



Community Gardening Guide





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Welcome

This guide has been developed to assist community groups plan, design and implement a new or existing community garden project and to manage and maintain it in the long-term.

It is not intended to be prescriptive, but instead demonstrate the broad range of considerations that will contribute to the long-term viability of any community garden project. It is based on the experience of successful community gardeners, as well as research conducted into the factors influencing the success or otherwise of community-based natural resource management and community development projects.

Community gardening is an immensely satisfying and enriching experience and it is hoped that this guide will go some way towards supporting the development of a strong network of diverse and beautiful gardens across Australia.



Getting started

The most successful community garden projects are those where the initiating group takes the time to undertake a detailed process of planning and design.

The first part of this guide looks closely at the various aspects of project planning as they apply to community garden projects.

Before you start we suggest you ask yourself the following questions:

- » Is there enough interest and energy within the group to sustain the project in the long term?
- » Is a community garden the most effective way to address your community's needs, e.g. for food security, social opportunities, health promotion, environmental improvement or learning for sustainability?
- » Would joining an established community garden be a better way to achieve your aims while also strengthening and enhancing that garden?
- » Would another form of 'gardening in community' be more appropriate, e.g. sharing and distributing produce from neighbourhood fruit trees, gardening collectively in backyards or joining a Bushcare or Coastcare group?

Although wonderful once established, starting a community garden is hard work and takes a great deal of time, energy and commitment. In order to avoid putting a lot of time and energy into a project that could ultimately fail, work where it counts and address the following tasks as a priority:

- » Develop a strong and committed garden group that can share the load, and form partnerships with other organisations in the community.
- » Research your project thoroughly.
- » Work together as a group to agree on and articulate a clear vision for your project.
- » Conduct some simple strategic planning that will provide a road map and priorities towards achieving your shared vision.
- » Design your garden carefully with your vision in mind.

By planning systematically and resisting the urge to rush into the implementation stage too quickly you will build a strong foundation for your project.



Establishing a community garden

A community garden is built on a sense of community and cannot succeed with the enthusiasm of just one or two people.

Forming a working group of committed folk with a range of skills and experience is the first step in establishing the groundwork for your project.

The size of this group will depend on the project but may be as large as twenty or as small as five. A larger group will provide more energy and input, but a smaller group may be easier to manage in the initial stages.

Holding a public meeting is one way to recruit involvement. As well as inviting people you know, extend the invitation to your local community including environment or gardening groups and resident associations. Put an advertisement in the local paper and letterbox the local neighbourhood, particularly if you already know where the garden is likely to be located.

At the meeting avoid putting forward your own already developed ideas for the garden. Instead, consider having someone from an established garden give a presentation on their project and present the benefits of community gardens generally. If possible have a skilled facilitator run the meeting, someone who is able to draw out ideas from the group and ensure these ideas are recorded. At the end of the meeting get names and contact details of everyone who wants to be involved. This will form the basis of your project contact list.

Anticipate that there may be concerns about the project. Make sure there is room for these to be heard and that you have the background information to address them. If concerns persist, don't bulldoze ahead with the project. In the long-term you will need the support and goodwill of everyone in the community in order to get the best possible outcomes. It is best to take a little time working with the people concerned rather than assuming the problems will go away by themselves.

Once you have established a committed group, work to develop trust and collaboration through social events such as BBQs, skill-sharing workshops and planning days. Maintain enthusiasm through celebration and activities that foster both personal and group development.



Developing community partnerships

Many successful community gardens have developed strong supportive partnerships with other community groups, businesses and organisations in their local area.

This can be a source of valuable resources, collaborative projects and ideas. Links with other community gardens can provide knowledge, experience and advice, while partnering with groups such as a migrant resource centre can provide opportunities for participation by individuals who may find integration within the community difficult.

Researching your project

One of the best ways for your group to learn about how to develop a successful community garden project, and how to avoid the pitfalls, is to undertake a tour of existing community gardens. A community garden tour can be a great way to attract involvement in your project and can generate lots of ideas and enthusiasm. You will also make many supportive connections that will be useful as your project progresses. Remember to document what you learn by taking notes and photos.

Russ Grayson and Fiona Campbell from the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network suggest asking the following questions when visiting other community gardens:

- » How did the garden start?
- » What type of organisational structure do you have?
- » What do you do about public liability insurance?
- » Where do you obtain resources (mulch, compost, seeds etc)?
- » What are your links to local government?
- » How are you funded?
- » How do you make decisions, solve problems and resolve conflict?
- » How do you pass on skills to new gardeners and improve people's skills?
- » How did you build a sense of community around the garden?

If there are no community gardens in your local area, look up the websites listed at the back of these guidelines for further information, resources and for case-studies of successful community garden projects.



Clarifying aims and objectives

A community garden can be many things to many people and unless group members are clear and in agreement as to what the purpose of the garden will be it is likely that conflict will emerge at an early stage and the project may not yet have the integrity to survive it.

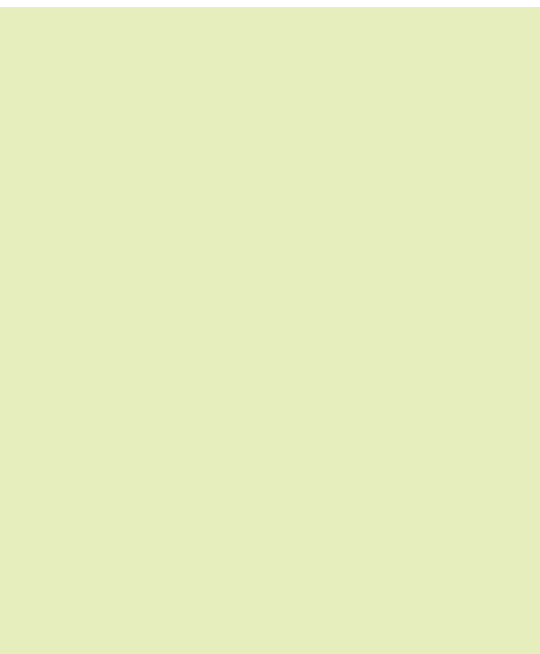
There are many good books that describe the basic process of strategic planning; how to develop a group vision and a plan of action for achieving a prioritised set of objectives. It is recommended that groups invite a skilled facilitator to assist with this process, someone who is not an active part of the garden group so that they remain neutral in discussions. This ensures that all group members have the opportunity to provide input and to have their voices heard.

At the outset keep an open mind and dream big. You might not be able to have that solar cooker straight away but having it in your plan might inspire someone in the group to develop it later on. Spend time brainstorming what the group would like to see the garden become in five years time. Some things to consider are:

- » Community art (e.g. sculpture, mosaics and murals).
- » Social spaces, seating and outdoor eating areas.

- » Shady and covered areas.
- » Spaces for performance and areas for workshop delivery.
- » Tool sheds and work areas.
- » Signage, displays and noticeboards.
- » Children's play areas and special plots for children or local schools.
- » Bike parking space.
- » A bush tucker trail, sensory or butterfly gardens.
- » Composting and waste management areas.
- » Storage areas for materials such as manure or straw.
- » Fruit trees.
- » Plots and shared garden areas.
- » Watering source and an irrigation system.
- » Predatory insect attracting plants to help manage pests.
- » Propagation area and a stall for sale of plants.

Once you have a shared vision you can begin to plan in earnest. Create a three-year action plan that prioritises tasks, allocates responsibility for these tasks to different group members and sets a timeframe for their completion.



Plans of Management

Developing a plan of management for your garden will help clarify the practical procedures by which the garden will be developed and organised.

A plan of management also demonstrates to the landowner and to funding bodies that an appropriate level of thought and research has been undertaken before implementing the project.

The plan of management should include the following:

- » Statement of purpose.
- » Aims and objectives, including the long term vision for the garden.
- » Proposed management structure.
- » Proposed induction process for volunteers.
- » Proposed risk management framework and completed risk assessment.
- » Provision for public liability insurance.
- » Proposed decision-making framework and conflict resolution processes.
- » Proposed policy regarding sustainable land management including management of soil, water, energy, organic and non-organic waste, biodiversity and building materials.
- » Proposed policy regarding access, equity and membership.
- » Proposed policy for the allocation and management of plot gardens.
- » Proposed funding model, e.g. membership fees, fundraising, grants.
- » Proposed policy regarding drugs and alcohol, including smoking onsite.
- » Any potential partnerships the group envisages, e.g. with local schools.
- » Contact details for project coordinators.
- » Considerations of accessibility including proximity to public transport.
- » Proposed three-year budgets showing costs and profit.
- » Proposed three-year work plan.



Design considerations for new gardens

It is useful to obtain professional guidance in the design of proposed community gardens, maintaining a participatory process through a series of meetings and design workshops.

Recruit a permaculture or landscape designer onto your working group. In particular, the following points are worth bearing in mind:

- » **Design for low-waste** – Maximise the opportunities for onsite management of organic waste generated by the garden, specifically compost and worm farming systems, as well as, potentially, organic waste materials produced by the surrounding community.
- » **Design for integrated soil fertility management** – Aim to grow the biomass (organic material) you need for mulch and composting on-site, incorporate legume species that both produce biomass and fix nitrogen (an essential plant nutrient) in the soil for other plants to utilise, and design in crop rotation. Crop rotation moves different types of plants through the garden beds in sequence so as not to exhaust the soil of nutrients and to help in the management of plant diseases.
- » **Design for sustainability** - Use recycled and local materials in construction, avoid importing soils and grow a variety of plants.
- » **Design for water management** - Consider access to potable water for drinking, washing of hands and produce grown on site. Maximise opportunities for water harvesting and passive irrigation while reducing run-off to the stormwater system. On sloped sites, use swales, terraces or beds that run along the contour of the slope to catch water.
- » **Design for solar access** – Planting and positioning of buildings and infrastructure should not block northerly and easterly sun. Plantings of shrubs on the western boundary can provide shade from the hot afternoon sun.
- » **Design for integrated pest management** – Include a range of plants that provide habitat for small birds, frogs, lizards and predatory insects. Include sources of water such as ponds and bird baths.
- » **Design in windbreaks** – Plantings of native (or exotics adapted to dry conditions) trees and shrubs on the southern and western perimeters will protect the garden and reduce evaporation of valuable moisture in the soil.
- » **Design for biodiversity** – When carefully designed, community gardens can be part of a city-wide network of local native bird and animal habitat, as well as a demonstration of rare and local food species (exotic birds will also make use of the habitat created).
- » **Design for the senses** – A garden designed to engage the senses will be a place where people want to be. It will also enable your garden to 'speak' to a wider cross-section of the community including children and the disabled. Try to include scented plants, colour, public art and auditory elements such as wind-chimes.
- » **Design for learning** – Think about how groups will be accommodated. Design in outdoor learning areas and paths with nodes that allow a group to pause for discussion. Create opportunities for experiential learning, demonstration and practical small-group activities.

- » **Design for accessibility** – Think about those with limited mobility. Raised beds should be incorporated where possible, pathways made wide enough for prams and wheelchairs to pass and beds made narrow enough for gardeners to reach the centre without strain. If gardeners with limited mobility do not join the garden immediately, the beds will still be more comfortable for all gardeners to use.
- » **Design for sociability** – Ensure you incorporate seating and informal sheltered spaces for eating, chatting and planning as a group.
- » **Design for safety** – Maintain clear lines of sight, incorporate seating to encourage people to spend time in the garden and avoid creating enclosed or hidden spaces. Bearing safety in mind, spaces may still be created for people seeking solitude, for meeting with one or two others or to create a sense of intrigue in a garden that unfolds as you move along a twisting path.
- » **Design for cultural diversity** – Include the plants and cultural traditions of the various cultural groups who make up your neighbourhood. Invite these communities to participate in the design process.

Actively involve as many people as possible in the garden design process. This will ensure that everyone's ideas are heard and the resulting plan will be something that everyone can 'own' and relate to.

If required, get some professional assistance in the production of the final design. An accurate and attractive site plan is inspiring to new members, especially at the initial stages of implementation and will keep the project on track if core founding members move on.

Remember that the initial garden design will continue to evolve as you implement the project. Be flexible to this and allow input from new group members who may not have been a part of the initial design process.



Funding your garden

Once you have a clear vision for your garden and a plan for implementing that vision, you will need to develop a budget and consider where you will obtain the necessary financial resources.

In-kind support (such as donations from local businesses), reusing 'waste' resources and applying for grants are some of the ways community garden groups have resourced their projects.

The requirements of each unique garden will vary, but most gardeners will need to consider the following:

- » Costs of involving the community (e.g. producing promotional material, mail-outs, local advertising and venues for meetings).
- » Public liability insurance.
- » Construction materials (e.g. termite-free recycled sleepers or bricks).
- » Organic material for no-dig bed construction.
- » Tools and equipment (e.g. hand-tools, wheelbarrows, watering cans, hoses and propagation supplies).
- » Irrigation equipment.
- » A lockable toolshed.
- » Water supply, including costs of fittings and professional installation.
- » A small selection of books as a resource for the group.
- » Permanent or casual staff, such as a co-ordinator or design consultant.

Accessing funds

There are many ways community gardeners can access funds for their project, depending upon its scale and focus. Plan your fund-raising efforts carefully, ensuring that the money raised is worth the time and energy expended. Successful ways that community gardeners have raised funds include:

- » **Events** – Open days, celebrations, festivals and markets can all attract a donation for entry as well as income from the sale of plants and other products. You may also attract new members this way.
- » **Annual plot and membership fees** – A consistent income stream that is enhanced by incentives such as a library, newsletter or free workshops.
- » **Lease of space** – A well developed community garden can be leased to local educators and community groups for courses and workshops.
- » **Visitor donation box** – Decorate to attract attention.
- » **Nursery** – A number of community gardens operate successful nurseries specialising in edible plants. These attract people to the garden, provide consistent income and sometimes employment for committed members.
- » **Educational tours** – Community groups, schools, TAFE and university courses may pay to visit a well developed site that demonstrates key sustainability principles.
- » **Courses and workshops** – This can be a significant source of income in a well designed and developed garden with appropriate facilities.
- » **Services** – Some community gardens have developed successful consultancy arms that provide an income stream.
- » **Grant funding** – Community gardens provide a diverse range of social and environmental benefits so they are eligible for a wide variety of local, state and federal government grants. Visit www.ourcommunity.com.au and www.grantslink.gov.au for further information on obtaining grants.



Reuse and in-kind support

Community gardeners are traditionally very skillful at turning waste into resources, as using recycled materials make both financial and environmental sense. Investigate the following:

- » Lawn clipping for composting from local mowers and landscapers.
- » Animal manure from a local race-track or police stables.
- » Food waste from restaurants, fruit and vegetable shops and residents.
- » Woodchips from Council or a local street tree lopping contractor.
- » Plant cuttings and heritage seed varieties from other community gardens or neighbours. Once your project is up and running you can reciprocate.
- » Out-of-date or root bound plant stock from local nurseries.
- » Recycled building materials from local demolition businesses.
- » Old sleepers from the State Rail Authority.

Local businesses may be happy to negotiate on-going discounts, donations or sponsorship of the project in exchange for publicity in your newsletter, project signage or promotional material. Invite them to visit your project or take your design to them and discuss potential partnerships based on a shared concern for the local community.

Insurance

Each garden committee has a duty of care to the community who utilise the garden areas. Public liability insurance is required to be taken out with a minimum of \$10,000,000 limit of liability, either by obtaining a policy of your own or through becoming auspiced by another organisation. The City of Fremantle will require a copy of your certificate of currency as proof of insurance cover. The Public Liability policy protects both the garden's incorporated body and the landowner against charges made against them if a visitor is hurt or injured as a result of the policy holder's negligence.

It's a good idea to talk to other community gardens about insurance. Ask them what kind of cover they have, how much it costs and what level of service the company provides. Community gardens are a unique land use that does not fit easily into established insurance categories. This can lead to significant variations in the cost of premiums, so shop around.

Consider having your project insured with another community garden, as an umbrella policy is likely to be much cheaper. Alternatively, you could have your project auspiced by another organisation, such as a garden club, neighbourhood centre or Landcare, that can include you in their insurance policy.

Make sure you review your insurance every year as progress and changes to your project, such as employment of staff, increasing numbers of volunteers, changes to activities and investment in equipment, could change your requirements and/or premium costs.

The City's insurers have a specialist division "Local Community Insurance Services". This division has been created to cater to the insurance needs of community groups and not for profit organisations.

Quotations can be obtained via their online website <https://www.localcommunityinsurance.com.au> as well as verbal advice given by their toll free number 1300 853 800. You are not obliged to use this service. There are many comparable insurers in the market that can give competitive pricing. Should you have difficulty in obtaining public liability insurance please contact the City.

Implementing your design

Consider available funding and human resources when commencing implementation of your project. Take on manageable tasks with sustainable outcomes, such as planting fruit trees and constructing compost bays. These will survive periods of inactivity whereas plantings of annual vegetables will not. Celebrate your successes and maintain enthusiasm during this initial stage of hard work and occasional set-back. Be patient. Persevere.



Ongoing management

The development of systems for the management of each aspect of your project is essential.

These systems include the development of policies and procedures for the management of community participation, maintenance, administration, ongoing infrastructure development and garden safety. Although this takes time, it can be the focus upon which the success or failure of your project hinges.



Administrative systems

Unfortunately, community garden projects aren't just about gardening. There are a few crucial administrative matters that will need to be attended to.

Keeping records

A simple notebook or spreadsheet is useful for volunteer and member contact details.

Use membership and plot holder application forms to collect the details you require. If designed carefully, a spreadsheet can make distributing information simple and efficient allowing quick access to email addresses for distribution of paperless newsletters and promotional material for events and workshops.

Documentation of the project is very important, both to promote the garden's progress and to obtain and keep funding.

Maintain records of member numbers, volunteer hours and the demographics of those involved. Regularly take photographs of the project's progress and significant events for use in promotional material and grant applications.

Handling money

Community garden projects must abide by many of the same laws regarding management of money as a small business. If you are selling a product, acquire an Australian Business Number (ABN) through the Australian Taxation Office. Always include your ABN on receipts you issue, e.g. for membership fees or plant sales.

Conversely, always obtain a receipt for anything you purchase. This is especially important if you are spending money from a grant that will need to be reported on to a funding body. Keep careful records of all income and expenditure to avoid confusion later on.

Health and safety systems

Don't underestimate the potential for serious injury in a community garden. By anticipating problems before they occur, and implementing systems to avoid or minimise them, you will protect both the community from injury and your project from costly and potentially damaging allegations of negligence.

Conduct a thorough risk assessment that considers the following, with particular reference to the safety of children and the elderly:

- » Poisonous or potentially allergenic plants.
- » Trip hazards.
- » Sharp or dangerous edges.
- » Manual handling and heavy loads including the use of wheelbarrows.
- » Use of sharp or dangerous tools.
- » Use of soils and manures.
- » Dangerous materials e.g. barbed wire.
- » Poisons and pesticides.

Develop a health and safety policy outlining the way your project will minimise the risks you have identified. Include safety procedures for any chemicals or power tools you will be using. A thorough volunteer induction process, including the provision of a health and safety training session and guide book, is essential.

Make the environment safe and provide appropriate facilities and tools, including shade, sunscreen and personal protective equipment such as hats and gloves. Provide a well equipped first-aid kit and ensure everyone is made aware of its location and contents at induction. Having gardeners who attend regularly complete a first aid course could prove useful. A logbook for the recording of accidents and incidents should be kept with the first-aid kit.

Maintenance systems

Many people working in community gardens like to have their own plot and this has many advantages. However gardens made up solely of plots can provide few opportunities for cooperation and community building. Some of the best community gardens have a balance of individual plots and communal space. Chat to other community gardeners about your options.

Individual plots

Individual plots don't necessarily have to be laid out in rows; if well thought out they can be attractively integrated into an overall design. This is generally beneficial for the overall functioning of the space in terms of integrated pest management, water sensitive design and solar access.

In developing a management system for plot gardens you will need to consider:

- » Will fees be charged annually or quarterly? How much will they be?
- » Will small plots attract a lower fee and will you have a concession rate?
- » Will plot holders need to agree to participate in other garden activities?
- » Will there be rules regarding use of chemicals and artificial fertilisers?
- » Will some plants, such as invasive species, be disallowed?
- » Will plot holders be required to maintain solar access to other plots?
- » How long will people be able to leave their plot fallow before it's reclaimed?

Adapted from the Community Gardening in South Australia Resource Kit

Communal areas

While maintenance of individual plots is the responsibility of the individual, maintaining communal areas can be a challenge unless a management system is implemented from the outset.

One way of ensuring that communal areas are maintained is to stipulate that all plot holders attend a monthly work-day, or participate in a working group. Working groups will be discussed in more detail later in these guidelines.

Maintaining the garden in an attractive, safe and functional state is an important aspect of being a responsible neighbour.

It will also make the garden appealing to visitors, attracting new members and showcasing the aesthetic as well as the practical aspects of sustainable gardening.

A number of tools can assist in the smooth functioning of garden maintenance systems including:

- » Rosters for specific tasks e.g. turning compost.
- » Logbook for recording specific tasks undertaken – this shows clearly who is doing the work.
- » Allocation of specific roles and responsibilities with corresponding incentives where appropriate e.g. green waste coordinator.
- » Work-groups for specific tasks.
- » Regular work days accompanied by social activities and shared meals.





Social and organisational systems

A common reason for the failure of community garden projects is a lack of emphasis on the design of internal governance and communications structures.

In a recent research paper (Ketai, D, 2006), Devorah Ketai identified six aspects of garden management that are key to their long-term success. These aspects are:

- » Attracting new members.
- » Orienting and educating new members.
- » Internal organisation.
- » Internal communication.
- » Governance.
- » Community partnerships.



Attracting new members

Attracting new members to your community garden can be difficult at the outset when there is little tangible evidence of the project. Some ideas that have worked for other successful gardens include:

- » Having an attractive and professionally drawn design plan.
- » Ensuring your vision and objectives are clear and easily communicated.
- » Registering the project with a local volunteer network.
- » Having well publicised working bees and BBQs.
- » Inviting the involvement of schools, local residents and friends.

As the project develops it will be easier to attract involvement. Try:

- » Running short, practical workshops.
- » Holding open days, events and celebrations.
- » Including musical and artistic events as well as gardening.

In order to maintain the long-term interest of a visitor to your garden, you need to make them feel welcome and ensure they understand what the project is about. Take the time to sit down and chat. Answer any questions they might have and explain how they can get involved.

Have a brochure explaining the garden's aims and objectives available to give to visitors and, as the garden develops, erect attractive project and interpretive signage that makes your vision clear to visitors from all walks of life. Graphical signage is important for children as well as those who don't read much English.

If you have a clear calendar of work days and events, this gives you a reason to invite people to come back. It also helps to have a clearly defined structure of roles and responsibilities, or work groups, that you can invite the visitor to participate in. For example, over coffee you might discover that a visitor works in marketing, a skill that perfectly fits the needs of the garden promotions team.

Let visitors know that the garden is owned by the community and is open to ideas and feedback from everyone. Illustrate this by providing a box for visitor comments and take these comments seriously!

Design and aesthetics

Think about how people will see the garden from outside. Paying attention to aesthetics is important, not only for attracting new members to your garden but for ensuring good relations with your neighbours.

Design your garden to be:

- » Beautiful and welcoming.
- » Safe, orderly and well maintained.

Thoughtful design can invite involvement.

Such designs pay close attention to the presentation of the entrance area, provide sheltered seating areas and have welcoming signage. Such signage clearly and graphically explains the garden's purpose and how people can get involved.



Orienting and educating new members

If you want people to stay you need to develop a process for including them, familiarising them with your project and making them feel they are a valuable member of the group. Conducting a volunteer induction process is therefore essential, ensuring that all new volunteers are aware of:

- » Their rights and responsibilities.
- » Occupational health and safety.
- » Training opportunities.
- » Garden policies and procedures.

It is recommended that garden coordinators develop a system of governance that allows volunteers to take on increasing responsibility as their involvement in the project deepens. This may be through the creation of a number of sub-coordination roles where a person can take responsibility for the management of certain aspects of the garden compost systems, community events or promotion. This allows for the development of a resilient social ecology that is not dependent for its success on the involvement of one or a few key people.

Retaining volunteers is about matching their skills with a role that makes them feel valued and where they are achieving their own aims and objectives.

This means taking the time to get to know the volunteer and finding out what they have to offer, and in what way they can best share their skills and experience.

Ask the volunteer what they hope to achieve by participating in the project. A volunteer application form can be used to ascertain the skills, experience and interest each volunteer brings to the project and what they hope to achieve. See volunteer involvement as a fair exchange, acknowledge and support volunteers, and ensure they are getting something of value from the experience. Encourage creativity and independent activity within a clearly defined structure.

Appointing someone with good interpersonal skills as a volunteer co-ordinator is a very good strategy for maintaining volunteer involvement in the long-term.



Volunteer rights and responsibilities

To facilitate the development of a healthy social ecology where everyone feels safe and included, volunteers working in community gardens should have the following rights:

- » To receive all necessary information about the group and its policies.
- » To receive clear instructions about the task they are undertaking.
- » To be able to negotiate the jobs, times and work days that suit them.
- » To understand who is responsible and for what.
- » To be included in meetings, social events and in decision-making.
- » To receive proper training, initially, and on an on-going basis.
- » To know who to go to with problems and difficulties.
- » To have their work valued and to receive constructive feedback.
- » To have the protection of insurance and safe working conditions.
- » To be provided with the right tools for the job.

- » To say 'no' if they feel unhappy with what is being requested of them.
- » To be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses, to an agreed limit.
- » To carry out their role without being exploited.
- » To be consulted on issues which affect them.

Conversely, volunteers have the following responsibilities:

- » To respect other gardeners and visitors to the garden.
- » To communicate information and concerns with other group members.
- » To take responsibility for the decisions they make.
- » To accept group decisions.
- » To address areas of conflict with those involved.
- » To ask for and give support when it is needed.
- » To work safely and be aware of their duty of care to others.
- » To accept the presence of people with different philosophical, political and religious allegiances and points of view.

Adapted from the Community Gardening in South Australia Resource Kit

Written guidelines for new members

An information package containing fact-sheets, important policies and procedures, contact telephone numbers, the garden code of conduct and other details is an important aspect of engaging new volunteers. It ensures they are able to fully participate in the activities of the garden, makes them feel included and informed and prevents misunderstanding and conflict that might otherwise crop up at a later date.

Creating opportunities for learning

Because people come to community gardens with a wide range of skills and experience, they are the perfect environment for informal peer-based learning to occur. Being aware of this process and facilitating it can be as simple as providing opportunities for gardeners to chat and socialise together. Other ideas and strategies are outlined below.

- » **Printed and video resources** - Fact-sheets outlining basic organic gardening are an easy way to introduce new gardeners to a range of skills. To supplement this, a small library of well chosen books, DVDs and magazines is also useful, as are planting guides and posters.
- » **Mentoring** - Encourage leadership and enhance learning by providing opportunities for skilled gardeners to mentor new ones. As these mentors become more skilled they may expand their focus to become educators within the wider community.
- » **Workshops** - Hosting skill-sharing workshops at the garden is another way of facilitating learning. Workshops can be presented by skilled garden members or you can bring in an expert to build capacity within the group. Make sure all group members have a say in what skills they feel need to be developed. Opening up workshops to the community can raise funds, attract new membership and spread the good word on sustainable living.



Internal organisation

A community garden without well-developed systems of internal organisation may not last long, because without clearly defined structures, responsibility tends to rest unduly on the shoulders of a few people who quickly burn out and become discouraged. The following are some ideas for internal organisation of community gardens.

Working groups

Working groups and sub-committees can be extremely effective ways of getting things done in a community garden. Ensure groups are provided with the information and resources they need to get their job done and that roles are clearly defined to avoid confusion.

Skills-mapping

Your group will function more effectively if you all know what each person has to offer. Being aware of the skills each member has will help the group evolve into an effective social ecology, where everyone's skills are fully utilised and valued. Each person should conduct a basic skills-audit which includes the following:

- » Networks and membership of community organisations.
- » Gardening skills.
- » Technical skills.
- » Access to equipment.
- » Administration skills.
- » Interpersonal and communication skills.
- » Leadership and learning and facilitation skills.
- » Fund-raising skills.
- » Promotion and marketing skills.
- » Local knowledge.
- » Licences for use of equipment or vehicles.
- » Research and writing skills.

Adapted from the Community Gardening in South Australia Resource Kit

Decision-making

Some garden groups opt to make decisions democratically, by vote after formal discussion at public meetings, while others choose a consensus decision-making model.

Whatever the structure, transparent and inclusive processes are essential.

Effective facilitation at meetings can make decision-making easier, particularly where there is conflict involved, and garden coordinators should consider developing skills in this area.

Garden rules and policies

Everyone involved with the community garden needs to have input into and/or be made aware of the rules and policies that underpin the project.

Member agreements are one way of ensuring that everyone is committed to abiding by these policies and that they clearly understand their rights and responsibilities with regard to the project.

Internal communication

Developing effective systems of communication within the garden group is essential to maintain a spirit of inclusiveness and ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

Some of the methods that other gardens have developed for communicating amongst themselves may prove useful to your project:

- » Letterboxes at each plot.
- » Newsletters and/or an email discussion list.
- » Noticeboards or blackboards for listing events, news and task lists.
- » A logbook or garden diary that volunteers fill in when they visit, noting what they did and anything out of the ordinary that they observed.
- » Regular meetings.

Community building

Internal communication will be vastly improved if a little effort is put into developing a sense of community within the group.

Community building can be facilitated by organising a range of events that involve:

- » Socialising together – any opportunity to get to know each other, share ideas, chat and build friendships.
- » Celebrating together – seasonal festivals, birthdays or simply the group's achievements thus far. Incorporate music wherever possible.
- » Cooking and eating together – BBQs, shared picnics, morning teas, harvest feasts, shared produce.
- » Working together – regular working bees as well as one-off projects.

Remember that a community is made up of a variety of unique individuals who do not always agree or hold the same values. This can be frustrating at times but also provides a wealth of opportunities for sharing skills, experience and knowledge. If you value equally the needs of all members and provide a framework where everyone's voice can be heard, you will find that diversity is a great asset, enriching the community garden and everyone who is involved.



Governance

A core group, ideally with a range of skills and experience, should be gathered to form the garden management committee.

This group of between five and ten people work collaboratively to keep the project on track and ensure that responsibility does not rest unduly upon the shoulders of one or two people. Be strategic and invite people to sit on your committee who have the leadership skills to take the project forward.

Effective committees:

- » Work in support of the garden's aims, objectives, and vision.
- » Include representation from a range of stakeholders.
- » Are well informed about the workings and goings-on of the garden.
- » Have good support from the community garden as a whole.
- » Target key people with key interests, skills and networks to fill roles.
- » Rely on agreed meeting and decision-making procedures.
- » Have friendly, efficient, well facilitated meetings.
- » Provide training and/or mentoring for committee members.
- » Have effective communication between committee and gardeners.

Adapted from the Community Gardening in South Australia Resource Kit

Code of conduct

A code of conduct defines what is, and is not, acceptable behaviour within the community garden. In some gardens the code of conduct has been an important tool for resolving conflict where one or more members are causing difficulty due to their differing and inflexible objectives. A code of conduct is prescriptive, so keep it brief and avoid creating too many rules and regulations.

Constitution

In contrast to a code of conduct, a constitution is a longer and more formal document with legal status. It is a requirement for community gardens to become incorporated associations and is also useful for any garden group that has begun to develop more complex projects and procedures as it formalises the fundamental principles and tenets that the group abide by.

Conflict resolution

Although community gardens generally aim to promote an environment that is tolerant and inclusive, it is inevitable that conflict will sometimes arise, either within the garden group or with external stakeholders.

Developing a clear process for the resolution of conflict is therefore essential. Many community gardens have learnt this the hard way.

Honestly and openly address the potential of conflict as a group and discuss what you will do when it arises. Your conflict resolution process should look at:

- » Ensuring respectful communication between those involved.
- » Who, both internally and externally, will mediate serious conflict?
- » What will be the process for addressing personal grievance?

Project evaluation

Now and then it is important to sit down as a group and look at your project to assess whether or not you are achieving what you set out to achieve. Evaluation helps you see how far you've come, can show you where potential sources of conflict lie and is also useful as a means of leveraging funding and publicity for your project.

- » What are we trying to do here? Does it work?
- » Is this what we set out to achieve?
- » What is its value?
- » What has this achieved?
- » Has this been successful?
- » Why does it work?
- » Why doesn't it work?
- » What can we do to make it work better?
- » What has been the short to medium term impact of our work?
- » What has been the longer term outcome of our work?

Adapted from the Community Gardening in South Australia Resource Kit



Community partnerships

A community is a network, a social ecology, and community gardens are very good at building this network through the development of collaborative and mutually beneficial partnerships.

Community outreach

There are many ways to let the community know about and get involved in your project. Some promotional activities to try include:

- » **Onsite signage** – Clear, welcoming and attractive, explaining what the garden is about, when it's open and contact details.
- » **A brochure** – Detailing the project vision and how people can get involved. Ensure it's distributed widely within your local area.
- » **T-shirts or hats** – To wear in the garden and at events.
- » **Community events and celebrations** – These can give you coverage in the local media and showcase the success of your project.
- » **A website** – Website space is available to promote your community garden and tell people about how it works at www.communitygarden.org.au. You should also list your garden at www.communityfoods.org.au.
- » **An information stall** – For community festivals and market days.
- » **A publicity officer** – Someone with publicity or marketing skills is ideal.

Vandalism

Encouraging involvement and a sense of ownership within the local community will minimise problems of vandalism. Welcome everyone, even non-gardeners can still enjoy the space for relaxation or social interaction. The following hints may also prove useful:

- » Provide supportive neighbours with phone numbers they can call if they see something suspicious.
- » Ensure garden signage lets people know that the garden has been developed for and by the community.
- » Liaise with schools and youth groups to develop activities in the garden that children and young people will enjoy.
- » Use spiky plants and vines on walls and fences to dissuade graffiti, or invite local artists to develop murals, aerosol art and mosaics.

Adapted from the Community Gardening in South Australia Resource Kit



Links with other organisations and networks

Initially, developing links with other community gardens and community garden networks is an important means of increasing your skills, as well as your access to funding and resources. As your garden develops, its value as a demonstration of sustainable living will increase; other organisations may use it as a site for field trips, practical activities or workshops. Opportunities will arise to form collaborate projects with groups such as youth centres, schools and universities.

Employment programs

Many community gardens develop work-skills programs for the unemployed that provide significant energy and input into the garden project while building confidence, skills and motivation in participants. Such programs are most effective when there is a particular project the group can take ownership of, such as building a pergola, and are particularly appropriate at the project outset.

Participants of such programs need to be afforded the same respect and opportunities provided to other volunteers. Encourage them to give input, take on responsibility and participate in training, social events and decision-making.

Community gardens participating in such programs need to be aware that there are administrative, coordination and financial responsibilities involved. Talk to other garden groups that have already undertaken similar programs to get advice and assistance in developing your own program.



Essential resources

Guidelines

Community Gardening in South Australia Resource Kit

www.canh.asn.au/community_gardening - includes a range of factsheets

Cultivating Communities' Good Practice Guide

www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/building_stronger/safer/commgard.html

Funding your Community Garden

www.communitygardenswa.org.au

Networks

Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network

www.communitygarden.org.au - great newsletter, website and email discussion group. ACFCGN also organises local get-togethers for community gardeners

Australian Community Foods

www.communityfoods.org.au - register of Australian community gardens

The American Community Gardening Association

www.communitygarden.org - a wealth of resources, links and publications

Cultivating Community

<http://cultivatingcommunity.org.au/cc> - a key player in the Victorian network that contracts its services to the Victorian government.

Books

Community Gardens,

Woodward, P and Vardy, P (2005), Hyland House, VIC

Introduction to Permaculture,

Mollison, Bill (2000), Tagari Press, NSW

Handbook of Community Gardening,

Susan Naimark (1982), Boston Urban Gardeners

Harvest of the Suburbs,

Andre Gaynor (2006), University of Western Australia Press, Crawley.

Permaculture, Principles & Pathways Beyond Sustainability,

David Holmgren (2002), Hepburn.

Earth Users Guide to Permaculture,

Rosemary Morrow (2006), Kangaroo Press, Sydney.



Glossary

Biodiversity - The abundance and variety of all living things on Earth including plants, animals, insects, micro-organisms and human beings.

Biomass - Organic material, both living and no longer living, in a specific environment.

Charter - A statement setting out an organisation's purpose, mission, values and goals.

Code of conduct - A document designed to guide the behaviour of an organisation's members.

Consensus decision-making - A group decision-making process that requires the agreement of most, if not all members. The process also involves the resolution of objections to the decision.

Constitution - An official document setting out the rules and principles governing management of an organisation. It is required of all organisations seeking to become incorporated associations.

Contour - An imaginary line on the surface of the earth, or drawn on a topographic map, connecting points of the same elevation above sea level.

Experiential learning - Learning through doing; a participatory approach to learning.

Incorporated association - A legal entity with certain rights and responsibilities under Australian law. It allows an organisation to do such things as sign a lease or obtain insurance without risk to individual members.

Integrated pest management - Designed pest management using a range of complementary methods including planting habitat for natural predators, using pest-resistant varieties and changing cultural practices. Pesticides (even natural ones) are used only as a last resort.

Integrated soil fertility management - In this context it refers to designing your garden to provide the nutrients and biomass required for sustainable soil fertility management from on-site sources.

Learnscape - An environment or landscape designed for learning.

Management committee - An elected group comprising a president, vice president, treasurer, secretary and public officer, as well as several ordinary members. Establishment of a management committee is required of organisations seeking to become incorporated associations.

Operations manual - The agreed procedures and practices for maintaining the community garden and its assets.

Passive irrigation - In this context, making the most of rainwater that naturally falls on the site.

Permaculture design - The use of ecological principles as the basis for designing sustainable systems of food production, housing, appropriate technology and community development.

Plan of management - A detailed document outlining exactly what the group hopes to achieve and how it intends to do so.

Public liability insurance - Insurance to cover the cost of accidental injury or property damage to garden visitors. It protects the organisation if a member of the public sues them for negligence.

Risk assessment - A formal process of identifying health and safety risks, assessing how likely and how serious these risks are and developing ways to avoid them occurring.

Swale - In this context a man-made depression along the contour designed to prevent rainwater running off the site. It is useful to increase passive irrigation and to avoid stormwater pollution.

Water sensitive urban design - Designing to increase rainwater and stormwater harvesting options, maximise water reuse and minimise the impacts of stormwater on urban waterways.



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