

The Community Garden Calendar Month-by-Month

Fall: October, November, December

First, hold an informal community/neighborhood 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 organizations, faith-based organizations, food bank or other non-profit organizations.
- 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 organizations 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 neighborhood meeting. At this meeting the planning committee will:

- Present the organizational 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 a 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, 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.
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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 itemizing all aspects of the garden's development. Remember to include volunteer labor and items, which might be donated "in kind" (goods and services, instead of cash). Many organizations 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.
 7. 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.

8. 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 roto-tilling 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.
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March

1. The garden coordinator whether paid or volunteer should be in place and involved by mid-March.
2. Confirm arrangements for site preparation and roto-tilling, 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 labor 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.
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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, arbors, 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.
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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 coordinator 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 coordinator(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.

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.
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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.
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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 winterize 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.
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