

Community Gardening Toolkit



Developed by
Summit County Public Health and Let's Grow Akron
Through an American Planning Association Plan4Health project

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Converting a Vacant Lot into a Community Garden

Assess the Space:

Is there a minimum of 6 to 8 hours of sunlight? Is there a water source nearby? Consider some of the other criteria listed on the included Site Assessment Checklist.

Have the Soil Tested:

Routine Soil Analysis from UMass costs \$15.00 <https://soiltest.umass.edu>

Ask the Neighbors:

How is the lot being used now? Would a community garden be welcome?

Organize Gardeners:

A group of 5 to 10 committed gardeners is a recommended start. Refer to the included *Let's Move: Community Garden Checklist*

Consider your Community Assets:

Create a mutually beneficial community asset map using the included template and refer to the *American Community Garden Association's guidelines for launching a successful community garden in your neighborhood.*

Contact your local County Extension Office for trainings and resources:

Refer to *Dig In! Growing a Community: A Guide for Starting a Community Garden* which is available under resources tab at: <http://cuyahoga.osu.edu/program-areas/agriculture-and-natural-resources>

Find out who owns the property:

Contact your county fiscal office or call your local planning department. Gain permission from the property owner or local government to use the land.

Get Growing:

Start small with room to grow. A small successful garden can be extended next season.

Do your research:

Many regional and national funding opportunities are available for community gardens

Some helpful websites:

<http://www.gardenabcs.com/grants.html>

<https://communitygarden.org/resources/funding-opportunities/>

Site Assessment: Get to Know Your Site

Inventory these features for each potential site

You have a few people who have come together to start a community garden. Where will you put it? Look for empty lots or unused land in your neighborhood. Don't rule out small or odd shaped spaces. They could work out. Make a list of possible sites. Try to find several to be sure one will work out. Consider these things when putting sites on your list.

Community Mapping

1) What community and business groups and facilities are nearby?

- Church, mosque, etc.
- Schools
- Childcare centers
- Community & neighborhood centers
- Aged care facilities
- Neighborhood watch groups
- Local environment groups
- Restaurants
- Business councils
- Garden stores
- Other businesses

2) Who lives nearby?

- What are the age groups of people?
- What are employment and unemployment levels?
- Is housing public, community, private rental, owned?
- What are people's cultural and language backgrounds?
- What is the crime rate in the area?
- What are other special characteristics of the people in the area?

3) Safety and Security

- Is the site near community facilities (school, community center, etc?)
- Is the site in view of houses, roads, shopping areas, etc?
- Is there graffiti or vandalism visible?
- Is there any lighting?
- Is there a neighborhood watch group?
- Is the site fenced?

Land Use

1) What are the main land uses surrounding the garden site?

- Businesses (what kinds?)
- Industry
- Parkland
- Major roads
- High density housing
- Medium density housing
- Low density housing

2) What is the history of the land?

- Residential
- Industrial
- Parking Lot
- Gas Station
- Business
- Other

3) Current land use

- Who currently uses the land?
- Do people walk through or use it as a shortcut?
- Rubbish dumped
- Illegal activities
- Children's play
- Other uses

4) Plants

- What plants grow well in the area?
- Who are the experienced gardeners in the neighborhood?

Tip: Use City Council, Community Development Corporations, and Census Data to answer these questions

Site Assessment: Physical Features

1) Size

- How big is the land?
- How much of the land is suitable for gardens?

2) Land tenure

- Who owns the land? Is the owner active on the land?
- Are there zoning regulations in place? What do they allow and restrict?
- What are/would be the leasing agreements, how long, cost, etc?

3) Sun, wind and soil

- What's the current ground cover? (grass, gravel, etc...)
- What is the slope of the land?
- What plants (including weeds and trees) are already on site?
- What is the soil like?
- How many hours a day sun does the garden get? (Should get at least 6 hours of direct sunlight)
- Are there any large trees or buildings blocking shading the site?
- Is there a water source on site?
- How does water move through the site?
- What direction does wind come from?
- What do you notice about the wind?

4) Structures

Are there any...

- Buildings on site?
- Seating?
- Shedding?
- Walls?
- Fences?
- Paved areas?
- Other structures?

5) Services

- Is there electricity on site or easy to access?
- Is there access for a vehicle for materials deliveries?
- Are there sewers or storm water drains?
- Is there public transport nearby?
- Are there major roads nearby?
- Are there barriers to pollution from traffic?
- Is there parking?

What other features does the site have? On another piece of paper, draw a quick sketch of the property.

Other Tips for Community Garden Projects

Look To Expand:

Allow for some changes and flexibility in the site design whenever possible.

Allow space for plants that attract pollinators to the garden. Rain Barrels, trash bins, compost bins, benches, tables.

Ideas for Getting People Involved:

Social Media - Share your garden again and again! Every time it comes up in your newsfeed, share it again (have others do the same). The more posts, the more likelihood of getting views. A picture is worth a thousand shares.

Create Memes for Social Media Promotion:

Use quotes and funny stories to create memes out of your own garden photos, and make sure you put your garden "branding"/logo/ or contact information on the meme. Online meme generators allow you to use already existing photos with your own funny saying or quotes, or upload your own pictures. Avoid using copyrighted photos.

Site Basics:

Sustained Interest: Make sure to schedule time for promotions and recruiting new members, like while waiting for your indoor seedlings to germinate.

Keep it fresh: Update things that no longer work, look for solutions to problems.

Post photos of the garden to capture interest long after the growing season has passed.

Ideas For Fundraising & Resources:

THINK BIG - Large National Corporations often have a section on their website for applying for grant funding. **Doublethedonation.com/donationrequests**

Amazon, Best Buy, CVS, Red Box, Apple, General Electric, American Eagle, Coco-Cola, Pepsi, Gap, Kohl's, Kroger, Boeing, McDonald's, Nike are just some of the many large corporations that donate to local organizations.

Seed and Garden Supply Companies: Donations of seeds, tools, supplies

Local stores of big Retail Chains - Target, Wal-Mart, Lowe's, Home Depot will often donate gift cards for purchasing supplies.

Local Businesses - Donations of needed items, goods, services, or donations for fundraisings such as items/services/gift certificates for auctions or raffles. Take a bucket to Starbuck's and get coffee grounds!

Authors , or creators of Garden inventions: Can be contacted as guest speakers at a fundraising event.

Develop A Site Plan:

What is on the site that can be used? Are there blocks or bricks to create borders or raised beds? Are there stones to create garden walls?