



# How to Start a Community Garden...

*Create a Sustainable  
Resource for Your Community  
in Four Easy Steps*



Carrie Olson  
Farmers Market & Community Garden Coordinator  
Phone: (425) 430-6600  
[rentonwa.gov/garden](http://rentonwa.gov/garden)



# CONTENTS

Why Start a Community Garden? 3

Where to Start 4-5

Build and Grow 6

Moving Forward 7

# Why Start a Community Garden?



*Community gardens serve the public in so many ways! They provide spaces for residents to grow and consume fresh local produce and help use available land for farming! Community gardens also help address a variety of environmental issues in an enjoyable and informative way.*

Community gardens provide space where neighbors can connect with one another in a hands-on environment, centered around the activity of growing produce. This Community Garden environment helps build friendships, build a connection with nature, promote physical and emotional health, and sustainability!

Community Gardens allow residents to have greater access to nutritious food. Growing our own food can help localize food systems, reduce food transportation costs and improve food security.

There are also financial benefits for gardeners and landowners! Gardeners can benefit by saving money on produce and property owners can generate money by renting garden plots.

Additionally, community gardens can provide uses for vacant lots that can be eyesores in a community, which will help to beautify your neighborhood and increase property values. Adding gardens to these spaces can also help the environment by improving air and soil quality, increasing biodiversity, and improving water infiltration!

Another way community gardens can help the environment is by providing lessons about water conservation, water quality preservation, and environmental stewardship. Lessons about sustainable land use can be taken back to homes, businesses, and schools, which will help to improve the health of our environment.

***Knowledge is power!***



# Where to Start

## 3 Steps to Getting Your Community Garden Started



### Find Land for Garden Site

private or public property and consider site conditions



### Organize and Get People Involved

build a team and determine garden rules



### Design Your Garden

draw a plan, and what bed types to consider

## ..... Step #1: Find Land for Your Community Garden Site .....

If you don't already have a garden site in mind, you may need to start by putting the word out! Ask local churches, community agencies, or local businesses that have vacant space, if they will support a neighborhood garden.

Privately owned property may also make a great site for your garden, though it is less frequently used for public gardens. Some may have concerns about liabilities on private property, however as long as you are exercising appropriate precautions, this might be a perfect fit.

### ChangeLab Solutions Legal Toolkit:

[https://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/CommunityGardenToolkit\\_Final\\_%28CLS\\_20120530%29\\_20110207.pdf](https://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/CommunityGardenToolkit_Final_%28CLS_20120530%29_20110207.pdf)

This toolkit was designed to help with legal and practical barriers to establishing community gardens on land that is not municipally owned.

It provides several model agreements and other documents that can be tailored, to make the process of building an agreement that benefits both landowners and the community easy!

### Factors to consider when selecting a site for a Community Garden:

1. Regular access to sufficient water.
2. Sun exposure for at least eight hours a day. (Six hours of sun is suitable for a few crops.)
3. Good soil on site or the ability to bring it in.

Test the existing soil in the garden, for its make up, pH, organic matter and toxicity.

#### Guide for soil testing:

<https://puyallup.wsu.edu/soils/soils/>

4. Relatively level ground or the ability to level it.
5. A secure location to avoid loss of produce.
6. Consider the size you want the garden to be and how you might want it to be organized.





# Where to Start

## Step #2: Organize and Get People Involved



### Build a Team

Community garden success depends on building a core team of invested and knowledgeable people.

Your team should have a variety of stakeholders such as potential gardeners, leadership from your site location, gardening experts, and any others who could represent different viewpoints or skills. There should be a conversation about the purpose of your community garden, how it will function, and how everyone will be involved.

### The University of Missouri Extension:

<https://extension.missouri.edu/media/wysiwyg/Extensiondata/Pub/pdf/miscpubs/mp0906welcome.pdf>

*Here is a list of items to cover at planning meetings as well as other helpful examples job descriptions and frequently asked questions.*

### Renton North Highlands Community Garden Guidelines:

[https://p1cdn4static.civicle.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server\\_7922657/File/City%20Hall/Community%20Services/Recreation/Events/Community%20Gardens/Community%20Garden%20Guidelines\\_Highlands.pdf](https://p1cdn4static.civicle.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_7922657/File/City%20Hall/Community%20Services/Recreation/Events/Community%20Gardens/Community%20Garden%20Guidelines_Highlands.pdf)



### Determine Your Garden Rules

Determining your garden rules or guidelines is very helpful for gardeners so they can know what is expected of them to keep the garden running smoothly.

There should be items that address the general standards for plot maintenance, if the garden will be all organic or pesticide free, where they are expected to store their tools and supplies, if they need to pay for registration and more.

## Step #3: Design Your Garden

Designing your Community Garden is a crucial step to consider before getting started.

#1

### Draw a Plan

Having your garden concept on paper is an important step. It should be to-scale if possible, indicating where existing infrastructure is and where new items will go. There should be outlines for garden beds, storage structures, defined paths, sitting areas, compost piles, garbage collection, entry and exit points and water access.

#2

### Changes Happen!

The plans you start out with may very well not be the ones you end up with. Expect that the input you get from the rest of the planning team may bring up challenges or ideas you did not think of. Use grid paper and a pencil for early versions of the plans.

#3

### What Types of Beds Should You Have?

Should your garden have raised beds or in-ground beds? There are both pros and cons to each type. The WSU Extension has a publication outlining the pros and cons of raised beds.

WSU Extension—Raised Beds: Will They Benefit Your Vegetable Garden?:

<https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/raised-beds-deciding-if-they-benefit-your-vegetable-garden-home-garden-series>

#4

### Safety and Accessibility

The garden should be built with the appropriate safety measures and accessibility standards in place such as path width, material make up, bed height, and other requirements.



# Build and Grow

## Funding

*Though there are lots of benefits that come with installing and operating a community garden, there can also be a variety of costs that come with it. Lucky for you, there are resources that can help with these costs!*

#1

### Develop a Budget

Your garden's budget can expect to change over time. As new and old ideas cycle through and other means for getting resources are developed, your funding needs will expand and shrink. These changes may create the need for something different in another area, that was not in the original construction plan or budget.

#2

### Applying for Grants

There are several small and large local, statewide, and national grant opportunities available for community gardens each year. Smaller, local grants can be easier to get and are often easier to apply for than larger national ones so consider spending more of your time looking for these.

#3

### Partnerships with Businesses

Look for businesses around the garden site that may have the types of supplies you'll need to build your garden like hardware stores, garden stores, nurseries, etc. Local, independently owned businesses have a bit more freedom to offer in-kind donations, financial support, or volunteer work than larger chain stores do. However, staff at larger chains may be able to contribute and they may have their own garden grant programs.

#4

### Other Potential Sponsors

- Parks and recreation departments
- Communities of faith, such as churches, temples, and mosques
- Colleges and universities
- Local Cooperative Extension centers
- Master Gardener programs
- Food banks and food security organizations
- Neighborhood associations
- Land trusts
- Slow food and local food groups



## Community Engagement

After creating a community garden, it is important to have continued community engagement for long lasting success. Remember that community gardens are most successful when people who are affected by the garden have a role in leading the development of the garden. This group of dedicated individuals should be diverse and have a range involvement levels. They can assist with duties such as help with the garden's mission statement or changes in design or organization.

Also, make sure to establish clear lines of communication and regular meetings with this group and cultivate a space where people can learn from one another. This group should try to consider what resources, styles of communication, and styles of food would be most desirable and beneficial for your community.



# Moving Forward

Despite some of the extra responsibilities, community gardening has become exceedingly popular! Starting community gardens provides a number of positive solutions to a range of community needs. They can help residents connect and learn as well as transformation local environments. All while giving you and your community more fresh fruits and veggies!

Happy planting!



## ***Questions?***

If you have any additional questions about starting a Community Garden please feel free to Contact Us!

Email: [clolson@rentonwa.gov](mailto:clolson@rentonwa.gov)



# Work Cited & Additional Resources

Albornoz, Sari. *Sustainable Food Center*. 8 November 2014. 2022.

<https://sustainablefoodcenter.org/latest/gardening/what-makes-a-community-garden-thrive>

Boekelheide, Don and Lucy Bradley. *NC State Extension*. 10 August 2017. 2022.

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/collard-greens-and-common-ground-a-north-carolina-community-food-gardening-handbook/getting-started>

Bradley, Dr. Lucy. *NC State Extension*. April 2022. May 2022.

<https://nccommunitygardens.ces.ncsu.edu/resources-3/nccommunitygardens-research/#:~:text=Results%20suggest%20that%20community%20gardens,social%20health%20and%20community%20cohesion>

*Community Gardening 101: Starting & Sustaining a Community Garden*. Dir. N.C.

Cooperative Extension: Forsyth County Center. Perf. Megan Gregory. 2019. Vimeo.

<https://vimeo.com/304362425>

County, WSU Extension Clark. *Washington State University*. n.d. 17 May 2022.

<https://extension.wsu.edu/clark/community-grown/community-gardens/#benefits>

DeMuro, Katie. *Greenleaf Communities*. 11 July 2013. 2022.

<https://greenleafcommunities.org/the-many-benefits-of-community-gardens/>

Editors, Almanac. *Almanac*. 11 May 2021. 2022.

<https://www.almanac.com/why-join-or-start-community-garden>

Wong, Greg. *Seattle*. 2019. 2022.

<https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/programs-and-services/p-patch-community-gardening/toolkit-for-gardeners/create-a-new-community-garden#getpeopleinvolved>