



Community Gardening:

An Overview for Getting Started!

By Bettylou Sandy of Bettylou's Gardening

The term “community” is the key to community gardening. Gardening is a favorite pastime for many people and a necessity for others. Food security often requires that we grow our own food to be able to feed ourselves, and our families. What better way to eat healthy food, get fresh air, sunshine and exercise, than gardening with other people who want the same things.

The style and function of community gardens vary according to the goals and vision of the people coordinating the projects. Community gardens could be large farms maintained by a group to share the harvest, or a field divided into sections where each person does their own garden in community with others. Other options could be a small vacant lot, or other space in a neighborhood where neighbors grow food and improve the neighborhood environment. There are endless styles and purposes all with the same motivation of feeding people, getting in touch with the natural world around us, and becoming less dependant on other countries for our food, while sharing community.

We will discuss the ways to begin a community garden, and then keep it going. There are books and other resources available, at the end of this document, for those people who are managing the garden, as well as the gardeners. The experience of other people who have participated in the adventure of community gardening is a very valuable resource. Never underestimate the value of information available to us from those who have gone before us in some way.

We begin with an idea to use a piece of land, to grow food and to bring people together. From there, a plan needs to be made as to how to get that done. There are a variety of questions to ask before the project gets very far. The following questions are numbered for reference, not for order of importance.

1) Does the site for the garden have full sunlight all day?

Most vegetables require 8 to 10 hours of direct sunlight per day in the warm growing season.

2) Is it accessible to future gardeners?

How far will people need to walk with their supplies to the garden, etc.?

3) Who owns the land?

This will determine insurance, future planning, limitations, etc.

4) Is it a privately owned, town or state owned?

5) Who needs to be involved in the process to acquire or plan the use of that land?

Grounds maintenance staff, health department, neighbors of the garden space, etc.

6) Is there enough interest in the community to support it?

A committed team of 5 to 7 people is best for starting a community garden and keeping it going.

7) How will it be advertised, and who will be the target audience?

8) Who will be responsible for the project?

Having one person, or a team, is important for a focal point for future communication and decision making. It is also important for conflict resolution.

9) Who is the final authority; an individual, a town committee, an association of the gardeners of the season, or school group?

10) Who will be the contact person for questions and applications for sections?

There must be a “go to” person.

11) Who will have insurance for the property?

Things happen sometimes.

12) What is the purpose of the garden?

Will the garden be to support a food bank, or for the individuals, who raise the food, school educational resource, or a combination of many of these and other purposes?

13) What is the style of the garden?

Decisions for design, future growth; framed raised beds, or flat rows, or containers should be considered for the space.

14) Will it be handicap accessible?

Accessible Framed raised beds of various heights, handicap parking, pathways, restroom, etc.

15) What is the quality of the soil?

A soil test is always recommended to determine if there are any heavy metals, like lead in the soil. Also the quality of the soil will determine the success of the crops to be grown and amendments to the soil for the desired crops.

16) Who will break the ground?

Will there be a ceremony? Who should be there and who will have the ceremonial shovels?

Will this be a large volunteer event, a person and a machine, people sorting stone and soil, establishing the beds and plots, or garden area?

17) How will ground be broken to prepare the soil for planting?

Will this be a large volunteer event with hand tools, or a person and a machine, people sorting stone and soil, establishing the beds and plots, or garden area?

18) How will the garden be maintained through the season?

Will each gardener have their own space, or plant types? Will everyone come on assigned days to water, weed and harvest? Who will determine when plants need more or less water and soil enhancements? Will this be a group effort or a group of individuals?

19) What will be the “season” for growing?

Will it be March to November, May to September, or all year long?

20) If gardeners rent their space, what will be the terms? How long will the rental be?

And what if a person comes in the middle of the season?

21) What will the responsibilities be for each gardener? What is the responsibility of the coordinator or group?

22) Questions of security (people and animals) must be addressed.

Consider things such as a fence, gates and signage.

23) What rules will be established for the garden?

This keeps order and a reference in times of conflict.

24) How will people be motivated to continue through the summer into the fall?

Spring is for high energy and hope. Mid summer is hot, often dry and sometimes discouraging. People will often stop maintaining their space and loose interest if the weeds or heat get ahead of them.

25) What kind of resources will be needed at the garden?

Water, tools, soil improvements, plant supports, among other things, need to be considered?

26) Will there be a shed to store tools and equipment? Who will have access to it and when?

27) Will a “gathering space” be provided for the gardeners to rest and communicate with each other?

In the middle of the summer when it is very hot and dry, people appreciate having some shade to sit and relax for a little while.

28) What will be the form of communication with other gardeners?

An email list, bulletin board, phone chain, etc.

29) How much funding will be required per season?

For materials, staff, gardener gatherings, seminars, etc.

30) What staff will be hired as resources?

A staff person would answer questions about gardening, or protocol in the garden, or keep track of “rentals” and other funds for the garden. A staff person might also recruit new gardeners, or other resources, maintain grounds, be the contact for donation and volunteers, etc.. There are other purposes for staff at a community garden.

31) Consider a grant writer to acquire funding.

These are just some of the questions we should ask when thinking about a community garden. I hope this will also encourage stimulating conversation and enthusiasm for the project as this document is reviewed.

Community gardening is a wonderful way to bring people together to grow healthy food, get fresh air and exercise, meet fellow gardeners and enjoy the natural world around us!

In the 1970’s there were only 100 known community gardens in America. Now in 2019 there are thousands of established community gardens with more sprouting up so rapidly, it is hard to keep track of them all.



For a list of some of the community gardens in Connecticut, as well as some resources, go to...

- The Connecticut Community Gardening Association website
www.ctcommunitygardening.org
- American Community Gardening Association website
www.communitygarden.org
- National Gardening Association
www.garden.org
- Knox Parks Foundation
www.knoxparks.org
- Connecticut NOFA
www.ctnofa.org
- Life Lab: Garden-Based Learning Activity Guides
www.lifelab.org
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