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Community Garden Logistics

Get the Facts

Community gardens are wonderful places. Not only do they help provide fresh fruits and vegetables, but they can also bring people together for a common cause and teach our children where their food comes from and healthy eating. There are many different types of community gardens, and this logistics guide should only serve as a starter as you get the facts and begin your journey in building a community garden. Gardens require a long-term commitment.

People may come to you looking for community gardening opportunities, or you may need to find gardeners to participate in your garden. When looking for gardeners begin by checking in the immediate neighborhood where the garden is to be located. Other ways include posting fliers at nearby community centers or library and checking with local gardening clubs. Once you have a group of people dedicated for the common goal it's a good idea to meet to discuss vision, goals, rules of your garden, next steps, and assignments for getting your garden launched.

During your initial meetings it's a good idea to adopt a charter, and/or rules for your garden. This will help maintain order as your community garden grows over time.

Prioritize the Behaviors

Now that you've been a sustainable sleuth and gathered all your evidence. You need to identify what behaviors you'd like to change with your event.

What key message do you want to resonate most with attendees and participants?

You can consider the following actions:

1. Look for blight in your community. *What needs to be done to turn this into a beautiful community?*
2. Look for areas without trees and flowers. *Develop a plan to install.*
3. Will your event support improving these issues?

Develop & Implement Action Plan

Locating a Site

You may need to find a site for your community garden. Brainstorm ideas of possible locations in your community. You may be able to find an unused piece of land at a community center, faith-based institution, school, or other location on city property, which you may be able to share. Another option is to survey your targeted neighborhood for possible abandoned vacant lots or other pieces of land.

Remember to research who owns the proposed property and get permission in writing. You may also have to get a waiver and guarantee to hold the owner harmless. Start with asking for a small commitment by asking for test a period of one year and then as your garden progresses you work out an extension for a longer period based on your success for the first year.

Conduct a Site Analysis

A simple soil test should be conducted to determine the quality of the soil on the property. The test will also help you in determining whether there are any contaminants in the soil. Also determine what the drainage is in and around the garden.

Determine if there are any utilities on the property. This can be done with checking with the local government or utilities companies. Utilities companies will also come to the site to mark where underground wires or pipes are located. Note where the nearest source for water, this is an important element in feeding your plants.

Another important element is sunlight, so determine how much sun the site gets throughout the day. Most vegetables prefer full sun (six to eight hours of direct sunlight a day).

Design Your Garden

Before you begin to build your garden, you need to come up with a plan. The first process in your plan should be to meet with the gardeners and brainstorm elements that they would like included in the garden. This way you can attempt to include what is meaningful to those who will be using the garden and build greater ownership from those who will use the garden the most.

Consider the type of soil that the site has in determining what type of beds to build. If the site has poor soil quality you may want to build raised garden beds, if you must amend the soil, raised beds are your best option. There are also several different options of materials that can be used to construct your beds including concrete block, lumber, and other creative re-use/re-purposing of materials. Garden containers, such as large pots, can also be used in your garden to give it an eclectic look.

Consider what types of plants you will be growing when designing your garden. The right plant - right place, can make all the difference in planting a successful garden. Consider soil condition, light exposure, and the plant's size at maturity.

You may want to ask for assistance in drawing your plan. Check to see if one of your community gardeners has any experience with landscape design. Your local master gardeners, landscape designers are additional options for assistance.

Garden Structures

Many community gardens include different structures in their design. Some popular elements include:

- Benches and picnic tables – allow for people to rest, and talk with each other
- Compost bins – allows you to turn organic waste from the garden into compost
- Storage – you will need a place to store all your tools, pots, and other items for the garden
- Bulletin board – a great tool for keeping all your community gardeners informed on what's going on in the garden
- Trellises – will give a place for viny plants to grow.

Sourcing Plants

There are several places to source your plants from, depending on what you would like your garden to look like and what your budget is.

If you want your garden to have a finished look on build day and you have the budget purchasing plants from your local nursery or home improvement store is a great option. The plants will bear fruit much sooner than if you started them from seed.

A much less expensive option is to start your own plants from seeds. This will take longer for the plants to grow; you should consult the grow time on your seed packet. If you can sow your seeds well in advance you may have quality plants ready for your build day.

Maintenance

Develop a maintenance schedule with your community gardening team. There's no shortage of maintenance that needs to be done in gardens. Scheduling workdays allows everyone to share in the work. Typical tasks include:

- Watering - Water your plants deeply once or twice a week, depending on your weather. It is better to water them deeply a few times, than giving them a quick sprinkle every day. Water in the early part of the day, to prevent fungal diseases. Water slowly and softly and direct water to the roots.
- Weeding - Weeds compete with plants for nutrients, space, and light. Pull by hand to get as much of the roots as possible.
- Mulching - Mulch will help keep the soil moist, warm, help control weeds, and add organic matter into your soil. Make sure to keep the mulch away from the stems of your plants to keep them from developing disease or rotting.
- Harvesting - Determine/research when the best time to harvest your crop is. It will vary depending on what you are growing. Harvest too soon and your crop may not fully develop, too late and you may end up with bug infestation, disease, or animal scavengers.
- Fall cleanup - This is a good time to add to your compost piles and prepare your plot for winter or begin a winter crop. Remove spent plants, stems, and put them in your compost pile. Any weeds with seeds or bug infested plants should be put in the trash, so they don't infect your garden next year. It's also a good time to amend the soil and add organic matter or shredded leaves to your garden.

Building a garden in a continual learning process, take your learnings from year to year to improve for the next. Build upon your knowledge of gardening by continue to research other methods and by experimenting yourself.

Tools and Safety Equipment

Tools that your volunteers will find useful include:

- Rakes (steel and leaf)
- Shovels (flat and round tipped)
- Hoes
- Pitchforks
- Hand trowels
- Hand cultivators
- Pruners/loppers
- Wheelbarrows/gardening carts
- Hose, garden sprinkler, watering cans

Build day tools include:

- Hammers
- Saws
- Drills
- Screwdrivers

Suggested safety equipment:

- Gloves
- Goggles

Evaluate Impacts

Volunteer groups will be responsible for keeping track of improvement metrics to be included in your report. How will you measure the behavior change impacts and specific community improvements?

- **Results Worksheet**
- **Reporting Instructions**

Provide Feedback

- Say **“Thank You”**
- What’s the most successful and what can be improved upon?
- Who should be consulted on this step?
- How do you communicate that to community leaders and stakeholders?