

How to Start a Community Garden

Feeling green? Want to get your hands in some clean dirt? Your local community garden has a mile-long wait list? Any of these reasons might be your motivation to look into starting a community garden!

The Recreation and Park Department receives many inquiries to start new community gardens throughout the City. Although it seems that it should be as easy as building a few raised beds on a vacant piece of land, there is much more than meets the eye to starting up a community garden.

As with any project proposal to establish a new recreational use (including play areas, dog runs, basketball courts, etc.), establishing a community garden requires three essential ingredients necessary for success:

Space – Level terrain is ideal for community gardening since it generally requires less site development and is easier to provide wheelchair access (i.e., building code and the Americans with Disabilities Act). The site must not conflict with other existing recreational uses. The site should be free of large trees, have water connection nearby, and not heavily shaded by trees or building structures. Consult with the Recreation and Park Department's [Neighborhood Services Manager](#) for the park to review the proposed location(s).

Funding – A typical community garden contains raised garden plots, hose bibs, tool shed and compost bins. The cost of the community garden will depend on its size and design. To give an idea of cost, in summer of 2008 a 4,300 SF community garden cost around \$20/SF to build (construction cost only), which included 14 garden plots (2 plots are wheelchair accessible), hose bibs, tool shed, compost bins, small greenhouse, and surface of either decomposed granite or bark mulch. This does not include the cost of securing the perimeter with fencing. Don't forget to cover costs associated with design and other soft costs.

Interest – Community interest in participation is essential for a successful garden. In the past, community gardens were put in because they were considered “good ideas”. But if nobody signs up, then the garden will simply lay fallow. Generally community gardens are in demand in neighborhoods that are densely populated, have a high renter population, or where backyards are not commonly available. However, community gardening is gaining interest in all neighborhoods, which should go a long way in your fundraising efforts!

Think you've found an ideal location, but not sure if there is enough community interest? Wondering how much it would cost to build the garden and how to fundraise? To begin gauging whether or not the 3 essential ingredients are there, consider introducing the proposal at a meeting of a community group. Contact a local landscape architect to inquire about *pro bono* services toward the planning of the garden. An illustrative plan will be a useful tool in preparing a cost estimate for the project, gaining more community interest and fundraising.

Starting a community garden will take time and effort. When you're ready to move on to the next step after securing the 3 essential ingredients, please contact the [Recreation and Park Department](#) for more information. Thanks for your interest in the Community Gardens Program.