

WANT TO START A COMMUNITY GARDEN?

- HERE ARE SOME KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE DIGGING IN -

WHY DO YOU WANT TO START A COMMUNITY GARDEN? WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?

It's important to think about what you hope to achieve so you choose a garden model that will help you reach your goals.

GOALS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Feeding people
- Building gardening skills
- Growing fresh food to donate
- Creating a space for people to come together
- Providing space for people who want to grow food



WHAT IS A COMMUNITY GARDEN?

A community garden brings together a group of people to garden in the same location. Community gardens can take many different forms. How people grow in the garden, how produce is used and who decides are all key to determining what model might work for you.

3 COMMON COMMUNITY GARDEN MODELS:

Individual plots: Each participant is assigned their own plot to grow and harvest for themselves.

Communally grown/ managed garden: Everyone works in the whole garden together and decides as a group what to do with the produce.

Market gardens: Produce is grown and sold for income and sometimes donated. These gardens might include individual or group plots.





PUTTING THE “COMMUNITY” IN COMMUNITY GARDEN

HAVE YOU ENGAGED COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO SEE IF A COMMUNITY GARDEN IS SOMETHING THEY WANT? OR IS THIS A “BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME” PROJECT?

Without a truly engaged and dedicated group of community members from the beginning, what often happens is that you build it...and they don't come. There's a HUGE difference if a handful of people plan a project and then unveil it to the community versus multiple people from the community helping to plan from the beginning. If you're having trouble getting community input and dedication to the garden idea in the planning stages, it's unlikely that participation will pickup after you've done the work of building it. Bringing a group of people together to talk about their ideas, wants, likes, dislikes, and limitations – and shaping a plan together – can help lead to a successful project.



ARE THERE FOUR OR MORE COMMUNITY MEMBERS COMMITTED TO STARTING, ORGANIZING AND PARTICIPATING IN THE GARDEN?

It's important that your community garden begins and happens with a group of people from the community. You need a handful – four or more – to make sure the garden moves forward. It's important that people *from* the community are the ones planning the project. If you can't get a core group of people to commit to the garden project at the beginning, do you think an even larger group will dig in to work in the garden? This happens frequently: A group decides to build a community garden, imagining all the good things that will come out of it. After construction, hosting a meeting about the garden, and passing out flyers, only a few people actually come to the garden regularly. The numbers fall even more when it gets hot or when school starts or when the holidays come around. “We built this great thing,” the organizers think. “Why is nobody coming?”

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

- INGREDIENTS TO HELP A COMMUNITY GARDEN GROW -

Use This Handy Checklist To Think Through What's Needed To Start A Community Garden

PHYSICAL

LAND: You will need a written, signed contract if you don't own the garden property. Is the land free from hazards such as lead in the soil? You can find free soil testing here:

www.union.ces.ncsu.edu/soil-testing-kits/

FENCING: Keep out deer and other pests!

TOOLS: Can you get them donated or at a low cost?

STORAGE: Do you have a safe, dry place to store your supplies?

WATER: Do you have a way to get water to the garden? Who will pay for water?

SEEDS/SEEDLINGS: Can these be donated or bought at a low cost?



How to Grow

A TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE COMMUNITY GARDEN

The triple bottom line is the foundation of our work, and it results in social justice, environmental and economic benefits.

1

SOCIAL JUSTICE

- Engage historically excluded community members
- Address root causes of community challenges such as poverty or the need for job skills

CONTINUED...



PEOPLE

- ✓ Do you have a team willing to commit time to the garden every week?
- ✓ Are these helpers from the community?
- ✓ Do people have transportation to get to the garden?

IS THERE SOMEONE WHO CAN:

- Reach out to the community
- Share information weekly with garden members
- Schedule and announce workdays
- Provide daily maintenance of the garden between workdays
- Manage garden money and receipts
- Keep up with utilities - water, energy, etc.
- Provide grant writing and reporting, if needed



2 ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- Environmental education activities
- Organic/sustainable garden practices
- Replacing synthetic chemicals such as Roundup® or Miracle-Gro® with natural composting
- Rainwater collection

3 COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Sell produce
- Cook & sell food from the garden
- Make & sell value added products (meal kits, pickles)
- Garden provides extra income
- "Soft" job skill training

HAVE YOU CREATED A BUDGET?



HAVE YOU CREATED A BUDGET FOR THE GARDEN?

A realistic budget reflects the amount of work and energy going into the garden. Initial start-up garden costs are the biggest investment. You can probably reduce costs by using donated or recycled materials. Once your garden is up and running and if you don't have paid staff, the project could run for less than \$1000 per year.

GOOD SOURCES FOR DONATED SUPPLIES & LABOR:

- Home improvement stores
- Landscape services
- Contractors
- Other gardeners



HAVE YOU WEIGHED THE COST OF STARTING A GARDEN WITH THE BENEFITS YOU'LL GET OUT OF IT?

Think of costs in terms of time, money and people. Say your goal is to donate fresh produce to your food pantry. If you spend thousands of dollars on a garden and lots of time for maintenance, but you end up with \$600 worth of produce to donate to the pantry, expenses far outweigh the benefits. You'd be investing more resources in the garden to grow less food than you could just buy outright with the same amount of money. This doesn't include all the things you need besides money -- time, supplies, effort.



WILL THE BENEFIT THAT YOU GET OUT OF THE GARDEN BE GREATER THAN ALL COSTS?

If yes, then this might be a successful model for you. If your costs are greater than the benefits though, then it might be time to explore different strategies to achieve your goals.

--> Take a look at [*Challenges for Community Gardens*](#) for additional ideas.



COSTS > BENEFIT = STOP & RECONSIDER!

HOW WILL YOU KNOW YOUR GARDEN IS A SUCCESS?

Identify what you will measure and how you will track your progress. You might track pounds of produce grown in the garden, sales totals, volunteer hours, or the amount of waste diverted from the landfill to compost.

Take a look at this free and easy resource to get started:

Farming Concrete Data Collection Toolkit

<https://farmingconcrete.org/toolkit>

From Five Boroughs Farm Project and the Design Trust for Public Space



CHALLENGES AND OTHER IDEAS

BEFORE YOU GROW YOUR GARDEN, THINK THROUGH THESE POTENTIAL CHALLENGES.

- Changing goals or participants
- Non-participation
- No one can get to the garden. Transportation is an issue.
- People are too busy to garden consistently.
- Is the garden dependent on one coordinator? What if that person moves?
- How will you keep the initial momentum and excitement, which often fade, going?

LEARN MORE:

NC Community Garden Partners

www.nccgp.org

NC Cooperative Extension: Guide to Growing Community Gardens

<https://bit.ly/3bi0jog>

Eat Smart Move More North Carolina: Growing Communities Through Gardens

<https://bit.ly/3OqPMW4>

THINK A COMMUNITY GARDEN ISN'T FOR YOU?

- TAKE A LOOK AT THESE IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS -

Value-Added Products

Turn a tomato into salsa or cucumbers into pickles!

Heritage Cooking Classes

Teach folks how to make traditional foods healthier

Veggie Education

Introduce kids to local produce and local farms

Double Bucks (or other incentives for Fresh Produce)

Increase buying power for local veggies



Church or Mobile Markets

Support your local farmers and take the produce to the people

Produce Boxes

Purchase and combine produce from farmers and coordinate buy one-give one sales

Fresh Produce Giveaways

Coordinate gleaning efforts (from gardeners & farmers) to provide healthy food for people in need

Home Gardens

Mobilize people to put gardens in individual homes for people who want and need fresh produce but can't access healthy food.

For more information and more ideas, check out this overview:

<https://bit.ly/3n8EAln>





RESOURCEFUL COMMUNITIES

People ✨ Places ✨ Opportunities

— THE —
CONSERVATION FUND

www.resourcefulcommunities.org

 **@ResourcefulCommunities**

Thanks to our wonderful photography interns, Olivia Jackson, Nicholas Johnson and Jagmeet Mac, and our community partners pictured here, including Caswell County Local Food Council, Dig In! Yancey, Greene County Cooperative Extension, Men and Women United for Youth and Families, Sandhills Family Heritage Association, Transplanting Traditions, Trees NC, and Veterans Base Camp and Organic Garden.

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