



STARTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

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This is a practical guide with many suggestions. No two community gardens are alike. Successful community gardens are planned by a community and evolve into what the community comes together to create.

WHY START A COMMUNITY GARDEN

- Builds and empowers communities
- Fosters social and environmental justice
- Breaks down racial and ethnic barriers
- Provides better food security for individuals, families, and communities
- Makes available cultural foods not available at local stores
- Promotes education
- Science, ecology, history, social studies, math, nutrition, agriculture, and more
- Bridges seniors to youth through interaction
- Reduces crime
- Provides green space
- Therapeutic and healing – physical as well as spiritual

FORM A PLANNING COMMITTEE

- Who will the garden serve?
 - Neighbors, youth, young adults, seniors, special populations, people interested in learning to grow their own vegetables
- It is essential that all groups are involved in all phases
- Invite all interested to an organizational meeting. Include landowner, neighborhood leaders, elected officials, city or county representatives, county agent, Master Gardeners, horticulture students
- Spend time at the first meeting introducing each other. Many times knowledge and skills needed for the garden are identified through the introductions. Brain storm about what the community garden will look like. Take notes. Determine goals and mission. Collect everyone's contact information and decide the best form of communication. Plan second meeting date and location.
- At second or third meeting, elect a garden coordinator, secretary and treasurer. Select name. Open bank account.
- Discuss finding a fiscal sponsor or agent with tax-exempt 501(c)3 status (such as a church, non-profit corporation, garden club, community garden network, civic organizations, city parks)

- Form committees and assign tasks
 - Budget
 - A small community garden (15 plots) with just the basic elements typically costs between \$2,500 to \$5,000 according to University of California Cooperative Extension
 - Funding and Resource Development
 - Find funding and sponsors
 - Design and Layout
 - Construction
 - Youth Activities
 - Communication
 - Garden Rules/Policies, application, dues, meeting attendance
 - Education
 - Newsletter/web site/facebook

SITE SELECTION

- Select fairly flat land that drains and receives 6 to 10 hours of sunlight with a water connection; a 1 to 3% slope is good
 - Request a ¾ to 1 inch water meter
- Select land large enough to accommodate the plots and to expand; add orchard; playground; picnic area; herb garden; etc according to plans
- Parking convenient, safe; bus stop nearby
- Restroom/hand washing nearby
- Know past use of land. Check for soil contamination. Run soil test for nutrients
- Purchase, lease or have an Memorandum Of Use (MOU) for the land
 - MOU should cover exactly what the landowner agrees to and what is expected of the community garden participants
- Place water bill in organizations name
- Is electricity necessary? Lights at night; Irrigation controller; pump for rainwater harvesting system
- Consider liability insurance if not covered by sponsoring organization or landowner
- Arrange for trash pickup

SITE PREPARE AND DEVELOPMENT

- Clear the site of weeds, debris and garbage
- Develop design
 - Account for stormwater flow through plots
 - Compass point for optimum light
 - Plot size – 4 feet wide and 8 or 12 feet wide for raised beds
 - Raised bed materials – wood, cinder blocks, ‘plastic wood,’ manufactured stacking stones, etc
 - In-ground beds – 10 feet by 10 feet or 20’ by 20’
 - 3 to 4 feet between beds to make moving material and maintenance convenient
 - Hose faucet at each plot

- Picnic tables, arbor, wind break, water feature, perimeter landscape, children's area
- Stake plots
- Gather building resources
- Schedule a community celebration date to build plots
- Gather all resources on site if secure
- Storage shed with combination lock for tools, wheelbarrows, bulletin board, etc
 - If no storage building, build a rainproof bulleting board for announcements, work schedules, rules, emergency contact, etc
- Fence and gate with lock; gate wide enough for cars and trucks to unload supplies and for delivery of compost, mulch
- Compost area

GARDEN ORGANIZATION

- Informal but with structured so everyone involved understands the goals, mission, policies, rules this will help avoid misunderstandings and conflict
- Develop organizational guidelines/rules and bylaws if the organization is going to incorporate or affiliate with an organization that requires bylaws
- When writing organization plans consider:

Purpose, goals, mission, short and long-term plans, affiliations, membership requirements, fund raising, dues, how work schedules are determined, election of leaders, committee appointments, job descriptions, garden contracts, responsibilities of leaders, committees and gardeners, board membership and meetings, general membership meetings, pesticide usage, agreement to keep all adjacent sidewalks in good repair and free of ice and snow in season, agreement to fund maintenance and repair of organization's equipment, fences, pipes, etc, a Hold Harmless clause: "We the undersigned members of the (name) garden group hereby agree to hold harmless (name owner) from and against any damage, loss, liability, claim, demand, suit, cost and expense directly or indirectly resulting from, arising out of or in connection with the use of the (name) garden by the garden group, its successors, assigns, employees, agents and invites."

COMMUNITY GARDEN CONTRACTS

Signing a contract will confirm agreements and understanding of rules and policies. A contact could include some or all the following:

- The organization/garden coordinator is the highest governing authority at the _____ Community Garden.
- I will pay a fee of \$_____ monthly/yearly to help cover garden expenses.
- I will have something planted in the garden by (date) and keep it planted, watered, mulched, and weeded
- If I must abandon my plot for any reason, I will notify the garden coordinator
- I will control weeds in my plot and the area immediately surrounding my plot
- If my plot becomes unkempt, I understand I will be given 1 week's notice to clean it up. At that time, it will be reassigned or tilled in.

- I will keep trash and litter cleaned from the plot, as well as from adjacent pathways and fences
- I will participate in garden clean-up events
- I will plant tall crops where they will not shade neighboring plots
- I will pick only my own crops unless given permission by others
- I will not use fertilizers, insecticides or weed that will affect other plots
- I agree to volunteer _____ hours toward community gardening efforts. (include a list of volunteer tasks which your garden needs).
- I will donate _____ % of my harvest to _____
- I will not bring pets to the garden or if I bring my pet, I will be responsible to pickup any pet waste
- I understand that neither the garden group nor owners of the land are responsible for my actions.
- I THEREFORE AGREE TO HOLD HARMLESS THE GARDEN GROUP AND OWNERS OF THE LAND FOR ANY LIABILITY, DAMAGE, LOSS OR CLAIM THAT OCCURS IN CONNECTION WITH USE OF THE GARDEN BY ME OR ANY OF MY GUESTS.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Vandalism is a common fear among community gardeners. However, the fear tends to be much greater than the actual incidence. Try any or all these suggestions to deter vandalism:

- Make a sign for the garden. Let people know to whom the garden belongs and that it is a community garden and mention the sponsors and contact person
- Fence the garden. Plan the fence where vining vegetables can climb
- Create a shady meeting area in the garden and spend time there
- Invite everyone in the neighborhood to participate from the very beginning. Persons excluded from the garden are potential vandals.
- Involve the neighborhood children in learning/butterfly garden.
- Plant raspberries, roses or other thorny plants along the fence as a barrier to fence climbers.
- Make friends with neighbors whose window overlook the garden. Trade them flowers and vegetables for a protective eye.
- Harvest all ripe fruit and vegetables on a daily basis. Red tomatoes falling from the vines invite trouble.
- Plant a "vandal's garden" at the entrance. Mark it with a sign: "Only pick from this plot"

PEOPLE PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Angry neighbors and bad gardeners pose problems for a community garden. Usually the two are related. Neighbors complain to municipal governments about messy, unkempt gardens or rowdy behavior; most gardens can ill afford poor relations with neighbors, local politicians or potential sponsors. Therefore, choose bylaws carefully so you have procedures to follow when members fail to keep their plots clean and up to code. A well-

organized garden with strong leadership and committed members can overcome almost any obstacle.

RESOURCES

- Extension Service office in your county - <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>
- Dallas County Extension Office - Dallas County Master Gardener office, 214-904-3053, <http://dallas-tx.tamu.edu/>, 10056 Marsh Lane, Suite B-101, Dallas, TX 77843
- Collin County Extension Office – <http://collin-tx.tamu.edu>, 825 N McDonald St, Ste 150, McKinney, TX 75069-2175, 972-548-4233
- Garden Clubs - <http://www.texasgardenclubs.org>
- Horticultural Societies
- Garden Centers
- Feed and Seed Stores
- Civic Organizations

REFERENCES

- Texas AgriLife Extension Service - <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>
- Rachel Surls, UCCE County Director, Chris Braswell and Laura Harris, Los Angeles Conservation Corps
- American Community Gardening Association - <http://www.communitygarden.org/>
- Dallas Community Gardening Network - <http://www.gardendallas.org/>
- Dotty Woodson, Texas AgriLife Extension, 972-952-9688; d-woodson@tamu.edu
- Fouad Jaber, Texas AgriLife Extension, 972-952-9216; f-jaber@tamu.edu; <http://educationcommunitygarden.org/>