



Community Gardens: How To

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Start a Community Garden!

Community garden projects are springing up all over the country, especially in urban areas, as the benefits of these projects are becoming widely recognized.

Why Start a Community Garden?

- Start a new hobby: Community gardens are a great way to get outdoors without leaving the city
- Get to know your neighbors: Community gardens provide a safe, green space for community events and educational opportunities that encourage intergenerational and cross-cultural interaction
- Give back to your community: Community gardens not only beautify neighborhoods, but have also been shown to reduce crime and increase property values
- Grow fresh, healthy food: Many community gardens also produce fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables that otherwise may be unavailable in the area. Nutritious, locally-produced produce contributes to food security and improves the health of individuals and families
- Improve the health of your community: Locally grown produce has been shown to reduce stress, obesity, and asthma rates in children. Locally-based food production can even bring green jobs to the community
- Help the environment: Community gardens improve the health of the environment both locally and globally. Community gardens reduce heat from parking lots and roads, filter rainwater, and improve air quality. Unlike large-scale commercial agriculture, community gardens (especially those using organic practices) cultivate and improve the soil. Locally-grown food also reduces carbon by cutting the transportation costs of imported food

So what are you waiting for? Use the resources on this page to start your own community garden or get involved with one in your area today!

There are several websites that have great information on how to start your own community garden. The basic steps are:

(Adapted from “Starting a Community Garden”, ACGA)

1. Form a Planning Committee

- Organize a meeting of interested people from the community
- Choose a well-organized garden coordinator
- Make a list of possible sites
- Make a list of what needs to be done
- Decide on a mailing address and central telephone number
- Consider possible sources of funding (more information below)

2. Choose a Site

- Identify and contact the owner of the land
- Make sure the site gets at least 6 full hours of sunlight daily (for vegetables)
- Consider past uses of the land. Is there any contamination? Do a soil test in the fall for nutrients & heavy metals. A soil test costs between \$30 to \$80 from private labs. Lists of labs are available by contacting the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) at (626) 312-4900
- Consider availability of water
- Try to get a lease or agreement, which allows the space to be used for at least three years. This may mean setting up a meeting with the landlord and creating a written agreement or M.O.U. (Memorandum of Understanding)
- Landowners may require that your group purchase liability insurance. Discuss with the landlord whether or not insurance is something you need to consider

3. Prepare and Develop the Site

(See links below for more detailed info.)

- Clean the site
- Develop your design

- Gather your resources--try to gather free materials. Ask your friends, neighbors, and colleagues for donations. Consider planning a fundraiser or tool drive for your garden.
- Organize volunteer work crews
- Plan your work day
- Decide on plot sizes, mark plots clearly with gardener's names
- Include plans for a storage area for tools and other equipment, as well as a compost area
- Have a rainproof bulletin board for announcing garden events and messages
- Arrange for land preparation--plowing, etc--or let gardeners do their own prep
- Will the garden be organic? An organic gardening guide can be found in the resources section of this page
- Lay out garden to place flower or shrub beds around the visible perimeter. This helps to promote good will with non-gardening neighbors, passersby, and municipal authorities

4. Organize the Garden

- Will plots be assigned (by family size, by residency, by need, by group -- i.e., youth, elderly, etc.), or will it be communal?
- Are there conditions for membership (residence, dues, agreement with rules)?
- If there will be plots assigned, how large should plots be (or should there be several sizes based on family size or other factors)?
- How will the group deal with possible vandalism?
- Will the gardeners meet regularly? If so, how often and for what purposes?
- How will maintenance (especially weeding) be handled both inside plots and in common areas (such as along fences, in flower beds, and in sitting areas)
- Will there be a set of written rules which gardeners are expected to uphold? If so, how will they be enforced? For example, will the garden be open only at certain hours? If the garden is not organic, will certain pesticides/ fertilizers be

prohibited?

- Should your group incorporate and consider eventually owning your garden site?

More details about how to start your own garden

Want to know more about the benefits of community gardens?

<http://www.gardenresearch.com/index.php?q=show&id=3126>

<http://communitygarden.org/learn/>

<http://www.gardendallas.org/benefits.htm>

<http://www.foodsecurity.org/UAHealthFactSheet.pdf>

http://www.collectiveroots.org/initiatives/foodsystem/urban_agriculture_health_benefits

Ready to start your own?

Links to how-to guides for starting your own garden:

<http://www.communitygarden.org/rebeltomato>

<http://communitygarden.org/learn/starting-a-community-garden.php>

http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/garden/articles/startup_guide.html

Find a community garden in your area!

Community garden-locator (courtesy of American Community Garden Association)

<http://acga.localharvest.org/>

Available grants for community garden projects:

<http://www.kidsgardening.com/grants.asp>

<http://assoc.garden.org/grants/>

Sample Community Garden Budget:

<http://www.extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/miscpubs/mp0906budget.pdf>

Already have a garden, but need advice on how to improve it?

Links to gardening advice, planting guides, etc:

<http://www.gardenguides.com/>

<http://www.howtogardenadvice.com/>

<http://www.weekendgardener.net/>