



POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND REDUCTION PROGRAMME BEST PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY FOOD GARDENS

INTRODUCTION

Creating and maintaining a community garden has been identified as an effective strategy to combat food insecurity. This also promotes the healthy food awareness and consumption.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY GARDEN?

A community garden is a garden that is shared by community members who share common goal of growing vegetables and fruits in order to provide for their families and other community members who are in need.

Community gardens vary in their structure and format. They can consist of collective plots, individual plots in one area or it can be combination of the two. The food gardens can support Early Childhood Development Centres, old age homes, shelters for homeless people etc.



WHY START A COMMUNITY GARDEN?

A community garden can help improve food security for community members by increasing economic access to proper amounts of healthy food. Community gardens provide economic, health, educational, social and environmental benefits to participants and the community at large.

The following are also benefits of community gardens:

- Encourage physical activity for all age groups.
- Create a social gathering place for community members and encourage the sharing of knowledge and transferring of skills.²
- Enable participants to learn basic gardening skills (soil preparation, sowing seeds, crop maintenance and harvesting).
- Encourage people to better understand their food system
- Provide fresh, healthy and low cost vegetables
- Help to improve the local environment by preserving and growing green space.

TYPES OF COMMUNITY GARDENS

It is important to choose a community garden model that will best serve the unique needs of the community as there are dynamics in communities. There are two common types of community gardens:

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1. Collective community gardens
2. Plot community gardens

1. Collective community gardens

Everyone contributes their efforts to one large garden from which everyone shares the harvest. The group agree what to plant and how to design the space.

This type of gardens requires some cooperation and work best with a small number of participants (3-8). The collective community garden is suitable for groups that have a strong membership and that meet on a regular basis. This can be at a school, church, a crèche or club for elderly group. Beginner gardeners may excel in this environment as they are supported by a strong common goal and they can learn new skills easily.



2. Plot community gardens

Plot community gardens divide the garden space into plots that are each independently maintained by an individual. These individuals may come and go on their own schedule. This type can provide a gardening space to individuals and community organisations that may not have access to it at home.³

This type works well for groups with different schedules and a variety of goals for what they want from their gardening experience. This type is well preferred by people who like to work seasonal.



ESTABLISHMENT OF A GARDEN

Criteria:

- People must have a written permission to use the land. This must be at least for 5 years. This is to ensure sustainability of the garden.
- The land must be fenced. This helps to restrict alien objects like dogs and people who might steal the produce.
- Availability of water -for any food garden to start, it needs enough water.
- Committed community members.

Getting started: Steps to success

There is no best way to start a community garden; however, the following is a list of steps to consider:



Step 1: Identify a group

- Let people know about the plan to have a community garden. This will allow the initiator to access the interest, support and commitment of people who are interested.
- Some communities may already have group of people who are interested.
- Let people know the benefits-economic, health and social benefits
- Promote the garden through word of mouth

Step 2: Form a garden committee

- After engaging the community, form a gardening committee of volunteers to help establish and run the garden.
- The committee can be made up of people who feel committed to the development of the community garden and have time.
- Best volunteers for the committee are the garden participants.
- This committee needs to decide when to have meetings.

Step 3: Establish partnerships

It is vital to establish partnerships with people or organizations that can help bring together the resources needed to successfully start the garden. Working with partner organisation can assist the garden with site, experience and resources.

The following are the possible partners:

- Department of Agriculture
- Local Farmers
- Local business
- Funding agencies
- Churches, schools, shelters, crèches and NGOs

Step 4: Select a site

There are many factors to keep in mind when selecting a site. These include the following:

- Sun/shade patterns (6 hours of direct sunlight)
- Wind patterns
- Drainage patterns
- Changes in elevation
- Soil conditions and quality
- Existing trees
- Existing shrubs and flower beds
- Existing building
- Existing structures
- Existing fences
- Traffic patterns
- Existing play areas (crèches)
- Existing sitting areas
- Space to accommodate future plans for expansion

Step 5: Community food garden support/sponsorship

There are number of different ways community gardens can get resources they need to establish or maintain the garden. Possible funding opportunities for community gardens include the following:

- Municipal and provincial government support
- Fundraising
- Membership
- Local businesses

Step 6: Plan and design the garden

Every community garden plan is different and is determined by the group of gardeners' needs. Type of a garden provides a description which will be helpful in developing a garden model.

The following points are general principles for designing a successful community garden:

- Consider fencing if the space is not fenced
- Orient plots for best growing conditions (direct sunlight, wind breaks etc.)
- Provide composting area
- Provide space for storage, greenhouses, rain harvest containers.

- Allow for convenient water access

Step 7: Determine garden rules and guidelines

Rules and guidelines should be established through consultation with gardeners, committees and other relevant stakeholders like land owners and funders where applicable. These rules and guidelines will ensure that everyone understands how the garden operates and what is expected of participants. These rules and guidelines will include information about the health and safety for the garden. Also, include rules and guidelines for working with others, sharing space and treating each other with respect. The following highlights some of the rules and guidelines:

- Code of conduct
- Agreement on membership fees if applicable
- Safe handling of tools, material and chemicals
- Gardening procedures
- Important contact of members
- Records of day to day activities
- Responsibilities

Step 8: Start community garden

There are four key areas to construct the garden:

- Prepare the site
- Build and install garden infrastructure where needed
- Plant the garden
- Garden maintenance

Stage 1: Prepare the site

- For many community gardens, the site will require some level of preparation prior to building infrastructure and planting the garden.
- Organize volunteer work crews to help clear the site by removing debris and other unwanted materials.
- You may need to organize a bulk garbage pick-up with municipal collection, or a trip to the local dump to remove materials from the site.
- If possible the soil should be tested before planting the garden to determine the soil quality and whether raised beds are required.

Stage 2: Build and Install Garden Infrastructure

- Once the site has been cleared and prepared, it is time to build and install required garden infrastructure.
- The infrastructure that is installed will depend on the garden design and needs of the group.
- Keep in mind that not all of these are required to be completed in the first year, and that projects can be added as the garden develops. Some of the items you will want to consider installing include:
 - Easily accessible raised beds
 - Pathways and ramps
 - Composting bins where applicable
 - Garden shed
 - Rain barrels

- Fencing and gate

Stage 3: Plan and garden

- When deciding what to plant in the garden, consider what the community likes to eat, growing conditions, which crops are easiest to grow, and which plants offer the highest nutritional value.
- Work with local gardeners and farmers to select the crops that will grow well in the region, and select plants that are likely to succeed.
- Depending on experience and timing of planting, the group may choose to plant the garden from seed, use transplants (seedlings or young plants that are transplanted from a pot or tray into the garden), or a combination of both.

Stage 4: Garden maintenance

- Successful community gardens require considerable collective and individual plot maintenance throughout the season.
- Collectively, gardeners and volunteers will be expected to work together to maintain shared spaces including communal plots, composting bins, garden sheds, and greenhouses.
- The garden coordinator should develop a to-do list of general maintenance that needs to be completed regularly at the garden.
- Post the to-do list in a visible spot at the garden and encourage that tasks be shared equally among gardeners and volunteers.
- Communal tasks will include:
 - Building raised beds, compost boxes, sheds, and other shared infrastructure
 - Distributing large deliveries of soil over multiple beds or plots
 - Proper cleaning and storage of shared tools
 - Collection of litter and yard debris (branches, twigs, etc.)
 - Proper use of the compost bin, including keeping it closed to prevent pests
 - Sweeping or raking up leaves on walkways/paths
 - Upkeep of sheds, fences, greenhouses and other infrastructure; and
 - Clearing moss from stone or brick walkways which could become slippery.
 - Many community gardens organize a harvest party during the fall to bring together gardeners and volunteers to harvest the bounty from their gardens. Harvest parties can be organized as educational events where gardeners participate in a workshop on harvesting techniques for crops that were planted in the garden.

Design Guidelines for Community Gardens

Adapted from Dig it! A practical Toolkit: How local governments can support community gardens, by Herb Barbolet, Co-published by: Ministry of Community Development and Union of British Columbia Municipalities, spring 2009.

Guiding Principles for Designing and Planning Community Gardens

Celebrate food: Build outdoor facilities for outdoor eating that enable people to socialize and celebrate food.

Productive landscape: Choose plants that produce food or herbs. Edible flowers add a pleasing aesthetic.

Appearance: Design community gardens to be attractive and easily maintained.

Showcase: Use community demonstration gardens to profile urban agriculture practices, and locate gardens in communal spaces.

Think like a gardener: Design community gardens from the perspective of a user (e.g., think about wheelbarrow turning and loading zones).

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Ecological health: Maintain community gardens with plant and soil health in mind. Promote the use of natural building materials, fertilization, and pest control.

Inclusiveness: Design for all mobility levels.

Safety: Ensure safety for all ages by pro-actively addressing potential hazards.

Eyes on the garden: Ensure that sites are highly visible to the surrounding community.

Long-term stability: Design the garden with growth in mind. Leave space available for additional plots or common areas.

Design for energy efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability: Organize the garden to ensure that the most commonly used amenities are most easily accessible.

Easing movement in the garden: Gardens should be designed for easy movement of soil, plants, tools and water. One-foot wide paths between beds and two-foot widths between bed clusters are a minimum. Four-foot wide paths are required for full accessibility. Include space for vehicle access and loading areas. A small number of parking spots and a bike lock-up area should be available.

Composting: On-site composting is the key to managing gardens and creating nutrient rich soils. One three-stage composter is generally required for every 10-15 standard sized (4' X 8') garden beds, or every 320-480 square feet.

Additional soil amendments: Additional amendments may be required beyond compost. Manure, fish meal, seaweed and other supplements should be considered. Cover crops could be used in winter months to maintain soil fertility.

Structures: On-site structures can include storage sheds, potting areas, greenhouses, benches, playgrounds, and harvest tables. These enhance the garden environment and provide spaces for people to gather.

Fencing: Low, permeable fences can exclude wildlife and signal that the garden is a special place with specific rules. Green fences – edible shrubs and trees – are a friendly and attractive alternative to traditional fencing.

Structural Design Suggestions for Community Gardens

When planning new community gardens, the following structural design suggestions should be considered:

Raised beds: Raised beds are useful when ground soil is contaminated. Beds should be a maximum of two feet wide to allow access from one side, and a maximum of four feet wide to allow access from two sides. Where space is limited, a minimum of 32 sq. ft. (4' X 8') is sufficient to grow a good range and quantity of produce. Wheelchair accessible gardens should be 24" to 48" above grade. 42

Soil: Soil depth for in-ground and raised beds should be a minimum of six". Some vegetable require 12" to 18" of soil. Think about what you will be planting before building raised beds.

Water: Having a site with water access nearby is essential. Plan your garden to allow for easy access to water from all garden plots. Rain barrels can collect rainwater to be stored and used in the garden as a sustainable source of water.

“GROWING A FOOD GARDEN IS A KEY TO A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY”.