

Community Gardening:

An Overview for Getting Started!

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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, or 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 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 ahead of 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 is 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?
- 2) Is it accessible to future gardeners?
- 3) Who owns the land?
- 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?
- 6) Is there enough interest in the community to support it?
- 7) How will it be advertised, and who will be the target audience?
- 8) Who will be responsible for the project?

- 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?
- 11) Who will have insurance for the property?
- 12) What is the purpose of the garden; will it be to support a food bank, or individuals, or a school educational resource, or a combination of many of these purposes?
- 13) What is the style of the garden?
- 14) Will it be handicap accessible?
- 15) What is the quality of the soil?
- 16) Who will break the ground?
- 17) How will ground be broken to prepare the soil for planting”?
- 18) How will the garden be maintained through the season?
- 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?
- 21) What will their responsibilities be? 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.
- 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?

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

28) How much funding will be required per season?

29) 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. There are other purposes for staff at a community garden.

30) Consider a grant writer to acquire funding.

These are just some of the questions we should ask when thinking about a community garden. In the 1970’s there were only 100 known community gardens in America. Now in 2009 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
- Knox Parks Foundation
www.knoxparks.org
- Connecticut NOFA
www.ctnofa.org
- Life Lab: Garden-Based Learning Activity Guides
www.lifelab.org
- Bettylou Sandy of Bettylou’s Gardening
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