

10 steps to starting a community garden

Photo: Teens with a Purpose- Safe Creative Community Space

1. ORGANIZE A MEETING OF INTERESTED PEOPLE:

Determine 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 — in other words, anyone who is likely to be interested.

2. FORM A PLANNING COMMITTEE: People who feel committed to the creation of the garden and have the time. Choose a garden coordinator. Form additional committees to tackle specific tasks, e.g., funding, resource development, construction and communication.

3. IDENTIFY ALL YOUR RESOURCES: Do a community asset assessment. What skills and resources already exist that can aid in the garden's creation? Look within your community for people with experience.

4. APPROACH A SPONSOR:

Some gardens "self-support" through membership dues, but for many, a sponsor is essential. For example, churches, schools, private businesses or parks and recreation departments are great possibilities.

5. CHOOSE A SITE: Consider the amount of daily sunshine, availability of water, and soil testing for possible pollutants. Find out who owns the land. Can you get a lease agreement? Will public liability insurance be necessary?

6. PREPARE AND DEVELOP THE SITE: In most cases, the land will need preparation for planting. Organize volunteer work crews to clean it, gather tools and materials. Decide on the design and plot arrangement.

7. ORGANIZE THE GARDEN: Members must decide how many plots and how they will be assigned. Allow space for storing tools and don't forget the pathways! Consider planting 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. Children are not as interested in the size of the harvest but rather in the process of gardening.

9. DETERMINE RULES AND PUT THEM IN WRITING: The gardeners devise the best ground rules. We are more willing to comply with rules that the group creates. Think of it as a code of behavior. Some examples of rules are: how are dues charged, how will the money be used, plot assignments, tools, meetings and regular maintenance.

10. HELP MEMBERS KEEP IN TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER: Good communication ensures a strong community garden with active participation by all. Consider: forming a telephone tree, creating an email list, installing a rainproof bulletin board, and regular celebrations. Community gardens are all about creating and strengthening communities.

ALWAYS BE RECRUITING

