



Humanity Healing™

healing the heart of humanity one soul at a time

Starting a Community Garden

General Guidelines



There are many ways to start a community garden. Whether you're working with friends, neighbors, or a local organization, there are many things you'll want to consider before you ever dig the first hole.

This fact sheet is designed to give many different groups the basic information they need to get their gardening project off the ground. These lists are in no way meant to be complete. Each main idea will probably trigger more questions, so an assortment of ways to carry out that idea are presented; pick and choose those that seem to apply to your own situation.

FORM A PLANNING COMMITTEE

- Determine if there really is a need and desire for a garden.
- What kind of garden--vegetable, flower, trees, a combination?
- Who will the garden serve--youth, seniors, special populations, people who just want an alternative to trash?
- If the project is meant to benefit a particular group or neighborhood, it is essential that the group be involved in all phases
- Organize a meeting of interested people.
- Choose a well-organized garden coordinator.
- Form committees to accomplish tasks: Funding & Resource Development; Youth Activities; Construction; Communication.

- Approach a sponsor. A sponsor is an individual or organization that supports a community garden. Site sponsorship can be a tremendous asset. Contributions of land, tools, seeds, fencing, soil improvements or money are all vital to a successful community garden. Some community gardens can provide most of their provisions through fees charged to the membership; but for many, a garden sponsor is essential. Churches, schools, citizens groups, private businesses, local parks and recreation departments are all potential supporters. Community Development Block Grants are sometimes available through your municipality.
- Make a list of what needs to be done.
- Find a garden site.
- Obtain lease or agreement from owner.
- Decide on a mailing address and central telephone number(s). Try to have at least 3 people who are very familiar with all pertinent information. Form a telephone tree.
- If your community garden has a budget, keep administration in the hands of several people.
- Choose a name for the garden.

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Choose a site

- Identify the owner of the land.
- Make sure the site gets at least 6 full hours of sunlight daily (for vegetables).
- Do a soil test in the fall for nutrients & heavy metals.
- Consider availability of water.

- Try and get a lease or agreement which allows the space to be used at least for 3 years.
- Consider past uses of the land. Is there any contamination?
- Is insurance something you need to consider?

PREPARE AND DEVELOP THE SITE

- Clean the site.
- Develop your design.
- Gather your resources--try to gather free materials.
- Organize volunteer work crews.
- Plan your work day.
- Decide on plot sizes, mark plots clearly with gardener's names.
- Include plans for a storage area for tools and other equipment, as well as a compost area.
- Have a rainproof bulletin board for announcing garden events and messages.
- Arrange for land preparation--plowing, etc--or let gardeners do their own prep.
- Will the garden be organic?
- Lay out garden to place flower or shrub beds around the visible perimeter. This helps to promote good will with non-gardening neighbors, passersby, and municipal authorities.



ORGANIZE THE GARDEN

- Are there conditions for membership (residence, dues, agreement with rules)?
- How will plots be assigned (by family size, by residency, by need, by group-- i.e., youth, elderly, etc.)?
- How large should plots be (or should there be several sizes based on family size or other factors)?
- How should plots be laid out?

- If the group charges dues, how will the money be used? What services, if any, will be provided to gardeners in return?
- Will the group do certain things cooperatively (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 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 there be a set of written rules which gardeners are expected to uphold? If so, how will they be enforced?
- Should your group incorporate and consider eventually owning your garden site?

How to Manage Your Community Garden



Sample Guidelines and Rules

Some may be more relevant to vegetable gardens than to community flower gardens or parks. Pick and choose what best fits your situation.

- I will pay a fee of \$___ to help cover garden expenses.
- 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 garden leadership.
- I will keep weeds at a minimum and maintain the areas immediately surrounding my plot if any.
- 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 re-assigned or tilled in.
- I will keep trash and litter out of the plot, as well as from adjacent pathways and fences.
- I will participate in the fall cleanup of the garden.
- I will plant tall crops where they will not shade neighboring plots.
- I will pick only my own crops unless given permission by another plot user.
- I will not use fertilizers, 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 which 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.

Application Forms

Application forms can include any of the following information:

Name(s)

Address Zip

Telephone number:

Days

Evenings

Site Preference:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Size of plot. (list choices available)

Season:

Year round (must be maintained all year)

Short season (include dates)

Check the appropriate items:

- I am a senior citizen
- I am physically disabled
- This is my first year at this garden
- I would like a garden next to a friend, Name
- I have gardened here before and would like plot # ___ if available
- I have gardened before at (where?); for how long?

TROUBLESHOOTING

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

- Make a sign for the garden. Let people know to whom the garden belongs and that it is a neighborhood project.
- Fences can be of almost any material. They serve as much to mark possession of a property as to prevent entry, since nothing short of razor-wire and land mines will keep a determined vandal from getting in. Short picket fences or turkey wire will keep out dogs and honest people.
- 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 gardens. They can be the garden's best protectors. (see below.)
- Plant raspberries, roses or other thorny plants along the fence as a barrier to fence climbers.
- Make friends with neighbors whose windows 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 potatoes, other root crops or a less popular vegetable such as kohlrabi along the side walk or fence.
- Plant the purple varieties of cauliflower and beans or the white eggplant to confuse a vandal.
- Plant a "vandal's garden" at the entrance. Mark it with a sign: "If you must take food, please take it from here."



- Children included in the garden process become champions of the cause rather than vandals of the garden. Therefore your garden may want to allocate some plots specifically for children. The "children's garden" can help market your idea to local scout troops, day cares, foster grandparent programs, church groups, etc.
- Consider offering free small plots in the children's garden to children whose parents already have a plot in the garden.

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.

How to Start a Community Garden on a Vacant Lot

A vacant lot can be an asset instead of an eyesore.

Many people move to the suburbs because there is lots of open space for children to play, for people to plant gardens of flowers and vegetables and enjoy a healthy, beautiful environment as well as improved property values. Chicago has open space, too, but the problem is that much of it is neglected. Open space in Chicago can be every bit as beautiful and useful as open space in the suburbs. In addition to the vacant lots, there are parkways, school yards, commercial and industrial strips, and even parking lots. All of these areas can be improved with plantings and maintenance making Chicago a more beautiful, and even safer, place to live, work and raise children.



Here is a brief outline of what is involved when people are trying to decide how to improve a piece of land for open space.

Step 1. Organize

Organize a meeting with people who can or should care about a garden. Help them to understand what work is involved in starting and caring for a garden and start right away to work to gain their commitment to the project.

Step 2. Decide on the Garden Goals

A. Should it be a park for active recreation like a play lot or basketball court? Do neighbors prefer a sitting garden, a vegetable garden? Raised beds or plantings directly in the ground, if possible? Individually maintained plots or cooperatively managed garden? If there is a great need

for parking, consider how to include plantings into a parking lot design. Does this seem like a spot for permanent open space or just a temporary beautification until something is built there?

B. Does the group want to own or lease the land to insure that it is protected as the desired open space? Ownership (or tenancy) is necessary in order to secure funding for improvements, which can be another goal..

C. Does the group want to seek funding and donations to work on the property? And are they willing to assume the long term responsibility for planting, maintenance and even potential liability for the site?

Step 3. Survey the Site

A. Is this the right place for a garden or other kind of development?

B. Does it have sun, access to water from a hydrant or neighboring building. Are the nearest neighbors interested? Will they help?

C. How is the site currently used? (a shortcut, sports, etc.) Will this project build on that current use, or interfere with that use. Which use does the group want to incorporate in the garden design?

Step 4. Research and Gather the Resources

Determine what resources are needed and available in and out of the community:

A. Create a list of items needed for the garden based on the design (ideas below) that includes tools, supplies, materials and services like tilling if necessary, fencing, water lines, lumber for beds and signs. Come up with a budget for these things and then see what you can get donated or funded. Survey your neighbors - you will be surprised what they can provide!

B. Seek cooperation from community groups and other organizations in the area.

C. Call the Alderman, Ward Office, Park Advisory Groups, Park Superintendents, business groups, schools. See what they can offer in terms of labor, money, materials. Don't leave out Chicago Department of the Environment, University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Morton Arboretum and Chicago Botanic Garden. They have extensive information on growing things and may even have materials or money.

D. Plant and gardening information and funding sources:

1. [Chicago Botanic Gardens](#) has plant and community gardening information and education services.
2. Chicago Department of the the Environment has a comprehensive community garden assistance program called [Greencorps Chicago](#). The program includes materials and training sessions in the spring and fall. They also provide free plant distribution days.
3. [University of Illinois' Extension Master Gardener Program](#) and plant information.
4. Openlands organizes and provides general technical assistance including help ordering mulch

from the city, Great Perennial Divide (free plants for community gardeners), GreenChicago mini-grants distribution and the TreeKeeper Program. Call 312-427-6256 for more information.

Step 5. Design the Garden

- A. Draw a diagram of where each element should be
- B. Research the kinds of plants and trees that do well in the city with low maintenance and add to diagram
- C. Consider structures like benches, arbors, tables and art work like statues and murals
- D. Be sure to include a compost area to collect plant refuse and to create your own garden fertilizer.

Step 6. Plan the Work to get the Project Started

Create a list of tasks and a schedule or time line and work out a system so that garden volunteers can do a share of the work. Look ahead a few years and think about how to phase in planting and building projects. Don't try to do everything the first year, but start with the "skeleton" of lot clearing, bed and soil installing, and a few plants in year one and build up from there. Be prepared to at least:

WINTER- Plan and hold several meetings to plan garden and assign work (TIME: one or two meetings a month)

SPRING - Clean, prepare soil or build and fill beds, spread mulch, purchase seeds and plants, plant and water. (TIME: several long work days and then at least once-a-week care to water, weed. Time depends on size of lot and number of volunteers!)

SUMMER - Weeding and watering as necessary, general plant maintenance such as "deadheading", fertilizing, mulching and composting (TIME: at least two times a week for two hour shifts)

FALL - harvest, remove plants and add to compost pile, fertilize, plan winter meetings, update garden journal and garden diagram to help when planning for next spring. (TIME: two or three times and week in two hour sessions)

One or two hours of volunteer work a week can accomplish a lot of planting and weeding and of course harvesting at the end of the summer and fun all season long!

Step 7. Dig In!

A. If an abandoned building is still on the property; work with the Alderman and the ward superintendent to make sure that what is good about the site is protected, such as the lawn, parkway and back yard and any plantings like trees and shrubs. Make sure that demolition is followed by clearing rubble, spreading top soil and mulch from the Bureau of Forestry.

B. If the lot is empty, and needs clearing, ask for the ward office's help to do this. Organize neighbors to work along side the crews to make sure care is taken.

Garden Etiquette



Gardening courtesy and communication

One of the main goals in community gardening is to work together or next to each other in relative harmony. Please be courteous in all interactions, and work together to resolve any disagreements. Contact your Garden Manager for guideline clarifications or plot delineation. Garden Managers will check plots regularly to encourage productive use by participants. Gardeners should make arrangements for plot maintenance and notify the Garden Manager if they

will be away for more than a week.

What constitutes a “working garden”

A garden plot must be maintained, planted or mulched, and stay within its boundaries. Plots may not be consistently weedy, untended or filled with debris. Gardeners are expected to spend at least 2 hours per week, on average, tending the plot during the growing seasons.

Growing seasons

Gardeners are responsible for keeping the plot gardened, cover-cropped or mulched. Weedy plots are subject to warning and cancellation. The spring growing season is approximately February through May. Summer growing season is approximately June through August. Fall gardening is usually September and October, with most gardens prepared for winter with mulch or cover crop. Perennial crops and some annual winter hardy crops may be overwintered, but should be maintained.

What to grow

Vegetables, herbs, flowers, and small fruit plants for home consumption and donation are appropriate. It is not acceptable to allow quantities of produce to rot. No large structures, trees, or large collection of non-plant items are allowed.

Getting started

The **May 1** deadline exists to motivate our gardeners to show that they are going to use the garden plot, and not waste it. The minimum requirements of “getting started” include:

- Weeding, planting
- Working some of the soil in preparation for planting
- Harvesting of crops, if appropriate
- Pathway clean-up

By **June 1**, there should be marked progress towards a productive garden, which includes:

- At least ½ the plot(s) worked
- Removal of remaining weeds
- Establishing and caring for plants
- Continued pathway maintenance

By **July 1**, there should be gardening activity, and weeding in the whole plot.

October clean-up

Annual crops should be harvested and the plants cleaned up and composted. Garden plots should be cover-cropped and/or mulched around perennial plants by **October 31**.

Water availability

Water in the gardens is turned on by March 30 and shut off by October 30.

Pathway maintenance

Paths must be 2½ to 3 feet wide, level, and either wood chip mulched or mowed. No plastic or carpet should be used. Cardboard or paper must be covered by wood chips, and leveled. Plants should not grow into the paths, or hang over the paths. Each garden site will designate path maintenance responsibility.

Steps to organizing a work party

If you would like to organize a work party at your garden, first talk to your garden manager about what tasks you'd like to accomplish. Then talk to other gardeners to gauge their interest in forming a work party. If enough people are interested, call the Community Garden office at 503-823-1612 to finalize the details.

Tool care

Any soil that clings to the metal surface of your tools should be removed. You will probably find it easier to wash off the larger soil patches with a strong stream of water from the hose. Small soil particles and rust spots are easily removed with sandpaper. It pays to keep your tools in good working order. To keep the handle from drying out and splitting, rub the handle with linseed oil. Wipe off any excess so it won't get tacky. They will last much longer and will operate more efficiently if you do.

Dogs in gardens

Dogs must be leashed and not allowed to run through the garden or go into other garden plots. Please be mindful that your pet is not crushing other gardener's plants or peeing on their produce.

Notification of abandoned/under-worked garden

1. Garden Manager calls gardener to set date for work to be done by gardener.
2. If gardener does not meet agreed-upon date, gardener will receive a 5-day notice to clean up garden or lose plot.
3. If gardener does not respond, gardener will receive a cancellation letter, and the plot will be assigned to another gardener.

Role of Garden Managers

- Keep track of plots that are used well, that are neglected, or are abandoned, and report these to the Community Gardens office.
- Write letters to the gardeners. The Community Gardens office will copy and mail out the letters. Newsletter articles can be written by the Garden Managers or by a gardener and submitted to the *Garden Notebook* newsletter.
- Help to resolve a conflict regarding garden site issues such as: pathway lines, water time and use, and other site issues. A measure of logic and cooperation is always the best approach.
- Organize and lead site garden meetings or events. Community Gardens can assist, if necessary.
- Form work parties to enhance the maintenance or renovation of the community areas at the site. This may include plot layout, compost work, planting or mulching.
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- **Attend quarterly all-City Garden Manager meetings.**
- **Work with other Garden Managers and Site Assistants. Help service learning volunteers and Master Gardener volunteers to work on site projects and programs.**
 - **Organize care for shared areas and assist with habitat areas**

Community Gardening Resources

There is a wealth of information on-line about urban gardening. For New York City Community Gardeners, there are a number of public and private organizations that provide a variety of services to community gardeners.

Individual Community Garden Websites

[6/15 Green](#)

[6th and B Garden](#)

[Clinton Community Garden](#)

[Creative Little Garden](#)

[El Puente Espirito Tierra](#)

[First Street Garden](#)

[The Floyd Bennett Garden Association](#)

[Garden of Union](#)

[Greene Acres Community Garden](#)

[JFK High School](#)

[LaGuardia Corner Gardens](#)

[La Plaza Cultural](#)
[Le Petit Versailles](#)
[Liz Christy Garden](#)
[M'Finda Kalunga Community Garden](#)
[Red Hook Community Farm](#)
[R.I.N.G. Garden](#)
[West 124th Street Community Garden](#)
[West Side Community Garden](#)

Horticultural information:

Cooperative Extension Service in your county
Garden Clubs
Horticultural Societies
Garden Centers

Seeds:

America the Beautiful Fund
725 15th St. NW, Suite 605, Dept. AG
Washington D.C. 20005
202-838-1649

Garden Centers and Hardware Stores

Bedding plants:

Local nurseries
Vocational-Tech Horticulture Department
High school Horticulture classes
Parks Department

Thank you for all the information we acquired on American Community Garden Association:

<http://www.communitygarden.org/>