

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

FACT SHEET

Stephen Hudkins, CEA/Horticulture

STARTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

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--kids, 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** (Highly important in the success of a community garden)

- 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

SITE SELECTION

Whether large or small, here are a few things to consider when choosing your garden site.

- Sunlight: Most flowers and vegetables need a minimum of six to eight hours of full sun. Check your future garden site for sun exposure at different times of the day and, if possible, in different seasons. Keep track of shady spots. Use them for shade gardens—great observation areas and teaching areas on hot, sunny days.
- Water: Watering the garden will be important for a good harvest and should be easy. The garden should be close to a water faucet so water is easily accessible to your plants. There are various systems you can consider: drip irrigation, soaker hoses, or watering cans. Be sure to consider the importance of conservation of resources in your planning. Use mulch to help the soil retain moisture. In most school gardens, we are recommending a drip irrigation system. Your County Extension Agent/Horticulture can assist with the design.
 - **A typical drip irrigation system for a 4x8 raised bed is \$125.00**
- Raised beds: Our native blackland prairie soils do not lend themselves well to in ground gardening. Raised beds are the recommended method for planting. Various materials can be used to make the raised beds. Consult with your County Extension Agent/Horticulture for recommendations and cost.
 - **The typical cost for a 4x8 raised bed 12 inches deep constructed of cedar will be \$185.00**
 - We recommend only a raised bed vegetable mix. **The cost of raised bed mix for the 4x8x12 inch deep bed is approximately \$80.00**

- Drainage: Both slope and soil type affect drainage. Avoid steep slopes; if that's not possible, consider terracing or raised beds. Don't plan a garden in a low spot where puddles form in wet weather.
 - Accessibility: If your garden is a short walk from the neighborhood, there will be more involvement than if the site is a long distance from the participants. A garden close to the neighborhood makes it more convenient and more visible on a regular basis.
- Security: If possible, locate your garden within sight of neighbors. Fences and natural borders of plants, if they don't obstruct visibility and hide intruders, provide security. Make use of existing fences, trees, and hedges in selecting your site.
- Visibility: Gardens always add beauty to the grounds. Try to integrate your garden with the existing landscape, but don't hide it. "Out of sight, out of mind" can apply to gardens that aren't in a central, visible location.

Approximate cost for a 4x8x12" bed

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| • Materials | \$185.00 |
| • Raised Bed Mix Soil | \$ 80.00 |
| • Drip Irrigation | \$125.00 |
| <hr style="width: 20%; margin: 0 auto;"/> | |
| • TOTAL | \$393.00 |

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 gardeners 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.

HOW SHOULD THE GARDEN BE ORGANIZED?

- 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?

INSURANCE

It is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain leases from landowners without public liability insurance. Garden insurance is a new thing for many insurance carriers and their underwriters are reluctant to cover community gardens. It helps if you know what you want before you start talking to agents. Two tips: you should probably be working with an agent from a firm which deals with many different carriers (so you can get the best policy for your needs) and you will probably have better success with one of the ten largest insurance carriers, rather than smaller ones.

SETTING UP A NEW GARDENING ORGANIZATION

Many garden groups are organized very informally and operate successfully. Leaders "rise to the occasion" to propose ideas and carry out tasks. However, as the work load expands, many groups choose a more formal structure for their organization.

A structured program is a means to an end. It is a conscious, planned effort to create a system so that each person can participate fully and the group can perform effectively. It's vital that the leadership be responsive to the members. Structure will help an organization to last; it will promote trust; it will help your group grow and create new opportunities for leaders to develop.

If your group is new, have several planning meetings to discuss your program and organization. Try out suggestions raised at these meetings and after a few months of operation, you'll be in a better position to develop bylaws or organizational guidelines. A community garden project should be kept simple as possible, whether large or small.

By laws are rules which govern the internal affairs of an organization. They are required when you form a non-profit corporation, but are useful even if your group is a club or a group of neighbors. Many battles are won simply because one side has more pieces of paper to wave than the other. It's helpful to look over bylaws from other similar organizations if you are incorporating. Guidelines and Rules (see TROUBLESHOOTING for examples) are less formal than Bylaws, and are often adequate enough for a garden group that has no intention of incorporating.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- What is your purpose? What are your short and long-term objectives?
- How are decisions to be made? Who chooses leaders and how?
- How will work be shared? Who does what?
- How will you raise money? Membership dues, fund raising, grants, sponsors?
- Are you open to change? Flexibility is important when goals and members change.
- Do you want to be incorporated or act as a club?

WHAT GOES INTO FORMAL BYLAWS:

- Full official name of organization and legal address.
- The purpose, goals and philosophy of the organization.
- Membership categories and eligibility requirements.
- Membership dues, how much and when paid.
- Specify when and how often regular or special meetings of the membership are to be held, as well as regular and annual meetings of the board of directors.
- State what officers are necessary, how they are chosen, length of term, their duties and how vacancies are filled.
- State special committees, their purpose and how they operate.
- Establish a system so that bylaws can be rescinded or amended, maybe by a simple majority.
- State any official policies or practices:eg. garden group will avoid the use of hazardous substances; group will agree to keep all adjacent sidewalks in good repair and free of ice and snow in season; group will make all repairs necessary to keep equipment, fences and furniture in good order and repair.
- Include a Hold Harmless clause (sample):
"We the undersigned members of the (name) garden group hereby agree to hold harmless (name owner) from and against any damage, loss, liability, claim, demand, suit, cost and expense directly or indirectly resulting from, arising out of or in connection with the use of the (name) garden by the garden group, its successors, assigns, employees, agents and invites."

HOW TO MANAGE YOUR COMMUNITY GARDEN

In order to offer a high quality community garden program, good management techniques are essential. Included in this fact sheet are the main ideas to consider in management, along with

many different ways to carry them out. Having written rules is very important with older groups as well as new gardens, since they spell out exactly what is expected of a gardener. They also make it much easier to eliminate dead wood should the need arise.

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 understand that ____ of this will be refunded to me when I clean up my plot at the end of the season.
- 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 manager.
- I will keep weeds down 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 reassigned or tilled in.
- I will keep trash and litter cleaned from the plot, as well as from adjacent pathways and fences.
- I will participate in the fall clean-up of the garden. I understand that the \$_____ deposit will be refunded only to those who do participate.
- I will plant tall crops where they will not shade neighboring plots.
- I will pick only my own crops unless given permission by the 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.

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 landmines will keep a determined vandal from getting in. Short picket fences or turkeywire 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 window 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 sidewalk 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'S PLOTS

- 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.

Publications Free to ACGA Members

Fact Sheets and articles on the following are available free of charge to ACGA members:

- Creating Community Gardens-- A Handbook for Planning and Creating Community Gardens to Beautify and Enhance Cities and Towns. Second Edition, Minnesota Green. An excellent source of info on planning and implementation of greening projects.
- Agreement for Community Gardening Sample Form
- Garden Planning for City Lots Basic site evaluation, large print* Liability Insurance
- Fundraising -- Theme issue of the Journal of the Land Trust Alliance EXCHANGE magazine

- How to Form a 501c(3) -is it necessary?
- Research Agenda-suggested topics for further research (monograph)
- Community Gardening Survey
- Community Gardening bibliography of related articles and publications
- Case Studies of Entrepreneurial Community Greening Projects (monograph)

May 10, 2016

Adapted from American Community Gardening Association

Individuals with disabilities who require an auxiliary aid, service, or accommodation to participate in this exhibit are encouraged to contact Dallas County Extension at (214) 904-3050 for assistance, at least one week prior to the marketed education program.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status. The Texas A&M University System, the U.S Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating.