

Community Garden Suggestions and Guidelines

In an effort to give anyone the knowledge to promote sustainability, combat food instability, and transform unused land into productive resources, members of the Fishers community, including local community gardeners, a representative of the Hamilton County Master Gardeners, and the Town of Fishers have crafted a how-to guide of community gardening. Below are top suggestions and guidelines for successfully building a community garden with the help of your neighbors, friends, and family. Community gardens can be great sources of food for your family and others throughout the community. The eleven guidelines are supplemented with a detailed appendix and more information. The Town of Fishers is committed to maintaining quality of life in the community, furthering community connectedness, and promoting solutions that are good for the environment, economy, and individual wellness.

1. Gather a committee of people who are committed to the project and select a location for the community garden.
2. Determine what resources you already have and what resources you will need.
3. Develop a set of rules for participation in the community garden.
4. Establish a plan for strong communication between the garden administrators and gardeners. (Using a variety of means to do this: e-mail, website, bulletin board, etc. are all recommended)
5. Determine the plot dimensions and walkway layout.
6. Create a calendar of important dates including when will the garden be open, when will it be closed for the season, what dates will be available for volunteers to work in the garden.
7. Prepare your land. Do this in the fall before the garden will open. It will generate interest, and it will give your group time to amend the soil and work on signing up gardeners in the meantime.
8. Gather a group of volunteers. These people will be essential to preparing the site as well as maintaining it.
9. Advertise the garden. Don't break the budget on this. Plowing up your land will do most of the work for you and word of mouth will do most of the rest. You might consider a visit to a local farmers' market or other community gatherings to get the word out.
10. Education: will you provide new gardeners with some kind of program to help them get started? Who will be responsible for this training?
11. Set up work days before and during the season to help maintain the beds.

Appendix to Top 10

1. Your committee needn't be large. 3-6 people would be sufficient. If there are a large number on this project it often slows the decision making process. It is helpful to be clear about each person's role on the committee. Try to have the committee attend every meeting, if possible, so that you all share the work of the garden. Avoid burnout by spreading the work of the committee equally.

The site for your community garden should have good drainage and have 8 hours of sunlight minimum for best growing results. Consider how far you are from your water source as well. Be sure to have the area checked and marked, if necessary, for any utility lines.

2. There will be costs when establishing a community garden. Determine your approximate expenses and set your budget. It is possible to find a source for funding from a sponsor or donor if need be. Most of your costs are up front in getting the garden prepared. You can charge gardeners fees that should cover any costs to run the garden (water, etc.) Do you have a shed to store tools and supplies? Will there need to be a fence? Will you create pathways through the garden? Are you making raised beds? Will you use compost? Is soil improvement (fertilizer/manure) necessary? How much land will you use? Will this change in the future? Is there room to expand? What about water? Do you need to run a water line for easy access?

The beds will need a water source for the dry periods of the summer season. It can be run from a building close to the area. Rules for use of the water should be laid out at the beginning of the season. Some community gardens only allow for water to be taken by buckets. Allowing the use of sprinklers should be closely monitored.

3. A printed list of rules and regulations should be provided to anyone asking to participate in the community garden. Examples of this might be: It is preferred that gardeners use only organic gardening practices and restrict the use of pesticides and fungicides; plots may not be large enough to accommodate large vining plants like pumpkins and gourds; Any fencing and growing structures used during the growing season need to be removed when the garden is closed down for the winter; to reserve a plot there is a fee of __?__(to be determined); The use of overhead fan type sprinklers is not permitted-use only soaker hoses or hand water; If a garden plot goes unattended for several weeks the gardener will be contacted and could lose gardening privileges; Any excess produce should be donated to the local food pantries. Any restrictions should be clearly stated. How will you handle unattended plots? Will you allowing vining plants that are un-staked or caged? What about the height of plants?

4. Communication is vital and very difficult. Ideally you will have strong communication not just between yourself and the gardeners but among the gardeners as well. Be prepared for folks who do not have access to a computer and/or e-mail. Have whatever information available as possible, be it email addresses, phone numbers (for texting), and/or a communication board to post.
5. Many gardeners use a maximum depth of 4' on the beds to allow for easy access to the center of the bed without walking into the planting area. The length can be determined by the amount of area for the overall garden. If raised beds are being used, the length might be determined by the materials used to create the borders.

Walkways between the beds should be at least 3' to allow for the use of wheelbarrows and multiple people working their beds at the same time.

6. How often will you gather folks together? It's nice if you can maintain face to face contact with gardeners. Consider having pitch in lunches, exchanges of vegetables, and fun, social activities to bring people together. It's nice if everyone pitches in to do work in the garden together as well.
7. The earlier you can get plowed up before you open the better. This will save you from waiting out a wet spring to prepare the land. Gardeners will be able to garden as early as possible.

It is probable the soil in your location will not provide ideal growing conditions. Plan for tilling of the bed areas. Soil amendments-such as sand, compost, ground leaves, etc. will probably be needed to be added to the existing soil. It would also help to test the soil in the area to determine what nutrients are needed. Some of the amending could be left up to the individual gardeners, but the beds should be somewhat ready for them to use. It is recommended this be done the season prior to offering the beds.

Pathways between the beds need to be established. Weed mat and mulching will help keep down any weeds. Mulches to consider: straw, pea gravel, wood chips, pine needles.

8. Try to have volunteers who are not just your committee members. Again, save yourselves from burning out by not being the only ones doing all work.
9. Keep it simple.
10. To help new people and experienced it is a good idea to offer free short workshops during the season. Some ideas would be: How to grow organically; How to do small plot

intensive gardening; Practice proper watering and conservation; How to mulch; Harvesting and storing of your produce; How to put the garden to bed in the Fall; How to maintain your garden tools.

11. To keep the core group from being too burdened with work, a group work session should be planned for the early Spring, late Spring, late Summer and end of growing season to help maintain the walkways and general areas. The actual beds should be the responsibility of the participating gardeners.

Important links and phone numbers:

Call Before You Dig – 811

Soil testing companies - https://ag.purdue.edu/agry/extension/Pages/soil_testing.aspx

Local Community Garden in operation – <http://holyfamilyfishers.org/communitygarden/>

Harvest Calendar - http://www.in.gov/isda/files/Harvest_Calander.pdf

Indiana Organic Gardeners Association - <http://gardeningnaturally.org/wordpress2/>

Hamilton County Master Gardeners Association - <http://hcmga.org/>

Food Pantries to call about donating to:

Fall Creek Township - 317-841-3180

Delaware Township - 317-842-8595

“Come-To-Me” Food Pantry - 317-849-1805 or email lwiliams@fishersumc.org