



Communal Gardening Toolkit

September 2016



Introduction

Each year, Growing Together is approached by local groups and churches regarding how to establish a community garden. Growing Together and its volunteers have mentored over 12 community gardens start ups in the Fargo Moorhead area. This toolkit has been created as a lasting document of reference for those wishing to found their own community garden.

The magic of the Growing Together model of community gardening lies in the communal nature of the garden. The entire garden is worked together as a group and the harvest is shared equally among participants. This communal model allows participants to grow relationships with each other and encourages integration. People come to the gardens for many reasons but they stay for the camaraderie.

Growing Together has 6 gardens in Fargo. Each has its own personality and runs in slightly different manner. Please adjust the running and organization of your garden according to the needs of your own participant base.



Key questions

There are a few key issues to contemplate when considering a community garden:

Who will be the participants?

Where will the garden be located?

Are there any financial resources available?

The specifics of your garden will be determined by the answers to these questions.

Participants

Who will be the participant base of your garden? Is the garden neighborhood based? Do they belong to a certain organization? A certain demographic? Is this group interested in gardening?

Location

Where will the garden be? The garden does not need to be large. Many gardens are extra green areas of larger lots. For example, many businesses have large unused green spaces that can easily be converted from lawn to garden. A 100ft by 100ft area can serve up to 40 gardeners. The location should have access to water. It is best to have storage for tools on site as well but not always necessary.

Growing Together has partnerships with many organizations that provide land access free of charge- Park districts, churches, and private businesses. Make sure to work with your land provider on access, water, parking, and hours among other things.

Financial resources

There are two types of costs involved with gardening, start up costs and annual costs. The initial investment when establishing a garden covers tools, buckets, hoses, wheel barrows, and possibly a storage shed. These items should last many years. Annual costs are seeds, plants, twine, stakes, and tilling services. Check with local community organizations for sponsorships or donations to help cover these cost. Or ask for donations from your participants.

Planning and organizing

There are many possible administration and leadership roles for the garden. Which roles your garden uses will depend on the number and make up of the participants. For example, Growing Together was created as a way to engage the refugee and immigrant populations in Fargo. Therefore we have a Refugee Coordinator. Your garden's target participation may be different. One person could fill multiple roles.

Garden Coordinator

- overall lead person for the garden
- assures communication between garden organizers, participants, sponsors and land owners

-
- weekly emails of announcements
 - updates to social media
 - tracks garden needs and requests for donations

Garden Record Keeper

- maintains database of contact information for participants, sponsors, and volunteers
- maintains record of garden plans- what is planted where
- maintains record of weekly and total harvest amounts for each vegetable

Garden Photographer/ Archivist

- Take photos, upload to social media
- Record history of the garden including crop rotation

Garden Liaison to Trustees

- represent the garden to church trustees or other groups that sponsor the garden
- coordinates building and land use

Garden Volunteer Coordinator

- coordinate outside volunteers to assist with larger garden projects such as building shed, tables, garden structures, raised beds, tilling
- coordinate with community groups who may want to visit the garden or work in the garden as a service experience

Celebration Planner

- lead person for planning registration, celebrations, etc

Meal Coordinator

- responsible for coordinating meals if your garden hosts meals each week
- purchase or source groceries, paper products, etc

Transportation Coordinator

- bus driver
- coordinate carpools

Liaison to refugee families

- help find families to participate
- distribute information about gardens to families

Children's Activities Coordinator

- provide child appropriate activities as needed

Timeline

FIRST FALL

Ideally, the location of the garden would be determined the fall before the first year of planting. Tilling up the space and adding in compost in the fall gives a jump start to the spring duties. But don't worry, it can still be accomplished in early spring.

SPRING

Outside the garden:

March: Host a registration night where potential garden participants can come and hear about the garden and register to participate.

March-April: Begin starting seeds in March or April for those vegetables that will benefit most from an early start. In other Growing Together gardens, this includes tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cabbages, and melons. Starting in the greenhouse allows for early and more prolonged harvest which is especially important for our climate. If you lack a space for starting seeds, partner with a local farmer, nursery, or grower to provide seedlings or space to grow your seedlings.

In the garden:

Late April: If not previously done, till the soil in preparation for planting. Likely, you or another garden organizer knows someone handy who has a tiller. Hardware stores and craigslist usually have people offering services as well.

May: Week 1- mark the rows and create raised beds in the garden according to the plan developed earlier in the year.

Week 2- Begin planting what are known as cold weather crops. These are hardy plants and seeds that will germinate at a lower soil temperature and with stand colder temperature. Continue with raised beds and marking if need be.

Week 3- Begin planting what are known as warm weather crops. These are plants that need warmer soil temperatures and milder weather. Continue with cold weather crops if needed.

Week 4- Begin transplanting your green house plants. We wait until after the “last average frost date” before bringing these beautiful sensitive plants out to the garden. Finish planting all seeds.

June: Week 1- All plants and seeds should be in the ground and coming up. If there are any rows or beds that have been planted for 2 weeks but have not germinated, this is your chance to replant.

Remainder of June- These are often the toughest weeks in the garden. This is when the heavy work of weeding and watering is done but there is no harvest to share yet. Use plenty of encouragement and positive reinforcement to keep participants coming back. It can help to have fun events at the end of the garden session- light snacks, games, or a group photo.

July: Continue to weed and water as necessary. Weekly harvests will begin. Consider a recognition night for those who have earned a full share in the garden if you have implemented a plan for sharing according to hours worked.

August: Mainly harvesting and watering along with weekly harvests. If you would like to use succession planting, Week 2 of August is the perfect time to plant a second crop of greens or other quick maturing crops.

FALL

September: Harvest continues. Now begins the clean up activities. For crops that are no longer producing well, pick harvestable fruits or vegetables and pull the remainder of the plant. Plants with thick vines should be cut with pruner into shorter 6-8 inch chunks or use a shredder if available. Dig a trench 12-18 inches deep in a now unused section of the garden, put the plant remains in the trench and cover with 6-12 inches of dirt. Burying plant material in this manner helps it breakdown faster, return nutrients to the soil, and improve soil tilth. This process is easy to accomplish bit by bit over the first 3 weeks of September. The goal is to have all beds and rows cleaned up by the last week in September.

Harvest festival- We recommend an event in the garden on the last week of gardening each year to celebrate a season of hard work and fun. This could be a BBQ or potluck with an open mike for those who would like to sing or perform.

WINTER

Monthly meetings of the core volunteer team helps to keep in touch and to organize any details of the upcoming season. Now is the time to reflect and discuss what went well and what needs improvement. Make a plan for the next season's garden to predict which seeds and plants will be ordered.

ALL SEASON LONG

When the growing season is in full swing, we recommend weekly communications with core volunteers, garden leaders, and participants. A simple email update regarding upcoming events, donation needs, or other need to know items can serve as a reminder and help everyone feel connected to the garden.

Tools List

5-10 shovels

5-10 hoes

2-3 rakes

15- 25 Food grade buckets

2-3 wheel barrows or carts

Wooden stakes

2-3, 2 lb sledge hammers

Twine

garden hose, enough to reach from faucet to garden edge

10 x 10 storage shed if possible

This document is a work in progress. Check back for updates