



# Organizing your Community Garden I

Organizing people and place-  
Site selection, organization and  
governance, rules and bylaws,  
generating and maintaining  
community interest.



## Organizing Your Community Garden I

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### Presentation Topics:

- How to get started
- Forming a planning committee
- Choosing a site
- Insurance
- Site preparation
- Organizing the garden
- Setting up a new gardening organization

The Franklin Park Conservatory gratefully acknowledges the following for handouts and information:

- The American Community Gardening Association
- Food Share Learning Centre
- The Clinton Community Garden
- City of Columbus
- Madison Gardens
- University of Missouri -Tool Kit



## FORM A PLANNING GROUP

In the planning phase of a community garden project there are several things you need to consider in order to become better organized.

- Determine if the need and desire for a garden are there.
  - Who would the garden serve?
    - Just participants or be more inclusive to provide opportunities to the neighbors, youth, seniors, a special population and non gardeners?
    - It is very important to include all interested parties in ALL phases of planning, design and maintenance of the project.
  
- What type of garden will it be?
  - Vegetable
  - Flower
  - Herb
  - Beautification
  - Educational
  - Combination

Publicize and organize a public meeting of interested people.

Choose a well-organized person or a small group to act as garden coordinator(s).

Determine the best contacts(s) and mailing address for your project. It works best to have at least three people that are very familiar with all garden information.

- Communication is key to disseminating information to the rest of the group.

You may decide to form committees to take on separate tasks, useful committees could be:

- Volunteer Recruitment
- Fundraising
- Maintenance
- Programming and Communication



Start working on lists for all committees to work from.

If your garden plans on seeking grants, fundraising or dues/ plot rentals, keep administration in the hands of several people.

- Approach nearby businesses or organizations for partnership or sponsor opportunities for your project:
  - Civic associations
  - Block watches
  - Local businesses
  - Churches
  - Schools
  - Private entities

Some may be able to provide land, building materials, tools, seeds, volunteers, or money to help build and sustain your project.

- Your success in this project could benefit all of these organizations in one way or another. Remember that you are making your neighborhood a better place to live, work and play

### **CHOOSING A SITE**

- Have you chosen a site?
  - City land bank
  - Area business
  - Churches and school
  - Private landowner
- Identify owner(s) of the land and discuss lease, use agreements and maintenance.
- Try and get a multi-year lease agreement if at all possible.
- Determine if the site gets at least six hours of sunlight daily.
  - Not any drainage problems or other adverse situations, this will require several visits to the site at different times.
- Research the history of the land: is there a possibility of contamination?
- Do a soil test in several locations of the proposed planting.
  - Test for nutrients and heavy metals

## INSURANCE

- It can become difficult to obtain leases or agreements from landowners without public liability insurance.
  - It helps to know what you want to cover before talking to agents.
  - If you have a fiscal agent for your garden such as a church, school or civic association, it may be as easy as adding a rider on their policy to cover the garden.
  - You may also talk to your homeowner insurance agent to see if they can provide coverage.
- You should at least get all participants to sign a 'release of all claims' to protect you and your garden organization.

## PREPARE AND DEVELOP THE SITE

- Develop the design to reflect the needs and desires of all you will utilize this space.
- Include plans for a safe storage area for tools, hoses and other equipment, as well as a compost area.
- A good idea to have a weatherproof bulletin board for announcing garden events and other messages.
- Lay out the garden to place flower or shrub beds around the visible perimeter. This helps to promote good will with non-gardening neighbors, passerby and municipal authorities.
- Will the garden be organic? Mostly organic? Up to individuals? Make the determination and stick to it!
- Decide how the gardens are prepared: will you hire someone to till the entire area or will gardeners be responsible for their own plots?
- Decide on plot sizes, mark plots clearly with gardener's names. Encourage gardeners to give their plot a personalized fun name.
- Gather resources- try to gather free materials.
- Plan a workday, Have specific task lists for volunteers. Be ready to demonstrate 'how-to' for each major task. Keep safety top of mind; always have a first-aid kit for minor injuries.
  - Have healthy snacks, water and a shady place for rest when needed
- Organize volunteer work crews, needed tools and related equipment for specific tasks.
- Clean the site carefully; you may not know what lies in or just below the grass.



- Wear protective gloves, use long handled trash pickers and use other proper safety equipment; there could be glass, sharp metal, poison ivy or worse.

## ORGANIZING THE GARDEN

- What are the conditions for participation?
  - Residence
  - Dues
  - Agreement with rules
- If individual plots, how will plots be assigned?
  - Family size
  - By residence
  - Need
  - By group
    - Youth
    - Elderly
- Will plots be the same size or will there be options for larger families or groups?
- How should plots be laid out and administered? (First come, first served?)
- If the group charges plot fees and dues, how will the money be used? What services, if any, will be provided to gardeners in return?
- How will maintenance be addressed in common areas?
  - Spring soil turning
  - Mowing and weed whipping
  - Composting
  - Trash

Will there be a policy in place for all gardeners to assist with minimum maintenance and large group projects for common areas?

Painting the fence, shed or benches

Weeding in flower beds or the common seating area.

When a garden plot becomes available, how will the space be filled?

- Waiting list
- Demonstration
- Plant for the food bank donation

How will the group deal with vandalism?

Will there be a children's plot?

- Will it have to abide by the same standards as the rest of the plots?  
It is a good idea to have regular meetings of the gardeners to keep up with problems, concerns and successes.
- Plan a group trip to another community garden during the season to meet with other community gardeners. Share your stories!



Will all the tools be for common use?

How will they be kept and cared for?

How do you replace tools that have been lost, stolen or broken?

Will there be a set of written rules which gardeners are expected to sign and to uphold? How will these be enforced?

## SETTING UP A NEW GARDENING ORGANIZATION

- Many garden groups are organized very informally and operate successfully. Leaders 'rise to the occasion' to proposed ideas and carry out tasks. However as the workload 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.
- 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.
- Bylaws are rules that govern the internal affairs of an organization. They are required when you form a nonprofit 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 for other similar organizations if you are incorporating.
- Guidelines and Rules 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 the short and long-term objectives?
- How are decisions to be made?
  - Who chooses leaders and how?
- How will work be shared?
  - Who does what and when?
- How will you raise money?
  - Membership dues
  - Fund raising



- Grants
- Sponsors
- Are you open to change?
  - How flexible are the goals, rules and membership
- 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.
- 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 member 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 invitees.”