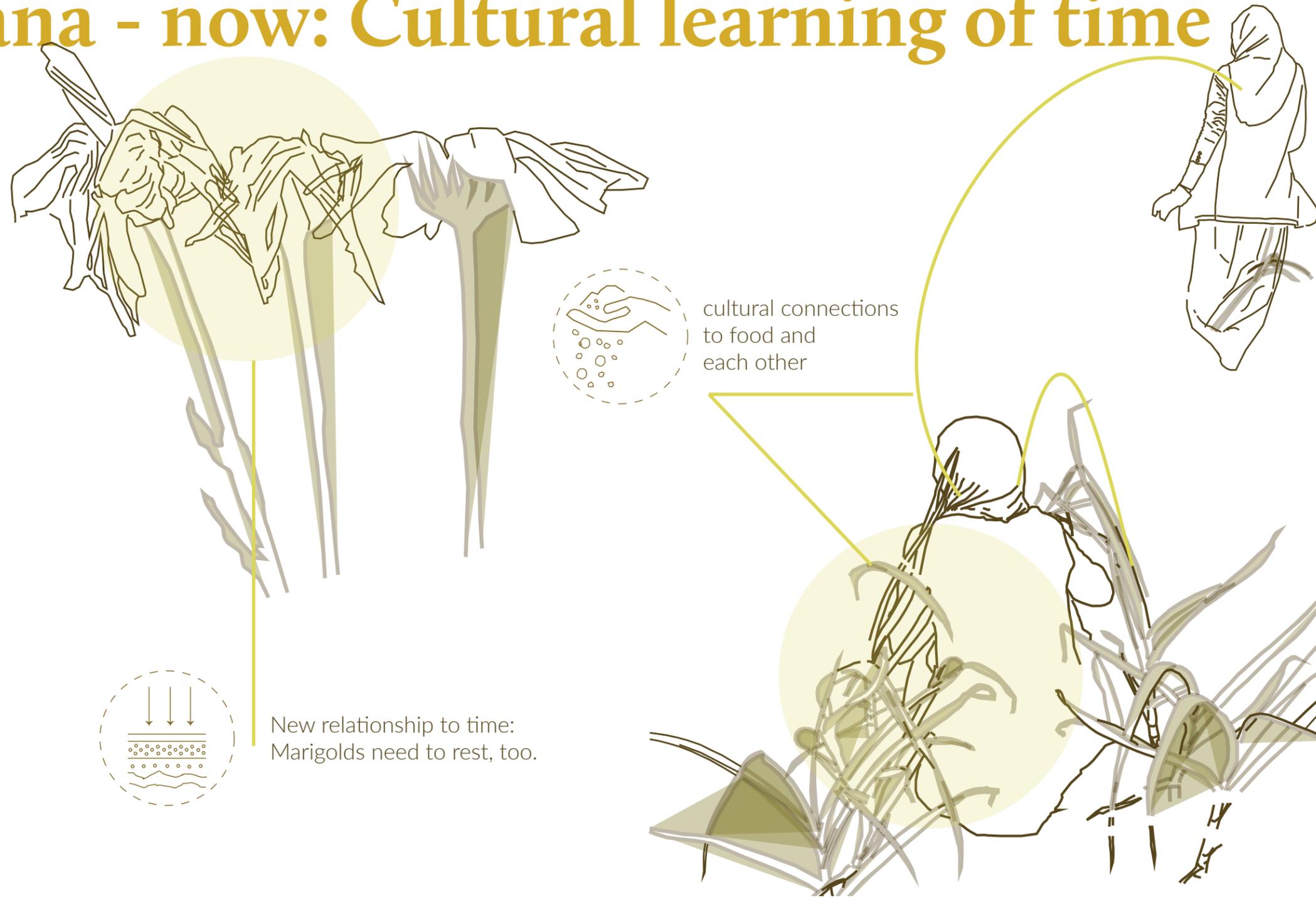
Christiana - grandparents



“My grandma wasn’t going to classes on how to garden, she learned from her mom who learned it from her friends... I vividly remember my grandma teaching me about deadheading, and she’s like, you have to, like, take off what’s dead. So it has room for new life.”

The connection to Detroit and her grandparents inspired Christiana’s learning with land and pride in the practice. Again, this intergenerational knowledge sharing is key in relating to land and soil.

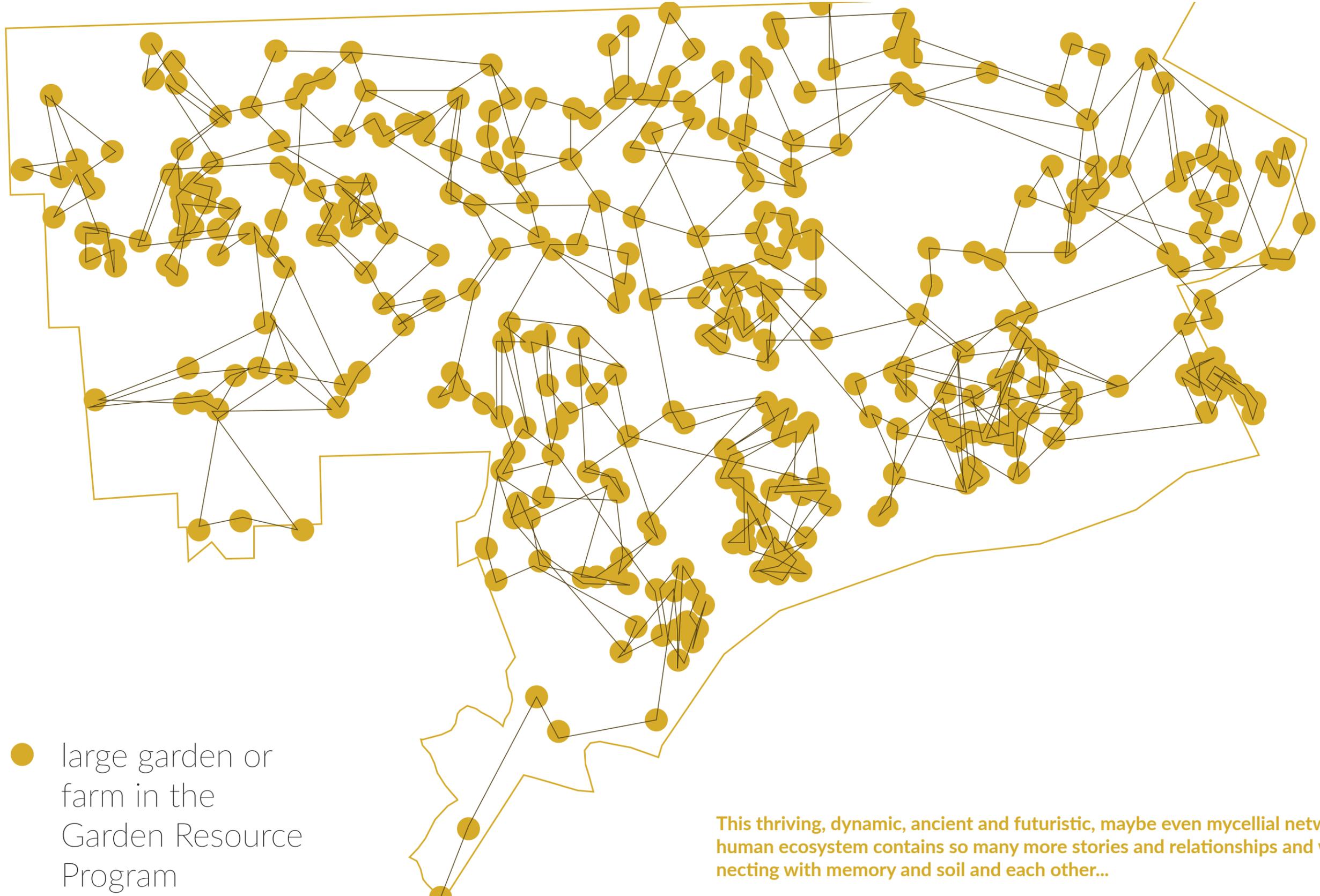
Christiana - now: Cultural learning of time



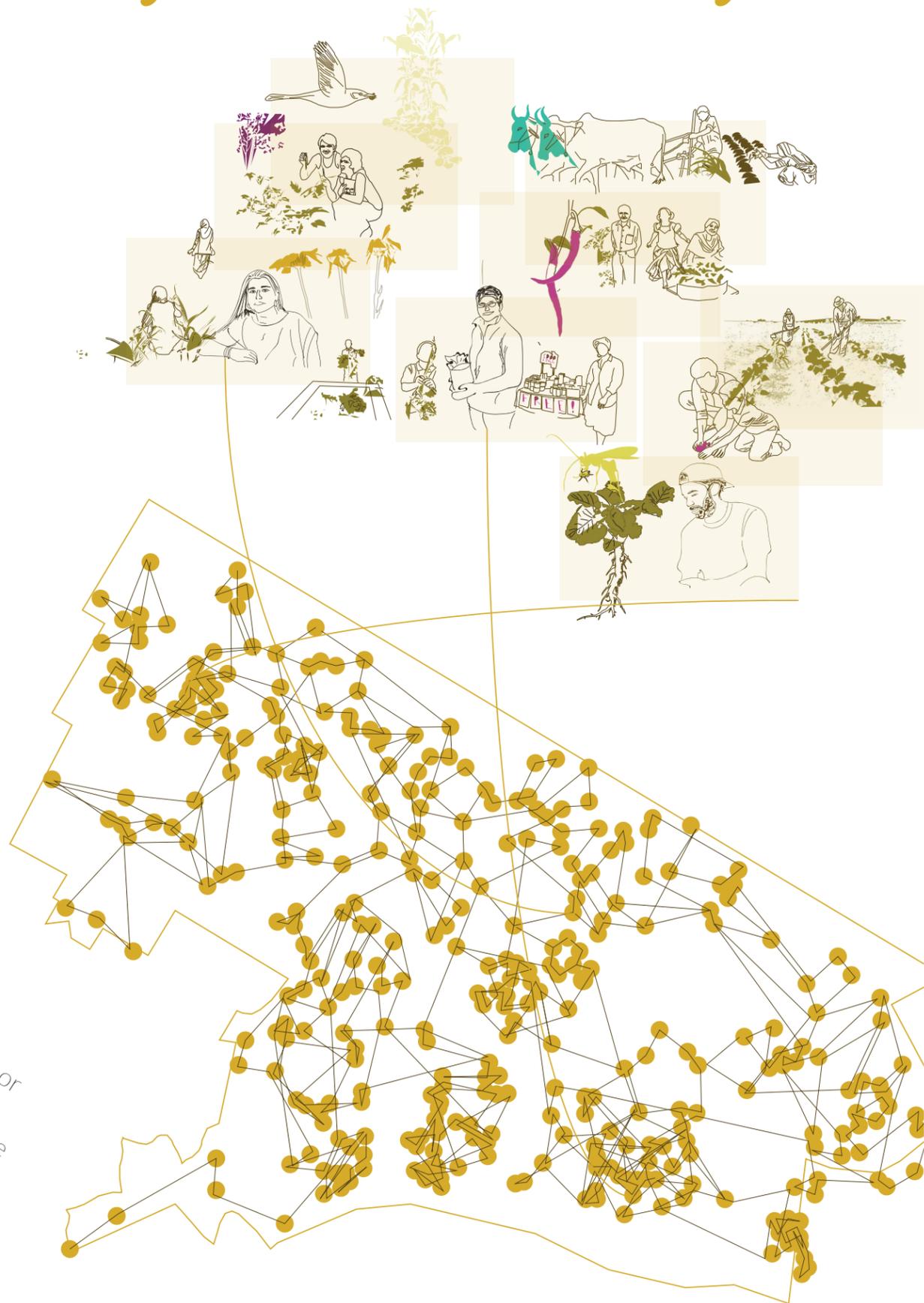
"I was talking to Anita the other day. We were at an outdoor gathering for Dia de los Muertos. And I was like a little sad that my marigolds were dying. And Anita was just like, they deserve to rest, too. And I was like, yes, the Marigold's deserved to rest. Thank you, Anita, for saying that... something I was doing pretty regularly was starting cultural gardens. So asking youth to talk to their community members or family members about like if there's a history of gardening in their family and what they did garden or just asking them like if that wasn't the case. Like what are some dishes you eat all the time and actually seeing the ingredients and seeing what we can grow?"

Today, Christiana shares connection to culture through gardening with students, not prescribing identity, but inviting them to bring theirs to the land they now inhabit. Her connection to fellow diaspora gardeners in the city is key in her garden practice and inspires her thinking of the cycles of time and relationships.

Garden Network



Tapestry of ancestrally informed future ideas



● large garden or farm in the Garden Resource Program

You pile up associations the way you pile up bricks. Memory itself is a form of architecture.

-Louise Bourgeois

Wandering on a road
I found air,
I greeted it and said
with respect:
“I’m glad
for once you’ve left
your transparency,
so we can talk.”

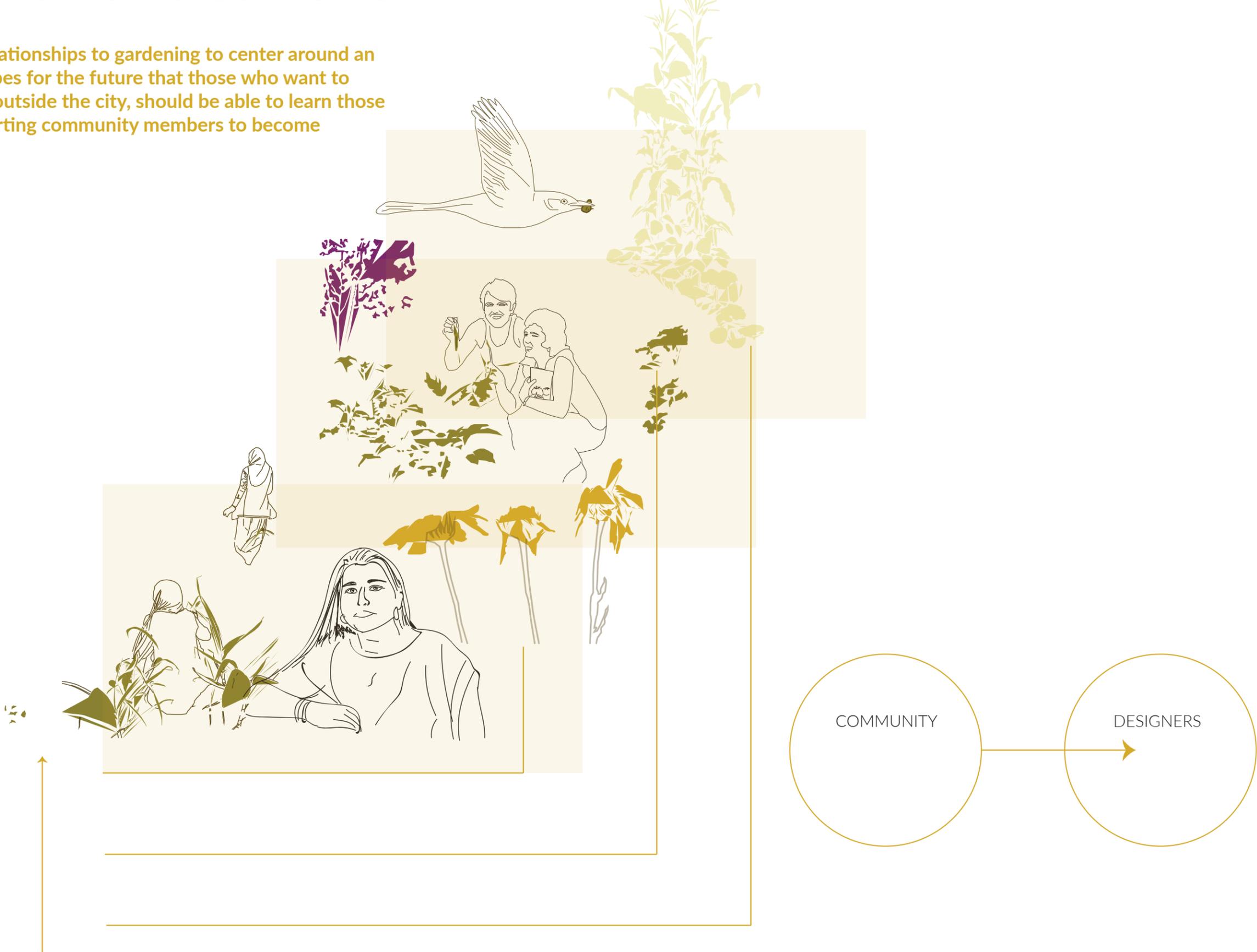
05

DESIGN SUGGESTIONS

Christiana - the future is LEARNED

I understand Christiana's stories and relationships to gardening to center around an idea of learning. And she says in her hopes for the future that those who want to learn the skills that are coming in from outside the city, should be able to learn those skills. I understand this simply as supporting community members to become designers.

ACCESS TO LEARNING
FROM ALL ANCESTORS



Naim - the future is INTIMATE

Naim's relationships through time describe a re-building of intimacy with land. His groundedness in intimacy with the ecosystems around him instill in him a trust that community members are the right designers and are already designing. Put another way, maybe through intimacy, we gain an appreciation for the existing work.

REBUILDING INTIMACY
WITH LAND

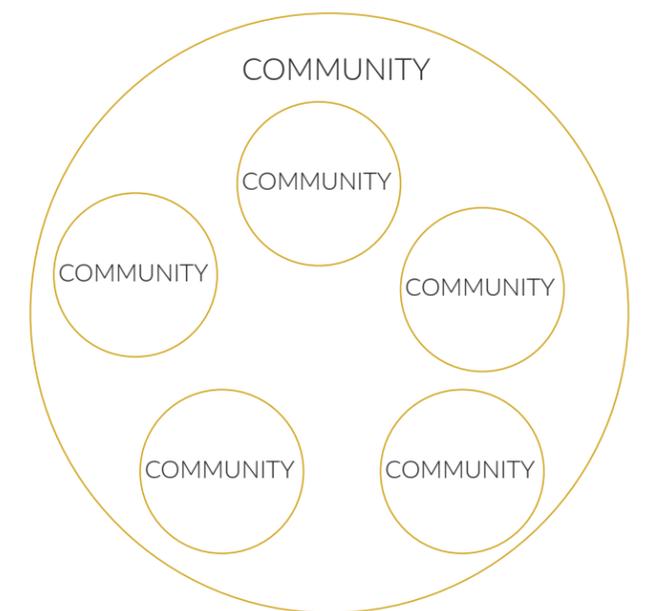


Anita- the future is WELCOMING

Anita offers us a maybe more practical idea. What if landscapes were welcoming?
How could we recognize local abundance and collect many groups of small abundances to feel confident in welcoming all needs at a larger scale?



OPERATING FROM PLACE
OF ABUNDANCE: RECOGNIZING
AND CELEBRATING





06

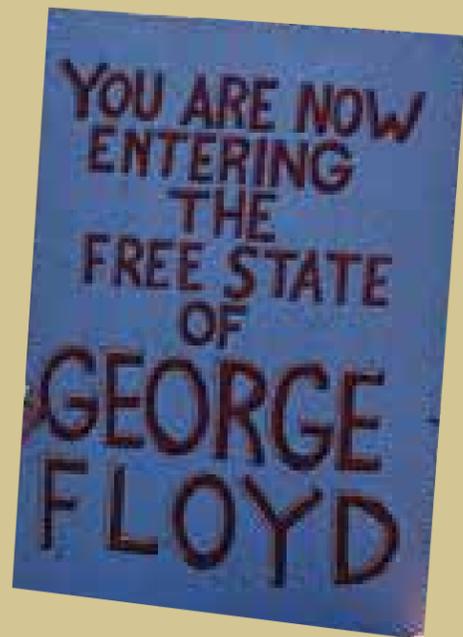
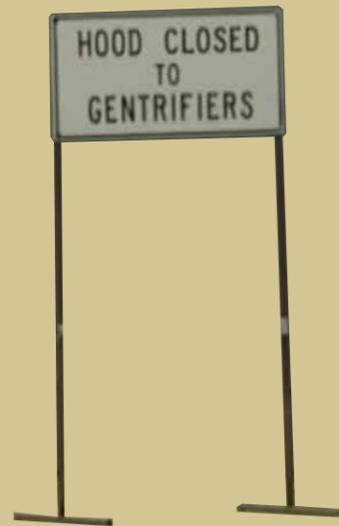
INTRODUCING
THE SOIL COMMONS

The Soil Commons is a place to build soil

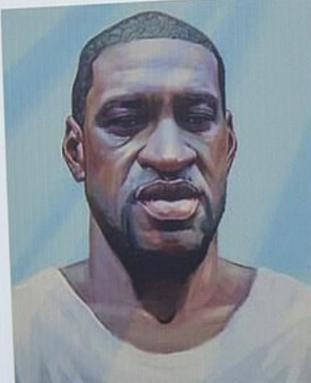
The Soil Commons is a place to build and get soil. The soil commons supports the gardening community in Detroit as a public resource. The soil commons acts as a site where neighbors can drop off household compost and witness each stage of the process of its turning into soil. The soil commons cannot exist without community interest. Community members request pieces to support site development which are provided by the city for free.

Pieces include:

Signs



Welcome to George Floyd Square
A Sacred Space for Community, Public Grief, and Protest



This is where George Floyd took his last breath under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, under the watch of three other officers.

Enter with reverence, humility, and openness, as an invited guest.

Care for each other by wearing a mask and asking others to wear a mask.

Honor the space as a place to connect and grieve as caring humans.

For White people in particular:

- Decenter yourself and come to listen, learn, mourn, and witness. Remember you are here to support, not to be supported.
- Be mindful of whether your volume, pace, and movements are supporting or undermining your efforts to decenter yourself.
- Seek to contribute to the energy of the space, rather than drain it. Bring your own processing to other white folks so that you will not harm BIPOC.
- Consider if you want or need to take photos and post them. Do not take photos of other people without their consent.
- If you witness white folks doing problematic things, speak up with compassion to take the burden off Black folks and our siblings of color whenever appropriate. Seek to engage rather than escalate, so that it can be a learning moment rather than a disruption.

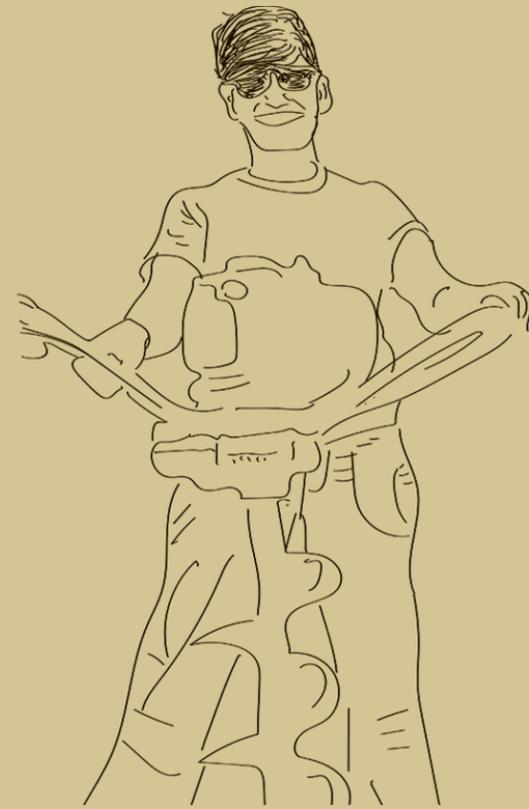
© Chelsea Lauren/REX

I include these signs here, in part to be provocative, but also to give an idea of how simple it can be to communicate how to be respectful in a place. These signs indicate thresholds of safety and belonging, particularly for black and brown people who are in places where that safety is not inherent in the landscape. My argument with this presentation is that recognizing that safety and belonging is essential for acknowledging, continuing to support, and celebrating abundance.

Jobs



Site manager



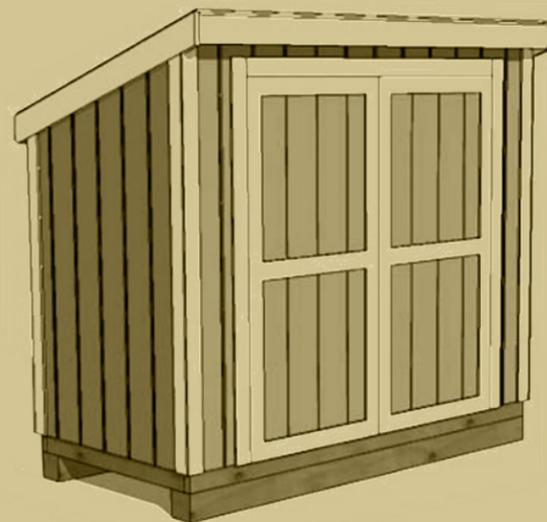
Soil scientist guidance

Neighborhood board

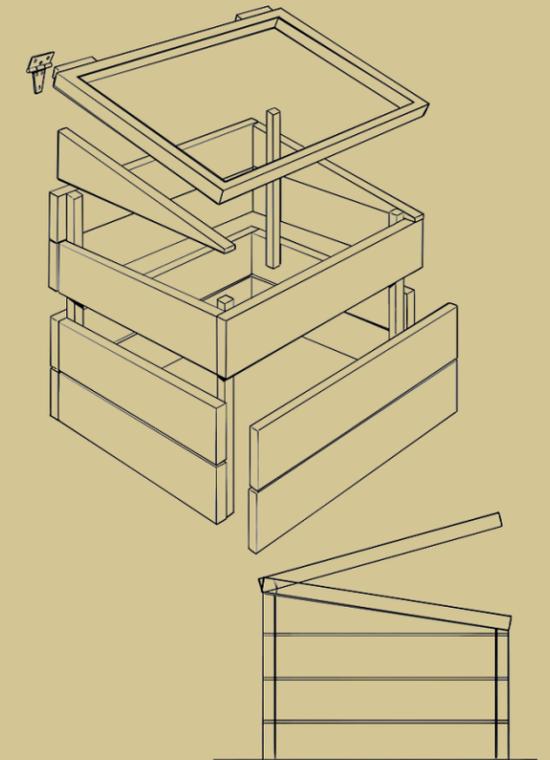
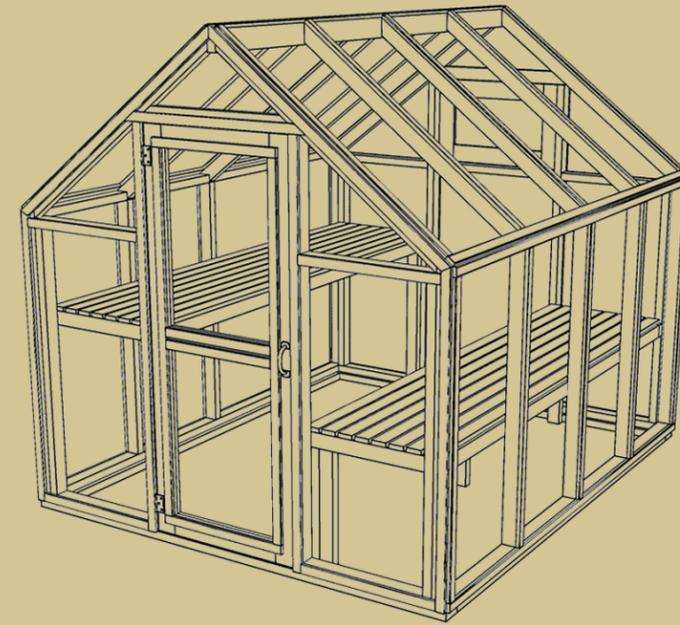


Another piece of the soil commons that residents can request from the city is jobs. My idea is that if a neighbor is elected by a neighborhood board to act as a site manager of a soil commons site, the city will pay them to do this full time. The neighborhood board is essential for decision making, members are also paid by the city to participate on the board, and they will hold meetings at the soil commons site. The city can provide soil scientist or design assistance as needed. And the work can build a network of practicing soil farmers.

Seed mixes & tools



Secure building structures

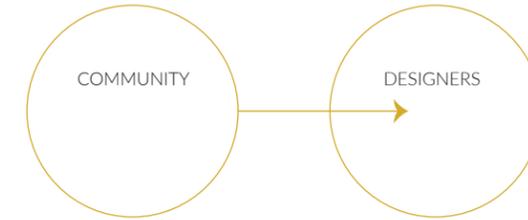
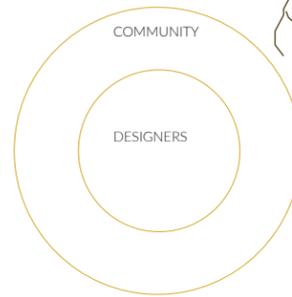


Some more physical elements that could be provided are seed mixes that work to add nutrients and reduce soil compaction. Residents can also request vermin-proof composting equipment, tools, toolshed materials, and greenhouse construction materials or guidance on how to make any of these. The idea is to create a soil building site, not necessarily focused on growing food. And hopefully plug into the existing network of gardeners but adding resources and participating in the network.

The Soil Commons

1 learning in landscape

2 witnessing landscape



Finally, the soil commons speaks to strategies brought up by my interviewees. It is a place where there is no hierarchy of expertise. We all have something to learn and something to share. It is a place where we can learn to build an intimacy with land and all the relationships that come with that, witnessing the designs those relationships make on their own. And finally in witnessing the intricacy of these relationships, we can recognize the abundance of existing ideas and strategies and freaking celebrate that.

3 cultivating/celebrating abundance

