

10 STEPS TO STARTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

The following steps are adapted from the American Community Garden Association's guidelines for launching a successful community garden in your neighborhood.

1. Organize a Meeting of Interested People

Determining whether a garden is really needed and wanted, what kind it should be (vegetable, flower, both, organic?), whom it will involve and who benefits. Invite neighbors, tenants, community organizations, gardening and horticultural societies, building superintendents (if it is at an apartment building) – in other words, anyone who is likely to be interested.

2. Form a Planning Committee

This group can be comprised of people who feel committed to the creation of the garden and have the time to devote to it, at least at this initial stage. Choose well-organized persons as garden coordinators. Form committees to tackle specific tasks: funding and partnerships, youth activities, construction, and communication.

3. Identify All Your Resources

Do a community asset assessment. What skills and resources already exist in the community that can aid in the garden's creation? Contact local municipal planners about possible sites, as well as horticultural societies and other local sources of information and assistance. Look within your community for people with experience in landscaping and gardening.

4. Approach a Sponsor

Some gardens "self-support" through membership dues, but for many, a sponsor is essential for donations of tools, seeds, or money. Churches, schools, private businesses or parks and recreation departments are all possible supporters. One garden raised money by selling "square inches" at \$5 each to hundreds of sponsors.

5. Choose a Site

Consider the amount of daily sunshine (vegetables need at least six to eight hours a day), availability of water, and soil testing for possible pollutants. Find out who owns the land. Can the gardeners get a lease agreement for at least three years? Will public liability insurance be necessary?

6. Prepare and Develop The Site

In most cases, the land will need considerable preparation for planting. Organize volunteer work crews to clean it, gather materials, and decide on the design and plot arrangement.

7. Organize the Garden

Members must decide how many plots are available and how they will be assigned. Allow space for storing tools, making compost, and don't forget the pathways between plots! Plant flowers or shrubs around the garden's edges to promote good will with non-gardening neighbors, passersby, and municipal authorities.

8. Plan for Children

Consider creating a special garden just for kids – including them is essential. Children are not as interested in the size of the harvest, but rather in the process of gardening. A separate area set aside for them allows them to explore the garden at their own speed.

9. Determine Rules and Put Them in Writing

The gardeners themselves devise the best ground rules. We are more willing to comply with rules that we have had a hand in creating. Ground rules help gardeners to know what is expected of them. Think of it as a code of behavior. Some examples of issues that are best dealt with by agreed upon rules are: dues, how will the money be used? How are plots assigned? Will gardeners share tools, meet regularly, handle basic maintenance?

10. Help Members Keep in Touch with Each Other

Good communication ensures a strong community garden with active participation by all. Some ways to do this are: form a telephone tree, create an email list; install a rainproof bulletin board in the garden; have regular celebrations. Community gardens are all about creating and strengthening communities.