



Community Gardening Month by Month

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Month-by-Month in the Community Garden:

Year One

This toolbox gives a month-by-month look at starting a community garden. There are a variety of things to consider in building your garden and your group. To mention a few, in the garden - location, layout, the growing season - and in the community - getting gardeners, what rules and regulations, how decisions will be made etc.

But there are a lot of details to consider - we hope the monthly overview highlights the issues and presents a logical approach to starting a great community garden. As with all great gardens a lot of planning and preparation needs to take place before any gardening does - so our community gardening year starts in the fall - with planning. Each month provides details on issues and ideas to get your garden growing.

Whether you are starting a new community garden or working with an established one, you will need to develop an organization to keep everything running smoothly. Organizing your community garden takes work and requires cooperation, but will result in everyone working together to grow productive gardens and make improvements to the site.

Raising money, finding and securing land, and making all other arrangements to carry on neighborhood gardening activities a big task. Trying to do this on your own will only result in early burn-out. An organized group can do this and much more. Having a garden leader can help facilitate a great group.

Fall: October, November, December

First, hold an informal community/neighbourhood get-together to see if there is enough support, need and interest in starting a community garden. If there is, form a committee who will write a program proposal. Include the following in the proposal:

- A preliminary budget
- Potential funding and revenue sources
- Possible garden sites and an outline of who owns the sites
- An inventory of group members' skills, knowledge, and strengths
- The garden's format (i.e. vegetable, flower, combination)
- The garden's focus (if the group decides to have one). For example: will the garden be for seniors, children, youth, low income and if so, it is essential that these groups participate in all stages of planning
- Potential sponsorship for the garden, such as a community health centre, a local business, school, day-care, hospital, public housing authorities, public service organisations, faith-based organisations, food bank or other non-profit organisations.
- Membership and volunteer guidelines and recruitment policies
- The garden's name (it may seem an unimportant thing at this stage of the game, but naming the garden will make it seem that much closer to reality).

2. Do some research into community organisations that could provide help at this first stage

and every step of the way. These include: horticultural societies, garden clubs, other community gardens, local landscape designers and architects, local schools and community colleges that have landscaping programs or offer courses in landscape design and construction, municipal parks and recreation departments.

3. The next step is to decide on a mailing address and telephone numbers. Form a telephone tree for internal communication with other committee members. The committee should also do the following:

- Open a bank account with at least two signatures necessary for withdrawals
- Plan a community-wide meeting at which the program proposal will be presented.

4. Hold a community or neighbourhood meeting. At this meeting the planning committee will:

- Present the organisational plan and structure for the proposed community garden. You may want to be prepared for folks who don't know exactly what a community garden is.
- Call for volunteers to form an official **STEERING COMMITTEE**. Most of the members of the planning committee will likely want to be on the steering committee, but an effort to add new members should be made.
- Call for volunteers to join and/or chair the following committees: **FINANCE, MEMBERSHIP, SITE & DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION, COMMUNICATION, EDUCATION, and SOCIAL**.
- Schedule the first committee meetings, including the steering committee.
- Introduce the sponsor. If no sponsor yet exists, now is the time to brainstorm with the community for ideas.
- If there is no definite site for the garden as yet, seek help from those at the meeting to identify possible sites.

January

All committees should try to meet at least once a month and should set goals and timelines in which to accomplish these goals.

1. The **steering committee** should clearly establish the project goals and objectives.
2. The **finance committee** should begin to prepare a detailed budget itemising all aspects of the garden's development. Remember to include volunteer labour and items, which might be donated "in kind" (goods and services, instead of cash). Many organisations that provide funds do so on a matching basis and will usually consider "in kind" donations to be acceptable. This committee should also identify and approach sources of funding, both public and private.
3. The **site and design committee** should have a list of potential sites and have evaluated them on their suitability. There are special considerations for starting a garden on common property including approach the site owner about arrangements for the use of the site. As soon as a suitable site has been acquired, a detailed, scaled plan should be drawn up, showing existing features of the site and its surroundings.
4. If necessary, the **membership committee** should outreach into the community to find more participants. Based upon the precious experience of committee members, decide upon an outreach strategy. Often word of mouth is more effective than putting up notices or handing out flyers, but each community is different. Go with what has worked in the past, but don't discount new ideas too quickly.

The membership committee is also responsible for establishing some basic rules for the garden. Determining these basic rules in the beginning can head off arguments later on.

- Many community gardens ask their members to participate in a certain number of group workdays per year (usually for spring and fall clean up).
- Decide upon a fee structure (whether or not you will charge a fee for the use of the plots, will it be a flat fee or a sliding scale based on the ability to pay, size of plot, number of gardeners per plot, etc.)
- Other things to consider are policies around organic vs. chemical fertilizers and pesticides, plot upkeep, water use, donations of produce to a food bank or shelter, children in the garden.

5. The **communications committee** can begin work on a newsletter. Your first efforts need not be much more than a page or two. As the garden grows in size and activity there will be plenty to include.

6. The **construction committee** can work with the site design and finance committees to decide what materials will be needed and how they will be obtained.

- Many local merchants may be willing to donate materials such as lumber, soil, seed, sand, paving materials, etc. Be sure to thank them in a written letter and publicly in your newsletter.
- Also identify skills within the group and assign tasks based upon those skills. There may be carpenters, stone masons, or landscapers in the group that are willing to help with the site construction.

8. The **education committee** should identify local horticultural experts who would be willing to conduct workshops on topics of interest to the gardeners. Survey the gardeners themselves to find out the level of existing knowledge and what they would be interested in learning more about.

9. The **social committee** can be one of the most important groups of the garden. It is through social events that the gardeners begin to get to know each other, especially in the non-growing seasons. There is no reason to wait until spring to hold a garden party. Consider also having a volunteer appreciation day during the summer to gather all the garden's contributors together.

February

1. Continue to recruit new members and, if circumstances permit, a paid contractor. Consider announcing the garden in local newspapers, radio stations, and public access television.
2. If a site has not yet been acquired, set a deadline to do so, no later than the end of March.
3. If you already have a site, proceed with the site inventory and analysis and schedule the first design committee brainstorming sessions. After the first group design session, the site and design committee should prepare a design drawing based upon the ideas generated. Before the end of March, hold another meeting of the entire group and present the design(s). If everyone is happy with it, the construction committee can now proceed with planning the construction work and the finance committee, can prepare a detailed budget.
4. Develop a draft set of rules and regulations that you will take to the entire group for approval.
5. Arrange for rototilling and other soil work to be done as soon as the soil is workable. If you

are getting help from the Park's Department, they need to know as far in advance as possible so that they can efficiently schedule the work. Don't expect them to do the work on only one week's notice.

6. Order seeds and supplies. Some gardeners will want to order their own, but many, especially first time gardeners will find this too daunting a task. Call upon the local experts that you have already contacted to help you decide what grows best in your area and under the specific conditions in your garden.

7. Draw up a schedule of work days. Depending on the complexity of the site design, you may need several days. Decide what will be done on each day so that members can contribute what they do best.

March

1. The garden co-ordinator whether paid or volunteer should be in place and involved by mid-March.

2. Confirm arrangements for site preparation and rototilling, etc.

3. Continue to solicit donations of materials, money and services (ongoing)

4. Encourage participation and advertise (on local media and by word-of-mouth) the need for land, funds, materials, and volunteer labour for site development (ongoing).

5. Begin to assign plots

6. Arrange for water sources: rain barrels, hoses, buckets, and watering cans.

7. Install water system, if possible.

8. Arrange for needed tools, rent or purchase as required and draw up procedures for tool sharing

9. Make provisions for secure on-site tool storage, both for small hand tools and for larger ones.

10. Arrange for compost bins (some municipalities provide them at a nominal charge).

11. Arrange for an educational workshop, topic to depend upon gardener's needs. Seed starting would be an appropriate one at this time of year.

12. Start seeds of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and other long season plants indoors, under lights.

April

1. Hold an orientation meeting with all gardeners. Explain the rules and regulation and have everyone sign their agreement to abide by them. Determine the levels of gardening skills within the group and determine the gardeners' needs.

2. In the beginning of the month send a sample of the soil for testing. Contact the Department of Agriculture for a list of labs and directions for taking soil samples.

3. Weather and soil permitting, begin construction of "hard" landscape features (paving, arbours, retaining walls, fences, etc.). Don't be tempted to do any digging if the soil is very wet or is still frozen. You'll harm the soil structure and actually set your schedule back.

4. When the soil is workable, stake out the plots and prepare the soil by digging in compost, manure, bone meal and whatever else the soil analysis recommends.

5. Plant cool season crops such as peas, lettuce, onion sets and spinach.

May

1. Finish "hard" landscaping construction.

2. Prepare the garden beds after the soil has warmed up.

3. Prepare a news release about the garden for the local media.

4. Contact all gardeners to see if they need any help.

5. Hold a mid-month workday to make sure that all plots are assigned and prepared, and to generate some excitement.

6. The co-ordinator should develop and maintain a demonstration plot.
7. Begin to set out transplants after the 24th of May (or whatever is the last frost-free date in your area), if it is warm enough. Tomatoes and other warm weather crops may still need protection from cool night time temperatures well into June.
8. Write the monthly newsletter.
9. Have an official opening day party for the garden. Don't forget to invite donors and other important friends as well as local media.

June

1. Finish setting out tender transplants.
2. Begin harvesting peas, radishes, lettuce and spinach.
3. Make sure the water system is adequate and that gardeners are able to use it easily.
4. Be on the lookout for any pest and disease problems.
5. Be on the lookout for any potential vandalism. Try to take care of it before it has a chance to escalate
6. Stake tomatoes, put up supports for beans and other vines.
7. Plant succession crops.
8. Maintain the site, mow borders and pathways, make compost, make sure that all members are able to fulfill their maintenance obligations.
9. The co-ordinator(s) should make sure to have everyone's vacation schedule so that they can take care of the plots while the gardeners are away.
10. Arrange for educational workshops, such as composting, insect and disease control, as needed.
11. Write newsletter.

July and August

1. Re-assign and replant any abandoned plots.
2. Continue maintenance chores
3. Make sure that the gardens are adequately watered during the hottest months and reapply mulch, as needed.
4. Continue monitoring for insect and disease problems.
5. Consider whether you will save seeds from open-pollinated varieties. SEE **SEED SAVING**
6. Hold a mid-season get together.
7. Set up a distribution system for surplus produce.
8. Hold demonstrations on food preserving techniques.
9. Conduct tours of the garden and prepare the gardens for awards, judging (if desired).
10. Write monthly newsletter.
11. Enjoy the harvest.

September

1. Conduct an evaluation survey of the gardeners.
2. Order seeds for green manure cover crops, to be planted after gardens are cleaned up.
3. Order fall bulbs for late September/early October planting.
4. Hold a harvest party toward the end of the month.
5. Write monthly newsletter.

October/November

1. Hold a workday to clean up plots and the rest of the site, after everyone has had a chance to harvest. Remove and compost spent plant materials. Plant cover crops.
2. Send soil sample for analysis
3. Clean, repair and store tools for the winter.

4. Repair any damage to fences, walls, tool shed, etc.
5. Flush and winterise watering system.
6. Write monthly newsletter.
7. Write thank you letters to volunteers, supporters and funders.
8. Begin monthly social gatherings and educational workshops
9. Write annual report.
10. Evaluate the project and plan changes for next year.

A Garden Leader

The Garden Leader is one of the keys to the success of any community garden. The garden leader coordinates and oversees all activities at the community garden and works with all the members. It is an important, rewarding, but demanding, job. A Garden Leader shares time, energy and land with others.

The Garden Leader is usually the person who has taken the initiative to get permission to use a site and has begun to get the group organized. How long a person serves as Garden Leader and how a new Garden Leader is selected depends on the bylaws agreed upon by the group.

A good Garden Leader ...

- has time to devote to the community garden
- is familiar with the residents and resources of the community
- loves to garden or is willing to learn
- is friendly, fair, creative and enthusiastic
- always looks for fair and equitable solutions to conflicts
- listens

Job Checklist for a Garden Leader

- Signs up gardeners and keeps an accurate contact list (phone, address, email, etc.).
- Calls and conducts regular meetings.
- Attends training sessions offered by the Toronto Community Garden Network (TCGN) or arranges for a representative to attend and report back to the group.
- Shares accurate information with gardeners.
- Serves as a contact person for gardeners, the TCGN and Toronto Parks and Recreation
- Recruits a steering committee to help in managing the site and completing these tasks:
- site preparation: coordinates clearing the land, plowing, staking plots, soil improvements, plot assignments, fencing, water, paving, and all other construction needed...
- obtain supplies, seek donations and oversee fund raising
- keep accurate records and budgets
- ensure regular communication among garden members

What Good are Community Gardens?

It's happening on every street, in every city, on balconies and rooftops, in municipal plots and abandoned sites, and although the benefits are still being assessed, no one questions that they are far-reaching. In fact, it's no exaggeration to say that community gardening can be a powerful antidote to hunger, poverty, loneliness and cultural isolation. Gardeners say it keeps them in shape, brings family and neighbours closer, increases their food security and imparts a sense of well being and community belonging, not to mention the potential benefits to the environment.

Benefits for individuals and families:

- physical exercise and mental relaxation
- more affordable produce
- increased consumption

of fruit and vegetables - greater control over food quality - opportunities for social exchange - time with kids and family - connecting with nature - a chance to protect the environment - acquaintance with different foods, cultures - improved gardening skills & food preservation techniques - a chance to share surplus produce - sense of community belonging - marketable skills, co-operative experience

Benefits for communities and countries:

- greener cities and towns - increased food security - community economic development - diversion of kitchen waste from landfills, through composting - chemical-free food consumption - reduced transportation costs - lower pollution - sense of community efficacy - cross-cultural sharing, exchange - greater self-sufficiency - inter-sectoral co-operation - improved population health - wildlife habitat protection/restoration

Some Nutrition Facts*:

-Community gardeners consumed a greater number of fruits and vegetables compared to the national averages: 7.5 servings per day in the fall, and 6.3 servings in the spring. - Of the gardeners surveyed, 70-80% consumed at least five servings of fruit and vegetables daily. - In addition, 74% of gardeners preserved produce from the garden (through freezing, canning, pickling, and drying) and 95% shared produce with neighbours, emergency food service providers, and others - Those involved with community gardens are more likely to eat and continue in the off-season to eat more fruits and vegetables making them more likely to meet "5 to 10 A-Day" goals. - Of those families and individuals who participated in garden projects, 89% ate more fresh vegetables than usual, 96% planned to eat more fresh vegetables all year round, and 79% learned a new way to prepare fresh vegetables.

*Source: Ohri-Vachaspati P and Warrix M. Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Among Urban Gardeners. Ohio State University Extension. As published in the 1999 SNE Annual Meeting Proceedings, page 33. Savoie KA. Growing Good Nutrition: EFNEP Improves Dietary Behavior Through Gardening. University of Maine Cooperative Extension. 1998

Gardeners Lead Active Lives:

Gardening is active living. It is the second most popular physical activity in Canada, attracting 72% of Canadian adults. It offers the opportunity for lifelong participation, and can be a positive contributor to the natural environment.

Numerous studies have shown that regular physical activity reduces your risk of premature death, heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis, stroke, depression and colon cancer. Gardening and yard work contributes to healthy active living, and are part of all three types of physical activity - endurance, flexibility and strength activities. Heavy yard work like raking and carrying leaves contributes to both endurance and strengthening activities, while all those stretches and contortions in the garden can help increase and maintain your flexibility

Scientists say to accumulate 60 minutes of physical activity every day to stay healthy or to improve your health. Sixty minutes is the magic number if activities involve light effort. Casual walking and easy gardening weeding, planting, etc. would fall into this category. If activity requires moderate effort, then less time somewhere in the 30-60 minute range will do. Raking leaves, mowing the lawn and pushing a wheelbarrow all fit the bill.

Gardening activities draw on your endurance, flexibility and strength, and will help control

your weight.

Endurance activities help your heart, lungs and circulatory system stay healthy, and they give you more energy. Cutting the lawn, raking and gathering leaves, hoeing the garden, spreading mulch and pushing a wheelbarrow keep you on the move and bring endurance benefits. Flexibility activities contribute to easy movement. They allow your muscles to stay relaxed and your joints mobile. Bending and stretching to plant, weed, prune, mix potting soils and water plants by hand are all great activities to help you stay flexible. -Strength activities keep your muscles and bones strong, and assist in maintaining proper posture. Digging in the garden, turning compost, carrying wood, hauling branches and other clean-up activities help keep you strong. A healthy weight comes from a balance of energy in (food) and energy out (physical activity). As a general guide, 3 1/2 hours of gardening or yard work burns about 1,000 calories.

Gardening Reduces Stress

Quietly tending your garden or vegetable patch is a real stress-buster, helping relieve feelings of anxiety and giving you a break from the general rush of life. There is ample evidence that simply looking at a plant can reduce stress, fear, and anger, and lower blood pressure and reduce muscle tension.

Because the work is mainly physical, you have a chance to think about concerns & problems or just spend an hour or two of luxurious day-dreaming. As the results of your work will usually be quite obvious, you'll also feel a sense of accomplishment.

Cultivating Community

Community gardens are places where individuals work side by side with neighbourhood children, businessmen, homeless folks, and artists, all at once. They share stories and shovels, laughter and water, and slowly they build relationships that extend beyond the garden and into our larger community.

On any given day, the gardeners toiling side by side in any of Toronto's 100 community gardens may include Vietnamese, Cambodians, Russians, Eritreans, Somalis, Ukrainians, Filipino, Italians, Greeks, Czechs, East Indians, Chinese, Lebanese or West Indians. Some Canadian-born participants speak English, some French, others Inuktitut. The mix of gardeners means many are meeting some foods for the first time. Amaranth, mustard greens, water grass, bitter melon, fava beans, Lebanese cucumbers and pole beans are unfamiliar to most Canadian-born participants. In turn, newcomers to Canada are getting acquainted with swiss chard, strawberries, rhubarb, kohlrabi and sunflowers.

New friendships bloom as gardeners swap tips, ideas and labour, or stop to chat in the afternoon heat. A midsummer potluck dinner features dishes the gardeners made from their own produce. Later in the season there'll be workshops to help them preserve what they and their fellow-gardeners have grown, through pickling, freezing and canning. Many say they share the harvest with friends and family and on average, that seven people eat from each plot.

"Gardening is good for body and soul."

" My children will now eat vegetables because they grew them themselves."

"Gardening helps me save money for something else."

" I just love spending time in the garden--it gives me something to look forward to every day."

"The garden plot helped my family relax and have fun together."

Acquiring a site

Step 1

As a starting point, look for empty parcels of land within your neighbourhood. If none exists, look for businesses with large lots that are under utilized or a school, hospital, nursing home, or senior's residence that is interested in sharing the garden, or for possible sites within a municipal park. If you are in a rural area, perhaps there is a farm or market garden nearby that would be willing to rent your group some land.

Once you have identified a potential site, you must now find out who owns it and come to an agreement about the use of the site. Ownership can be determined by checking records in your municipality's Land Registrar office, if it is privately owned, or if it is public, by checking with the municipality's Buildings Department for the zoning and permitted usage.

If there are zoning problems, the next step is to contact the Planning Department to see if a community garden can be accommodated or if the zoning can be changed.

Tips:

1. Some municipalities are willing to accommodate community gardens within their parks.
2. It's also good idea to enlist the help of your local Councillor or alderman and the residents' association in the neighbourhood.
3. Something to remember whenever dealing with any office of your local government: be persistent and be patient. It always takes longer than you would think possible.

Step 2

Once you know who owns the land, schedule a meeting with the owner to discuss the use of the land as a community garden. If possible, invite a prominent member of the community who is a supporter of the project as well as someone with a legal or real estate background.

Tips:

1. It's helpful to have ready a one page description of your project to give to the land owner, neighbours, city officials and potential fund-raisers. Keep it brief and include the following information:
 - Definition of community gardening, aims and purposes - Your garden's mission statement - Names of garden members - What will be grown - Year round maintenance plan - Background of the sponsoring agency or group - Name, address and phone numbers for at least two contact people - Attach letters of support
2. Talk with the neighbours of the site, especially those immediately adjacent. Explain your intentions, invite them to participate and assure them of your commitment to maintain the site. Ask them to sign a letter of support for the project.

Step 3

Once you have agreement in principle with the site's owner, you must now work out the

terms of use and prepare a written agreement that will form the basis the site lease. Points to consider include:

- General purpose
- Property description and location
- Utilities (water, electricity, etc.)
- Inspection of site
- Length of lease
- Option to renew
- Lease termination
- Lease modification
- Fees
- Maintenance
- Insurance
- Hold harmless clause
- Nondiscrimination clause

Many private owners require that you carry your own liability insurance, while municipalities can often include your group in their insurance. There is no one policy that covers community gardens. The best advice is to work it out with a sympathetic insurance broker.

Tip: Some owners may be willing to have all participants just sign a “Hold Harmless” clause. This sets out in writing that you will absolve the owner of any liability but it will not provide any sort of coverage for the injured. Here’s an example of one from the American Community Gardening Association:

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.

A presentation to the City Council or a Residents Association may be required. Be well organized, clear and have examples and pictures of other successful community gardens. Bring as many supporters as possible to these types of meetings.

Landowners need to feel confident in your group’s ability to carry out the project. Keep them well informed, in writing, of your plans, past experience in community-based projects, and of your progress. Make sure to send them the monthly newsletter and, most of all, invite them to become a member of the garden.

Garden site factors to consider

Site Section Factors

What makes a good site for a community garden? Location, location, location...and plenty of sun! Community gardens should be just that—a garden within the community. Ideally they are located within easy walking distance of all participants or are accessible by public transport. If you have to drive or travel more than a very short distance by bus or subway, chances are that you won't garden as often as you would if the garden is located just down the street from your home. In order for it to truly be a community garden it must be an integral part of everyday life in the neighbourhood.

Important factors in choosing a garden site

Sunlight

A vegetable garden should receive at least six hours a day of sunlight. A bit of dappled shade in part of the garden is desirable for a sitting area, but the growing areas must receive full sun for as long as possible. If you don't have this kind of sun, and there is no other available site, look into growing those plants that can tolerate more shade than most. There isn't a wide range of typical garden vegetables that do well in the shade, but don't despair—think creatively.

Soil Quality

The most important factor for success of any garden, whether it is a community vegetable garden or a meadow regeneration project, is the soil. Without a living, healthy soil every ounce of energy and every penny that you put into your garden will be wasted. It makes much better sense to concentrate the garden group's energy, especially in the first year, into adding organic matter (compost, manure, mulch) than in buying expensive, synthetic fertilizers that promise astonishing yields and giant vegetables. These chemical fertilizers need to be applied every year and, in the bargain, kill off the natural, beneficial soil organisms that do the work for free. Chemical fertilizers are to plants what steroids are to bodybuilders.

Every site should have a soil test, not only for nutrient content but also for contaminants. Contaminant tests can be quite expensive, so if you can narrow the scope of the tests by providing information that will tell the labs what to suspect, you can save some money. Investigate the past usage of the site—was it used for housing, commercial or heavy industrial use?

Tip: If there was heavy industry on site there is a good chance that the soil contains toxic contaminants and may make the site unsuitable for gardening without first replacing or otherwise remediating the soil. It might be easier, and cheaper, to look for another site.

Nutrient tests will tell you the ratio of nitrogen to phosphorous to potassium, or NPK—the 3 numbers on fertilizer labels—as well as the soil's pH. Some testing services will also report organic matter content, calcium, magnesium, sodium, sulfur and trace minerals. OMAFRA (Ontario only) supplies a list of these accredited labs to gardeners, as do many other provincial and state agricultural extension offices. The cost for nutrient testing is usually under \$20.00 (contaminant testing is considerably higher), and depending upon the time of year, it may take a month or more to get the results.

Tip: If time is of the essence, many nurseries and garden centres sell kits for testing pH and NPK at a comparable or slightly higher price.

In addition to nutrient content, soil texture is another important selection criteria. Soil is made up of organic components (humus) and inorganic components (sand, clay and silt). The ideal soil has lots of organic matter and a combination of the tiny rock fragments of sand, silt and clay. The relative proportion of these factors influences the soil's water retention capabilities, drainage, oxygen content, and fertility. Sandy soil drains too quickly to hold water for long and so adversely affects the soil's fertility. Clay soil sticks together, forming hard, dense crusts that roots and water have trouble penetrating.

Tip: The addition of organic matter, especially in the form of compost, can improve any type of soil.

Drainage

In addition to the soil's characteristics, the drainage of the site as a whole is very important. Improving the soil texture will help the general drainage, but if the site is unevenly graded, the low areas will hold water regardless of the texture. If your site has problem areas, regrade it to redirect the water elsewhere, but also examine the texture. If the problem doesn't resolve by regrading and adding organic matter, the cause may be underground. Often subterranean springs, leaking water pipes, buried paving and other unknowable factors are the cause of wet areas that just won't go away.

Tip: Don't fight it. If your site has a low area that is always wet, plant a miniature wetland or use plants that love to have their feet wet at all times.

Water

Easy access to water is vital to garden success. If there isn't any running water on the site, investigate the cost of providing it. If that is too prohibitive or is not possible due to zoning or lease conditions, perhaps an adjacent neighbour will allow the (newly formed) Water Committee to run a hose or fill holding barrels once a week, either for contributions to the water bill or for a share of the harvest. And if that isn't possible, the committee should purchase some rain barrels (there are several good ones on the market these days).

Tip: Encourage all gardeners to practice water conservation techniques, such as mulching and bottle drip irrigation.

Proximity to Pollution Sources

Air born pollution is an ongoing vexation for any gardener who wants to use organic gardening techniques, whether in the city or in rural areas. The wind knows no boundaries and pollution that originates in one part of the country is quite capable of affecting a garden hundreds or even thousands of kilometers away. Combating long range pollution requires a political approach. Combating more immediate pollution sources can take a more horticultural approach.

The most common source of air born pollution that you can do something about comes from car exhausts. Common sense tells us to keep the garden, especially the food plants, as far away as possible from busy roads, parking lots, situations where cars sit idling their engines (traffic lights, stop signs, drop off and pick up areas).

Tip: If the garden is too close to a road for comfort, plant an ornamental (non-edible) strip, such as a hedge or a vine on a fence, to act as a filter. Choose something with large leaves or something that is very thick and dense. The more biomass, the better the filter.

Lead paint is another problem pollution source. The soil of many older building sites are contaminated with minuscule flakes of lead-based paint. This is especially hazardous to children, who have a much lower tolerance of lead than do adults, because of their smaller body size. The only way to determine if lead is a problem at your site is to have the soil tested for contaminants. Be sure to alert the soil lab to the possibility of lead when you send in your sample.

If you get a positive test result, the only way to use the site safely would be to remove the contaminated soil and replace it with healthy soil. Depending on the size of the garden, this could be prohibitively expensive. Make sure that all of the gardeners are aware of the health hazard and that children are not allowed to play in the contaminated soil. Even the small amount of lead absorbed by just getting your hands dirty is too much for a child and breathing the dust stirred up by removing the soil is hazardous.

Tips: 1. Look for another site or build planters that will allow you to grow food crops in good soil. 2. Certain plants in the mustard family (brassicas) can clean heavy metals from the soil. This is known as bio-remediation or phytoremediation. There are many websites on the topic. Start here: <http://water.usgs.gov/wid/html/bioremed.html>

Another type of pollution that occurs more often in urban areas than in rural ones is from road salt. Again, locate the growing areas as far away from the pollution source as you can, and encourage garden neighbours as well as your municipality to use sand rather than salt on their sidewalks and roads.

Tip: Small areas of salt contamination can be improved by removing the top 5–20 cm. (2"–8") of soil, watering the excavated area heavily in order to dilute the salt as much as possible, and then replacing it with healthy soil with a high organic matter content. Plants used in this remediated area should have shallow root systems that will remain within the new soil zone.

Safety

A good location for a community garden is in a highly visible, well-traveled area. Out of the way locations are potentially unsafe and open to vandalism. A garden that is visible is much safer and is more likely to become a source of community pride if it is in view at all times.

Some type of lighting is also advisable, especially if members like to visit the garden at night. Take care to adjust the lights so that they illuminate the garden and do not annoy the neighbours.

Tip: Make it possible for the gardeners to identify each other and to distinguish between friend and foe.

Access and Services

Look for a site that allows easy access by the gardeners, their bicycles and, occasionally, their cars and also by delivery trucks. Nearby public transportation and adequate parking is important if the gardeners are coming from outside the neighbourhood—make sure that they don't take the locals residents' parking spaces!

Another vital site criteria is the proximity of public washrooms and telephones. If there are no public facilities, consider renting a portable toilet, but get the approval of the neighbours and check if you also need zoning permission.

Tip: If you do get a port-a-potty, locate it in such a way that it will be as unobtrusive as possible and plant some tall flowers around it as an added precaution.

Keys to Fundraising Success

There really is no perfect model for successful fundraising. This guide sets out a variety of options for raising funds to start and maintain your community garden. Try several ideas and be guided by the past experiences of your group's members. Regardless of your approach, there are a few basic fundraising rules:

- Know your project inside and out.
- Be thoroughly familiar with your group and the project, its goals and objectives, the benefits to the members and to the community, the organisational structure, activity time lines, etc.
- Research potential sources of funding thoroughly.
- Develop a strategy.
- Prepare a well thought-out, thorough budget, but don't box yourself into a corner by excessive itemisation.
- Submit letters of endorsement from community partners, well-known people or groups active in the community gardening field, community leaders and activists, politicians supportive of your project and its goals.
- Ask an experienced fundraiser or someone with similar skills to read and comment on your proposal before submitting it.
- Timing is important – willingness to contribute may depend upon the ups and downs of business.
- Spread out your request over several donors – don't put all your eggs into one basket.
- Make sure to thank your donors, both privately by letter and publicly.
- Take before and after photos of the site.
- If your proposal is not approved, ask the funder how the proposal could have been better and try again.

How will the garden run?

Decisions that need to be made with the participation of the gardeners

- Will the harvest belong to the gardener or will it be shared communally or will it go to a food bank or other organization?
- How will plots be assigned (by family size, by residency, by need, by group– i.e., youth, elderly, etc.)?

- Will there be a fee for the plots? How much and what services, if any, will be provided to gardeners in return?
- It is a very good idea to draw up a set of written rules which gardeners are expected to uphold. The gardeners should participate in deciding the rules & means of enforcing them and everyone should be given a written copy of the rules.
- Will the group do certain things cooperatively or will the management provide ongoing services (such as turning in soil in the spring, planting cover crops, or composting)?
- When someone leaves a plot, how will the next tenant be chosen?
- How will the group deal with possible vandalism?
- Will there be a children's plot?
- Will there be a garden committee?
- Will there be a garden coordinator & how will this person be chosen?
- Will the gardeners meet regularly? If so, how often and for what purposes?
- Will gardeners share tools, hoses, and other such items?
- How will minimum maintenance (especially weeding) be handled both inside plots and in common areas (such as along fences, in flower beds, and in sitting areas)?
- Will the garden be organic (no chemical pesticides or fertilizers)?
- Will there be any plants that should not be grown?

Community Garden Wish List - How to find what you'll need

If your group is just starting up and needs everything, or if you're looking for something specific, consider published a "wish list" in your garden newsletter, local newspaper, or tell your local garden or service club.

Horticultural Items

- Topsoil, compost, potting soil
- Seeds, bulbs, bedding plants, cover crop seeds
- Perennials, shrubs, fruit bushes, trees, shade trees
- Manure, bone meal, blood meal, other natural fertilisers
- Soil testing kit
- Mulching materials such as shredded leaves, cocoa bean hulls, coconut straw, hay, shredded bark, wood chips, black plastic, corrugated cardboard
- Insecticidal soaps, hand held sprayers

Equipment and Supplies

- Hand tools: forks, spades, shovels, trowels, dibbles, rakes, hoes, cultivators, secateurs (pruning shears), loppers
- Child-sized hand tools
- Garden hose, soaker hose, drip irrigation systems and parts, spray nozzles, hose reels, water barrels, watering cans
- Rototiller, chipper-shredder, mower, edger, wheelbarrow and garden cart
- Plant labels, plot markers, signs, indelible markers
- Plastic, wood or metal edging
- Plastic and clay flower pots, all sizes, seedling trays, peat pots, wood planters
- Locks and chains, fluorescent lights, timers, fabric row covers, cloches, gloves, kneeling pads, tool caddies, tool aprons

Resources - How to find what you'll need

Most gardeners are born scroungers or eventually learn how to do this. There are a lot of free or nearly free materials out there that, with a little effort, can be turned into something of use for the garden. Keep your eyes and mind open!

- Manure: It doesn't have to be bought in bags. Check local stables, including the police, if you are in an urban area.
- Leaves for mulch and compost: Most municipalities now collect leaves in clear plastic bags for their own composting programs. Either beat them to it on collection days or order their finished product.
- Grass clippings for mulch and compost: Rake it up yourself, raid neighbours' curbside collection bags, but beware of herbicide-treated lawns.
- Wood chips for mulch and pathways: Power companies, tree service companies and municipalities chip their trimmings, usually on right on site.
- Miscellaneous mulch and soil amendments: Food processors, coffee grounds, rice, peanut and buckwheat hulls, apple and grape pomace, monument companies for granite dust (a potassium source), feed mills for corncobs, farmers' spoiled hay and straw, construction companies for straw and topsoil.
- Scrap wood: Old pallets (great for making compost bins), dumpsters at lumberyards and construction sites, wooden packing crates (often perfect planters, just as they are). Just make sure that the wood isn't pressure treated (the green colour on the wood).
- Scrap metal: Pipes for posts, trellises can often be found in dumpsters at construction sites.
- Fencing: Scrap wood from various sources (see above), used snow fence (sometimes free from fence companies who rent it to construction companies).

- Gallon plastic buckets: These come in handy for watering, container gardening, hauling anything and everything, protecting newly transplanted seedlings, mixing ingredients. Can be found at restaurants, construction sites, dumpsters.
- Trellis materials: Plumbing companies will often throw out damaged or small pieces of PVC (plastic) pipe. Also, old snow fence makes good plan supports.
- Free or inexpensive seeds and plants: Many nurseries, garden centres, seed companies, and Parks Departments will give away seeds and annual plants at the end of the planting season (usually around mid-June).
- Tools: Garage sales, auctions, second hand stores, tool lending libraries. SEE **GARDEN TOOLS**

Sample Rules and Regulations

The following guidelines are only suggestions. You should adapt them to your particular situation and needs. The best rules are those that the gardeners participate in drawing up. Make sure that the rules you adopt are enforceable and fair. Every gardener should be given a copy in a language in which they are comfortable and they should be posted in a prominent place (see examples at www.cityfarmer.org/gardenrules.html#rules)

- I will pay a fee of \$___ to help cover garden expenses. I understand that \$_____ of this will be refunded to me when I clean up my plot at the end of the season.
- I will have something planted in the garden by [date] and keep it planted all summer long.
- If I must abandon my plot for any reason, I will notify the manager.
- I will keep weeds down and maintain the areas immediately surrounding my plot if any.
- If my plot becomes unkempt, I understand that I will be given one week's notice to clean it up. At that time, it will be re-assigned 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 the fall cleanup of the garden. I understand that the \$_____ deposit will be refunded only to those who participate.
- I will plant tall crops where they will not shade the neighbouring plots.
- I will pick only my own crops unless given permission by the plot user.
- I will not use fertilisers, insecticides or weed repellents that will in any way affect other plots.
- I agree to volunteer hours toward community gardening efforts (include a list of volunteer tasks that your garden needs.)
- I will not bring pets to the garden.
- 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.

Signature of garden member: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Co-ordinator: _____

Garden Tools

Gardeners may not agree on the best mulch or the perfect fertiliser, but there's one thing that every gardener agrees on: when it comes to buying tools, buy the best. Quality garden tools are an investment that yield dividends over time. Here are the top ten gardening tools every community garden should own.

1. **Trowel:** A well-made trowel is your most important tool. From container gardening to large beds, a trowel will help you get your plants into the soil. Every gardener should have one.
2. **Hand fork:** A hand fork helps cultivate soil, chop up clumps and work amendments into the soil. A hand fork is necessary for cultivating in closely planted beds.
3. **Hoe:** A long-handled hoe is a gardener's best friend. Keeping weeds at bay is the purpose of this useful tool.
4. **Secateurs (Hand pruners):** Invest in a pair of quality pruners, such as Felco, which is clearly a cut above. This sturdy pruner is used for clipping rose canes, cutting back perennials, and any other trimming jobs.
5. **Watering can:** Haws are the best in the business. This English watering can creates a fine even stream of water that delivers with a gentleness that won't wash seedlings or sprouting seeds out of their soil.
6. **Fork:** You can't dig and divide perennials without a heavy-duty fork (and some dividing methods even suggest you own two).
7. **Shovel:** The sharper the better. A shovel is a requisite tool for planting larger perennials, shrubs and trees. The most basic act in the garden is breaking ground, so it stands to reason that a sharp shovel will be a key player.
8. **Wheelbarrow:** Wheelbarrows come in all different sizes (and prices). They are indispensable for hauling soil, compost, plants, mulch, hoses, tools...everything you'll need to garden.
9. **Gloves:** Unless you want to ear your favourite hobby under your nails, use gloves. Leather gloves hold up best. If you have roses, get a pair that resist thorn pricks.
10. **Hose:** This is the fastest way to transport lots of water from your water source to your garden.

Tool Care Tips

Clean up: Clean all soil form digging tools after each use. If soil has dried, use a wire brush or even a knife.

How to handle handles: If wooden tool handles are damp, set the tools in the sun to dry before storing. At the end of each gardening season, rub linseed oil or tung oil into handles.

Stay on the cutting edge: Don't forget to sharpen cutting tools and blades of shovels and spades during the garden season. Frequently used tools dull quickly, so keep a whetstone or a sharpener in your tool arsenal.

Chase rust away: Damp tools welcome rust. After each use, wipe down metal parts of pruners, shears, and loppers with an oily rag. This will help keep rust at bay.

Keys to Community Garden Success

Every community garden is as different as the gardeners that belong to them. There are some common traits that the most successful gardens share, despite their other differences. These are:

Establish good lines of communication among all participants

Everyone likes to feel that their voice matters, that what they say and think is acknowledged on an equal basis with everyone else. Good communication is the key to ensuring this. There are often many major decisions to be made in the development of a community garden, especially at the outset. It may sometimes seem easier for one or two people to make decisions for the group, but this usually backfires, especially at the beginning before everyone has had time to get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses.

A good garden coordinator will recognize this and give people the opportunity to express their opinions before decisions are made. Obviously there are some things that the coordinator can and should decide independently or why else have a coordinator. But it is better to err on the side of caution than to pre-empt discussion for the sake of (often imagined) expediency. In addition to regular group meetings, a notice board in the garden is a good way to keep everyone informed about important issues, as is a regular newsletter. And so that no one person is overburdened with the task of telephoning, it is best to set up a telephone tree system.

Develop partnerships within the community

Involve as many like-minded groups and individuals in your project as possible. It is not necessary to be a gardener in order to enjoy and participate in a community garden. Create a "Friends of the Garden" membership category for those people who want to help the project but aren't able, for whatever reason, to take a garden plot. Actively seek out local politicians and other community leaders, members of the media, health professionals, the landscape industry, anti-poverty activists, and anyone else that could help. The more people that feel a personal attachment to the project, the better.

The perfect garden coordinator

A good garden coordinator is all things to all people. She or he is dynamic, enthusiastic, inspiring, a diplomat, a veritable garden encyclopedia, tireless, devoted, able to deal with any problem with ease...and just about impossible to find. Since that's the case, make sure that the candidates fully understand the scope of the job and that as many garden members as possible are involved in the selection process.

Don't rely on only one person

As important as a good coordinator is, it is equally important to have a good organizational team. The success of the project should not rest on any one person's shoulders. If the garden is

associated with a community center or other institution, the coordinator is often a staff member of that organization. But what happens when that person moves on to another position? Without the active involvement of a committed team, the entire project could go into a rapid nose-dive.

Start small

Especially in the first year it is always better to have a small success than a big failure. Taking on too much at the start of any project usually results in burn-out after only a short time. You can always expand in the years to come. Most people are very enthusiastic gardeners in the spring, when that heady combination of sunshine, warm temperatures and sweet smelling soil is too intoxicating to resist. By mid-summer that enthusiasm has waned considerably as the less than glamorous garden chores, like weeding and deadheading, compete with swimming, baseball and other summer fun. Don't get too discouraged when this inevitably happens. Instead, create some sort of special event or activity that will draw the gardeners back to the garden and help them to recall the excitement they felt in May.

Choose your site well

Look for a site that is visible, safe, centrally located, in an area that will benefit from a community garden, has plenty of sun (at least 6 hours), good access, both by foot and for deliveries, and has the support of the neighbours. The area should be as flat as possible and should have good drainage (no wet spots). Make sure the location you've chosen has easy access to water. To cut down on pollution from cars, try to find a spot that isn't too close to a stop sign or traffic light or adjacent to a parking lot. Don't hide the garden away from view—vandals prefer not to be seen. The more people can see you, the safer the garden will be. Do a soil test for nutrients & heavy metals if the past uses of the land warrants it. (Call the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for a list of labs and the simple procedures for taking a soil sample)

Keep the garden well maintained year round

Vegetable gardens often have the reputation of being less than attractive. This is usually the result of haphazard maintenance by the people rather than an aesthetic short-coming on the part of the plants. Don't give any would-be detractors ammunition against the garden. Let the gardeners know what is expected of them with a clearly defined, written set of garden by-laws. Keep the grass trimmed, common areas neat, the beds weeded (or better yet, mulched), pick up trash daily, locate the compost area out of sight as much as possible, plant flowers around the edges of the site as well as within the plots, and try to design the site with imagination—there is no rule that says a garden has to be laid out in perfect 10ft x20 ft rectangular plots.

Build a strong sense of community

Most community garden projects don't start out with this elusive quality already intact unless the group has come together before for other projects. Quite often most of the gardeners have never met before, or are the all too common kind of neighbours who say hello to each other but never really get beyond that. A community garden provides an excellent setting in which to get to know other people without many of the normal barriers to communication that we, unfortunately, create. It's hard to develop respect for someone when you don't have the opportunity to get to know them. When people are working together for a common cause, enjoying the fresh air, with their hands in the soil and the beauty of nature all around, things like how much money they make and where their grandmother was born don't seem to matter as much as they did before.

When we can come together to create something with other people, especially something that adds beauty to our lives and helps us to feel that we are contributing something positive, a very special bond can begin to grow. And with careful nurturing it can blossom into that essential ingredient to human happiness: connection, a sense of belonging, a feeling of community.

Provide educational opportunities for the gardeners

Not all, or even most, of the participants will be knowledgeable gardeners when they join the garden. A wise coordinator will understand that a first time gardener's enthusiasm is linked to a successful harvest. That doesn't mean that the first year has to yield a record bumper crop, but it can be very demoralizing if nothing does well. Many novice gardeners will benefit from a bit of guidance from a more experienced gardener, either formally, as in a workshop, or informally, from the life-long gardener in a nearby plot. Actively encourage these opportunities, if necessary.

Growing Your Group

Garden Guidelines

Guidelines Inspire Guidelines are goals with behaviors associated to them. They are more than a list of "Do's and Don'ts" or "No this, No that."

Begin with a brief mission statement that unites the group and the garden to a larger purpose. Example: "Our mission is to strengthen our neighborhood by maintaining a sitting garden where people can get to know each other." Vision + Action = Mission

Identify the garden's needs and name the responsibilities people will have to take on to meet the needs and support the mission. Know the group's abilities and limitations before setting goals.

Start with a few guidelines that will help the group get going. Write them out and provide each person a copy. Schedule to review the guidelines, growing them along with the group.

Rules versus Guidelines "No leaving tools out;" vs. "We value our resources. Be sure to put all tools away." Keep them positive.

Set a few small goals for the garden per 3-month phases and the year. Review them, adjust them, and set a few new ones. A goal not met simply is an opportunity to learn. There is no failure when real learning occurs.

Communication

Listening The most important skill is listening; hearing another person from their perspective. "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Win-win vs. lose-lose.

Give everyone a chance to voice his or her opinion, and be sure everyone feels heard.

Expect differences From the beginning, set up how the group will resolve differences and conflicts. CONFLICT IS AN OPPORTUNITY to create strength in the group by embracing it and navigating to resolution. Never give up, even in times when the group is struggling. Welcome the growing pains.

Celebrate! With frequent small celebrations and occasional big ones. Afternoon juice and cookies, pot lucks, BBQs, musicians, plays, poetry readings, bake sale.

Sharing the joy of successes along the way is group communication to each other: stating pride, joy, appreciation of each other, community.

Share Leadership

Everyone has some leader qualities in them, so find ways that they can be expressed. Share leadership via roles, responsibilities, committees, etc. Support each other in filling the roles. A common mistake is that one person assumes the role, the group lets them, and some form of dictatorship occurs, or a good-hearted person burns out from taking on too much.

Inventory the group's skills and resources, person by person. Match a person's skills to the roles and how that fits into the mission. This keeps people personally invested in the project.

Reaching Out

An Open Invitation A group that doesn't seek new participants will gradually shrink and cease to exist. Invite people into the garden simply to experience it from the inside. Just being in it without feeling pressure to work can inspire people to gradually participate, or at least be an advocate for the garden and your efforts. Announce events such as: celebrations, garden work days, meetings, fund raisers, barbecues, etc.

Always reach out to people to participate Ask in an inviting way, honoring a "no," without accepting it as a permanent answer. Some people need to be asked a few times. Stop when it's clear they are absolutely not interested, perhaps with an open-ended invitation to come by should they want to.

Invite everyone Invite people in-person when possible, and provide a written invitation as well (card, flyer). Include area residents, store owners, local organizations (faith congregations, hospitals, social services) etc. local officials to. Your garden and other community efforts will be more successful if the neighborhood feels welcome and included.

Youth

Youth Is the Future in the Present Many elder gardeners are now isolated for rejecting youth over the years as irresponsible and disrespectful. If not from adults, from whom are youth supposed to learn responsibility and respect?

Reach out to youth again and again Be patient and encouraging with them as they learn. Allow mistakes. Let their interest grow gradually. Be realistic with what you ask them to do.

They Just Want To Belong Very often, youth who have vandalized gardens, but were invited in to learn rather than punished, often become eager participants and protectors of the gardens. Get past anger and feeling victimized; don't grow animosity; grow gardeners! Like with conflict, youthful indiscretion is an opportunity to learn and teach.

Adapted from Growing Your Group: by Philadelphia Green