

Growing Gardens

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A Resource Package on How to Start Your Own Community Garden







Geography 447 Class, UBC, 2007
















Urban Agriculture Site Development Group
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In Consultation for
Society Promoting Environmental Conservation

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Letter to the Gardener



Dear community gardener,

The intention of the Community Garden Resource Package is to encourage and empower people such as yourself who are interested in community garden to dream and create one of their own.




As you know, starting a community garden can be a long process and there are many things to consider. Some steps and questions to think about include:

-  how to organize your project
-  how to garner community support and bring people together for your garden;
-  where to find and how to wade through the various guidelines and policies applicable to the future site of your garden
-  what funding sources and options are available
-  what information and resources exist and where to find them
-  how to ensure that your community garden maintains ecological, economic, social, and aesthetic sustainability and receives on-going support

To help you through the process of creating your community garden, we have compiled a toolkit of information and resources for you. The package contains useful advice from fellow citizens that have initiated and continue to maintain successful community garden projects; and from Vancouverites that are involved in promoting urban agriculture. It also provides information on the wealth of resources available in Vancouver. We hope that our package can help you spend less time hunting down procedures and people and more time for you and future community gardeners to get your hands dirty!

Good luck with your future community garden!

Sincerely,

-  Geography 447 Urban Agriculture Site Development Group 2007
Gehron Burkholder, Polly Ng, Jing Niu, Anjuli Solanki
-  Dr. Kathrine E. Richardson, Geography 447 Instructor
-  In consultation for Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC), Karen Wristen, Executive Director, as part of SPEC's initiative to assist the City of Vancouver in creating 2,010 community gardens by 2010.

Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens in Vancouver









A garden nurtured by students of LifeSong School at Jericho Hill Centre.

Urban Agriculture

What is it?











It is the “growing, processing and distribution of food and other products through intensive plant cultivation and animal husbandry in and around cities” (Brown 2003; qtd. in Kaethler 2006)

What can it look like?

-  your balcony tomatoes
-  the neighbour's hobby greenhouse
-  the local school's garden
-  the bustling farmer's market in your local church's parking lot
-  the herb garden on the Fairmont Waterfront Hotel's green roof
-  vegetable plots in your neighbourhood community garden

Community Gardens

What can they do for your community?

-  provide community members with fresh, healthy, and affordable food
-  provide gardeners with regular exercise and recreation
-  bring neighbours together to learn about each other and share knowledge and food
-  teach children about nutrition, life sciences, and sustainability
-  create beautiful green spaces
-  create habitat for wildlife
-  reduce our ecological footprint
-  improve neighbourhood safety by reducing crime
-  provide a source of pride for your community
-  provide opportunities to help those in need (e.g. donating food to the Food Bank)

What are they?

They are organic gardens that are used by its members to grow food and flowers for personal use



A community gardener in her garden at Cottonwood Community Gardens, located on Malkin Street between Hawks and Raymur.




Envisioning Your Community Garden Project

Envisioning Your Project






Volunteers at the Richmond Fruit Tree Sharing Project communal Sharing Farm.

Imagine what your future community garden will look like: a beautiful space blooming with vegetables and laughter. Explore all the details of your dream garden.

-  Who is present? Neighbours, friends, volunteers?
-  Who is not there but contributed something or helped you build the garden? Local store owners, landscape architect students, seed companies, community funding agencies?
-  What plants and materials make up your garden? Seeds, transplants, tools, a shed, wood, compost?

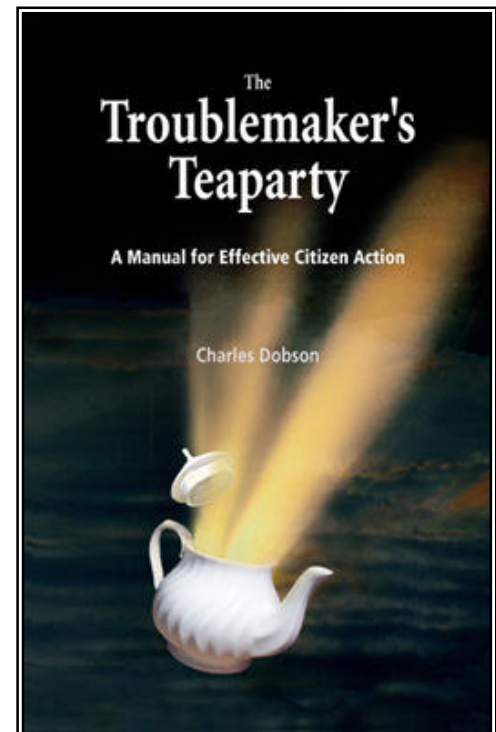
Create a mental list of all the individual people and separate resources that were in your vision and think about whether they exist, where they are, and how you can access them. These resources and people will be located in different places; separated from you by barriers such as applications and procedures; and you may not know where to find and how to access some of them.

The project of creating your community garden is the process of organising or bringing together all of these unconnected people and resources. There are many ways to organize all the ingredients that go into creating a community garden. There is no best practice or sure-fire method but successful organizing is often:

-  well thought out and carefully planned
-  flexible to changes as you learn from experiences and mistakes
-  respectful of and makes the most of the resources and abilities available to you

An excellent resource on community organizing is “The Citizen’s Handbook: A guide to Building Community” by Charles Dobson from Vancouver Citizen’s Committee, available at

<http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/welcome.html>.



“The Troublemaker’s Teaparty is an updated version of “The Citizen’s Handbook” and is available at Amazon.ca.

Laying Down the Organisational Groundwork

There are some basic steps that are fundamental to building the solid foundation needed for the fruitful organising of your community garden. They help to pull together the people that will make it happen; define your project, and map out how you will get from where you are to where you want to be. The following was based on "The Citizen's Handbook". For more comprehensive information, please refer to the handbook. <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/welcome.html>

A. Where: Where to Begin?

You have a fantastic idea and need to find information and like-minded people.

- ☒ Research existing literature and examples
- ☒ Join an existing group that is already doing similar work
- ☒ Start your own group if a group does not exist or does not work for you

B. Who: Who is Organizing?

Whether you joined or formed a group, you need a core of 3-5 committed individuals. Talk to acquaintances and soon-to-be acquaintances and look for people with:

- ☒ similar passions and values
- ☒ solid commitment and follow through
- ☒ diverse skills and experiences
- ☒ fantastic and enthusiastic attitude

C. What: Defining Your Project

When you have your group, brainstorm your ideas on these questions:

- ☒ What are we trying to achieve?
- ☒ What size of area will we organize?
- ☒ Who will support our project?
- ☒ What is a simple and rewarding first action that we can do?
- ☒ How will we reach out to others in our community?

D. How: Planning Your Project

When you have a good sense of your group and project, think about how you can make things happen.

- ☒ Set simple, achievable goals that will yield concrete results
- ☒ Brainstorm objectives and strategies to reach these goals
- ☒ Narrow down goals and objectives
- ☒ Brainstorm actions to reach these objectives

E. When: Creating an Action Plan

When you have small, manageable projects that best fit your visions, values, and available resources, create a flexible action plan with:

- ☒ a list of tasks to complete, sorted according to priority
- ☒ a person assigned to each task
- ☒ a list of necessary resources, including materials, funding and facilities
- ☒ a time-line for completing tasks

F. Adapting to Available Resources

If you have limited resources:

- ☒ Keep your group small
- ☒ Find strong and dependable people
- ☒ Focus on a single project that will produce tangible, rewarding results
- ☒ Tackle one goal at a time
- ☒ Do your most important tasks first
- ☒ Incorporate project tasks into daily life
- ☒ Reduce the time you spend on what feels like work

Starting Your Community Garden

Introduction to the Process

There are some basic pieces that make up almost every process of creating a community garden. Organised into three broad categories of social, physical, and economic considerations, these include:

Social

- fostering initial and continuing community support for your project

Physical

- finding available and suitable land for gardening
- doing a physical analysis for your site
- planning the physical design of your garden

Economic

- assessing costs
- finding funding

Within and aside from these fundamentals, there are many tasks and considerations that go into the creation of a community garden. You will likely come across ideas, opportunities, and concerns that are unique to your project. As well, the order in which you tackle these considerations (or perhaps the sequence in which surprises find you!) will be individual to your garden.

Hence, the following sections are not organised in chronological order. They are organised into the three categories of social, physical, and economic; and present the fundamentals and other items that you will likely think about or come across in the process of starting your garden. It is up to you to decide which tasks and considerations best fit your needs and to choose when it makes the most sense for your group to address them.

An important thing to recognize when thinking about the process of starting a community garden is that it takes time. On average it takes about 18-24 months from your first organising efforts to when you are able to start gardening. There will be snags along the way but the learning and growing process can be as enjoyable as the potential outcome.

As well, there is no absolute perfect garden and it is important that each garden has character to match its neighbourhood. However, there are certain guidelines that are important to follow when gardening on lands owned by the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation (see pages 15-16) and the City of Vancouver (see pages 17-18).

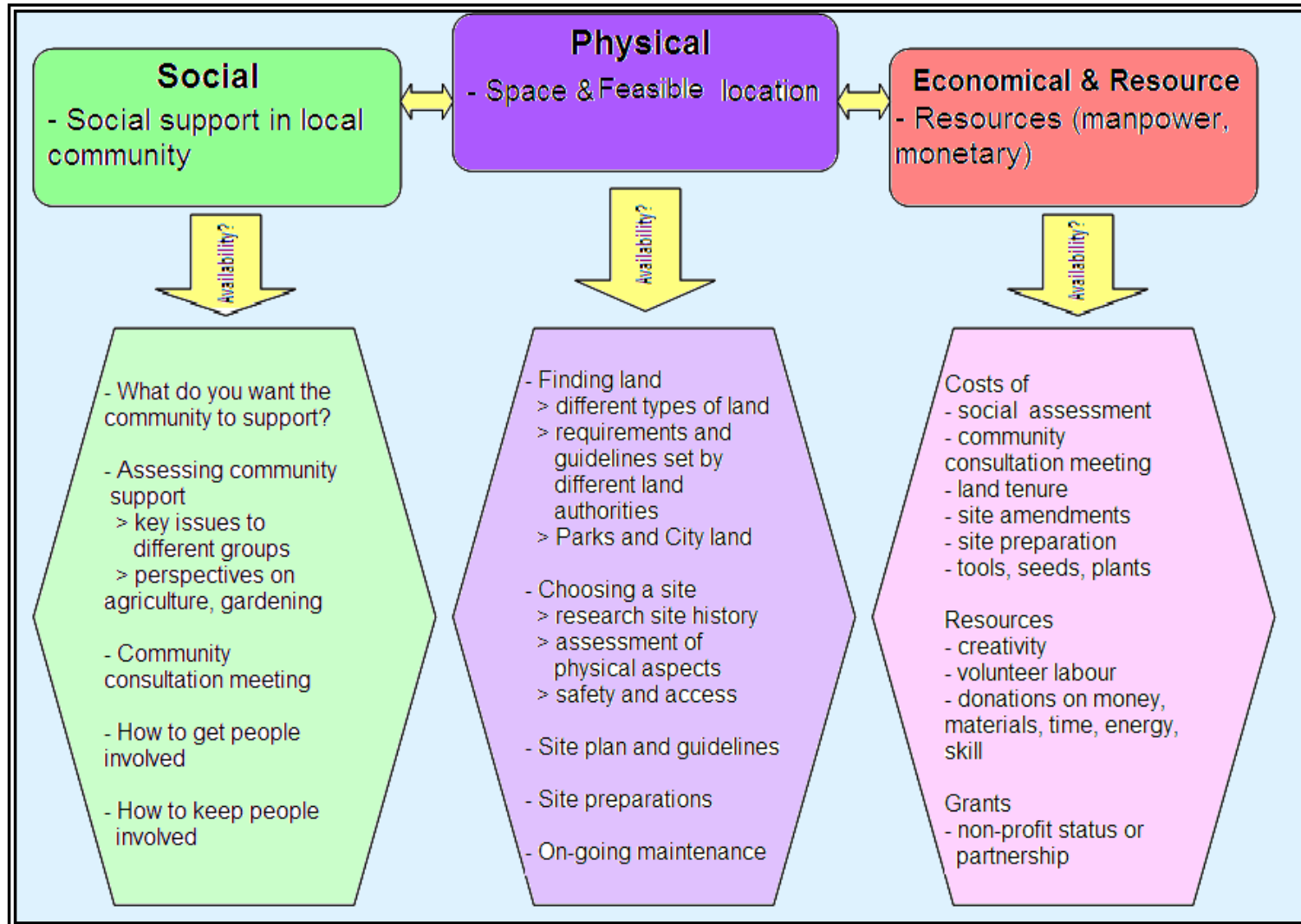
If you would like guidance through your process, consider partnering with an established garden. For a list of a few community gardens in Vancouver which have expressed interest in providing advice and guidance for budding gardens, see [APPENDIX A](#). Also try approaching members of the many other successful community gardens and ask for their advice and expertise. Many people are eager to support the growth of more community gardens and gardeners.



A potential outcome?

Conceptualising the Process

This template may be helpful in helping you organise the many errands and projects that are involved in starting your community garden. The template is broken down into two phases and three categories of factors. It is important to meet the requirements of the initial phase so that you can successfully develop your project through the second phase. The three categories of social, economic, and physical/ environmental factors are equally important to consider when planning your community garden and will vary from garden to garden. You may need to select certain steps and carry them out according to the action plan that makes the most sense for your group, location, and resources. For more detail on this template, please see [APPENDIX B](#).



Social




Your Community's Garden

A garden is always far more than the vegetables and flowers growing in it. The most important ingredients in any garden are the people that care for and love the plants; and the community that views and uses it as a place of gathering, meeting, sharing, learning, and connection.



People and community make a garden.







Many community gardens in Vancouver emphasise that community support was essential to their creation. Community support and involvement also fuel the continuing success of these gardens. Encouraging your community to adopt your garden into their minds and hearts as a positive and integral part of the neighbourhood will help you to:

-  foster commitment to your garden
-  cultivate stewardship of your garden
-  ensure that your garden becomes a perennial place in your neighbourhood

Garnering Community Support

What is the Community Supporting?

The first step to building community support for your garden is to have a clear picture of the idea and project that you want supported. The following are some questions to help you and your group to brainstorm and to sketch the broad outline of what your project and garden will look like:

-  What is the purpose of the garden?
-  What goals do you want to achieve by establishing a garden?
-  How will the garden be used?
-  Who is welcome to use the garden?
-  Who will be using the garden?
-  What features and programs will be included in the garden?

Assessing Community Support

Finding out the degree to which your community favours urban agriculture in and approves of a garden in the neighbourhood will help you identify potential supporters and partners. Gauging the opinions and attitudes of local residents and different groups will also allow you to get a sense of how well your garden fits the needs of your community. If you find that there are issues that are important to the wider community or to specific groups that are not addressed by your project, you may be able to win the support of these individuals by reworking the concept of your garden to incorporate these issues.

Useful information to look for when assessing community support include:

🌱 **Issues that are important to the community**

- These may include:
 - improving community participation
 - addressing crime, vandalism, drug use, and prostitution
 - improving the supply of and access to safe and nutritious food for vulnerable groups, such as immigrants and disadvantaged households
 - beautification of public spaces
- How can your garden address and support these issues?

🌱 **How your garden will impact the community**

- What are positive effects? (e.g. creating social capital and healthy food sources)
- What are negative effects? (e.g. aesthetic considerations)

🌱 **Cultural perspectives on agriculture**

- Talk to different cultural groups and organizations
- Address negative attitudes and perspectives
- Use positive attitudes and perspectives to 'sell' your garden

🌱 **Potential user groups**

- Who will want to be a part of your garden?
- What common objectives do you have and how can you help each other accomplish these objectives?

Some methods of assessing community support are:

- 🌱 **Talking to people:** the most old-fashioned and effective; get a range of opinions from neighbours, neighbourhood associations, churches, community centers, co-ops, apartments, local social organizations, etc.
- 🌱 **Door knocking:** a fantastic way of reaching out but can be time-consuming and intimidating for you and the resident
- 🌱 **Surveys:** a comprehensive method but time-consuming and possibly costly and ineffective

Community Consultation Process

At some point, you will need to inform the community about your project. This can be done simply by putting up notices in your future garden site location and at popular bulletin boards. However, holding a community consultation meeting to make your project public can be a valuable way for you to:

- ✂ gain support and feedback for your garden
- ✂ invite community members to get involved in your project
- ✂ make valuable connections with potential supporters, donors, and volunteers

Organising the Meeting

The best time to organize a community consultation meeting is when you are clear about what you want to tell those attending and what you want to gain from holding the meeting. Depending on the size of your neighbourhood, it may be advantageous to hold several meetings if possible: the more meetings and locations, the more diverse the audience that you may be able to reach.

When you have set the date, time, and location for your meeting; advertise around the neighbourhood. Postings should include the details of when and where the meeting will be, as well as the purpose or objective of the meeting and discussion topics that will be covered. Also provide contact information, in case individuals want to get in touch to confirm details or ask questions. Try to have advertisements up for at least several days before the meeting, to ensure that they have generated interest. To the right are some ideas on how to spread the word. For more suggestions on where to poster and meet, see [APPENDIX C](#). Missing from the list of venues is the SPEC building (see [APPENDIX K](#)).

Advertising Ideas

- ✂ Word of mouth
- ✂ Coffee shops
- ✂ City newspaper event listings
- ✂ Co-op radio
- ✂ Websites of gardening and agriculture non-profit organizations
- ✂ Blogspot.com
- ✂ CraigsList
- ✂ SPEC event calendar

Holding the Meeting

The following are some suggestions on how to plan and prepare for holding your meeting:



Citizen involvement is crucial to building a community garden

- ✂ Choose an accessible location
- ✂ If possible, provide food and childcare to motivate and enable people to attend
- ✂ Have a clear, simple, and concise agenda
 - present your project
 - outline how it will benefit the community
 - ask for participants' reactions, opinions, ideas, and involvement
- ✂ Plan for a short 45min to 1h meeting, so people can fit it into their busy lives
- ✂ Leave time before and after the meeting for informal discussion and networking
- ✂ Obtain contact information from interested individuals and invite them to a follow-up meeting

Getting and Keeping People

At every stage of starting your community garden, getting and keeping people involved will be important for keeping the project going. The following tips are gleaned from the very informative 'Getting People' and 'Keeping People' sections of the "Citizen's Handbook".

Getting People

- ✎ Ask members to invite family, friends, and neighbours
- ✎ Go to where people meet and gather
 - meetings of other groups
 - community events
- ✎ Ask for and record names, addresses, and phone numbers of interested individuals
 - follow through by contacting these people with an e-mail or phone call
- ✎ Reach out to the under-represented
 - ethnic minorities
 - low-income residents
 - the differently-abled
 - the elderly
 - youth
- ✎ Door knock
- ✎ Create newsletters and leaflets



Keep people involved with food and fun.

Keeping People

- ✎ Keep in contact with one another
 - preferably in person but electronically may be more convenient
- ✎ Welcome potential new members
 - introduce them to everyone
 - help them find a place in your project doing what they want to do
- ✎ Pay attention to group process
 - define clear roles and healthy decision-making methods
- ✎ Discuss expectations
 - what do members expect of the project and the group?
- ✎ Act more, meet less
- ✎ Keep time demands reasonable
- ✎ Pair up
- ✎ Organise social activities and time
 - take a break from work to relax and have fun with these people
- ✎ Provide skills training
 - organise workshops and training to invest value in your members

Physical

Finding Land

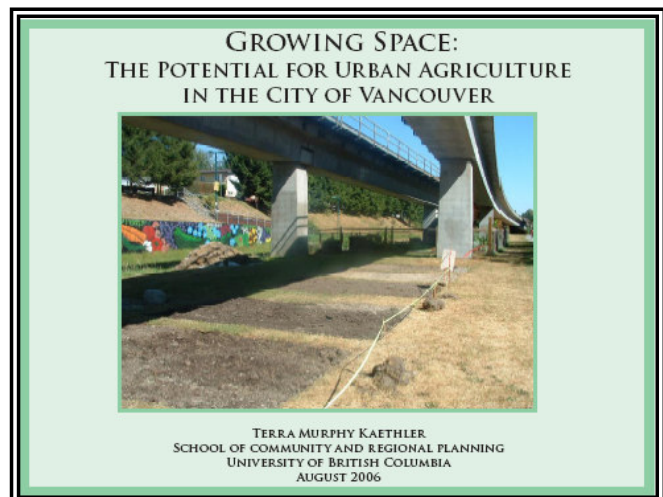
Finding available land in Vancouver for your community garden can be a challenge, depending on how developed your neighbourhood is and the scale and type of gardening that you envision for your project. You may already have your sights set on a long-abandoned lot, a grassy field owned by your local church, or a space in your or your neighbour's housing complex specifically designed for a garden. If you do not have a location in mind, you can search for a space simply by walking around your neighbourhood or the area in which you want to create your community garden and keeping an eye out for a piece of land large enough for your needs. Talking to neighbours will also give you a good idea of available spaces in the area.

Another avenue to explore while searching for land is to contact the various authorities that own and manage land. Many allow space for community gardening if you meet certain conditions and requirements. Available spaces can be located on lands owned by the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver Parks and Recreation Board, the Vancouver School Board land, TransLink, the federal government, and private owners. The following inventories list some lands in Vancouver that may be available for community gardening. These inventories do not include all available spaces and the authorities that own and manage the locations listed may not necessarily allow for community gardens.

Land Inventories

"Growing Space: the potential for Urban Agriculture in the City of Vancouver"

- **Source:**
http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/foodpolicy/tools/pdf/Growing_Space_Rpt.pdf
- **List:** available lands on City-leased or city-owned property
- **Author:** Terra Murphy Kaethler, School of Community and Regional Planning (UBC, August 2006)



City of Vancouver Semi-Public Properties Inventory:

- **List:** available lands on semi-public properties (e.g. churches, private schools)
- **Author:** (will be available in fall 2007)
- **Source:** (contact City of Vancouver Social Planning Dept.)

When choosing a site for your garden, find out under whose jurisdiction the space falls and learn about the rules, regulations and requirements that your garden will have to meet. Ideally, the authority that manages your space will accommodate the scale and type of gardening that you envision for your project. In the case of City and Parks land, there are policies and programs that offer support such as funding and services for your community garden.

Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation Land

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation has made public park space available for community gardens since 1985, when Strathcona Community Garden was created. The Parks Board views community gardening as an important land use that builds community development and education, environmental stewardship, and healthy social interactions.

Parks staff will work with interested individuals and groups in the development of new community gardens. They work with both community and communal gardens and offer guidelines on how you should proceed if it is determined that your project and Parks Land are a good match



Strathcona Community Gardens is located on Parks land at Prior Street and Hawkes Avenue.

General Requirements

Your group and project must meet the following stipulations in order to be eligible for using Parks land. For more information, please see the Parks Board's official Community Gardens Policy at: <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/parks/info/policy/comgardnpolicy.htm>

- ❏ Your group must have non-profit status or be partnered with a non-profit organisation (see page 23).
- ❏ Your project must encourage community development through the involvement of schools, youth groups, or citizens that are not gardening in an assigned plot in your garden
- ❏ Your garden must be organic and increase ecological biodiversity
- ❏ Your garden should nurture understanding of local food production
- ❏ Your group and project must have the support of the neighbourhood (see pages 10-13)
- ❏ A site plan for your garden must be submitted and approved by the General Manager of the Parks Board before development begins (see page 20)

Support from Parks and Recreation

The Parks Board offers the following services to community gardening groups that meet the above requirements. It will:

- ❏ Provide access to information on the development and operation of community gardens
- ❏ Assist interested groups in searching for suitable land

Assist in the development of user agreements with the owners of sites chosen Assist with the development of a community led environmental education program

- 🌿 Prepare the site for planting prior to the first season by removing grass, ploughing the soil and adding compost at Parks Board's Cost



West Point Grey Garden is a communal garden located on the corner of Trimble Street and W8th Avenue.

Other Considerations

The advantages of starting your community garden on Parks land are balanced by several potential disadvantages.

- 🌿 It is difficult for the Parks Board to change existing land use patterns that benefit the public and provide land solely for gardening purposes, since the plot allotment in community gardens is semi-private and takes space away from other members of the public. However, the Parks Board can better accommodate communal gardening, where anyone can participate in gardening a shared, communal area.
- 🌿 The process may take up to 18 – 24 months
- 🌿 Parks Board may require that you make your plots available to all City residents.

Parks Contact Information

For additional information regarding starting your own community garden, contact:

Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

2099 Beach Avenue
 Vancouver, B.C. V6G 1Z4
 Phone: 604-257-8400
 Fax: 604-257-8427

City of Vancouver Land

Several mature community gardens have resided on land owned by the City for many years. Currently, the City of Vancouver actively encourages and supports the creation of new community gardens on city property because it recognises the numerous social, sustainability and economic benefits of community gardening. In 2006, City Council announced the '2,010 New Community Shared Garden Plots by 2010' Challenge, which calls "individuals, families, community groups and neighbourhood organisations to establish more food-producing gardens in Vancouver" (City of Vancouver 2006).

Social Planning Department staff that is working on food policy and urban agriculture envisions that community gardens will play a big role in rising up to the challenge. The City will collaborate with interested individuals and groups and assist them in the process of starting a new community garden. Helpful guidelines similar to those of the Parks Board are provided by the City on what you need to do to start your garden on City land.

General Requirements

Your group and project must meet the following broad criteria in order to be eligible for using City land. For more details, please see guidelines for the Pilot Project in [APPENDIX D](#).

- ❏ Your group must have non-profit status or be partnered with a non-profit organisation (see page 23).
- ❏ Your project must, in some way, foster
 - community development and involvement
 - food donations to charitable purposes
 - environmental education and demonstration
 - increase in environmental biodiversity
- ❏ Your group and project must have the support of the neighbourhood (see pages 10-13)
- ❏ A site plan for your garden must be submitted and approved by the City before development begins (see page 20)

Support from the City

The City offers the following services to community gardening groups that meet the above requirements. It will:

- ❏ Provide access to information on the development and operation of community gardens
- ❏ Help an interested group of people find land if they do not have a potential site already identified.
- ❏ Help facilitate the community outreach and consultation process
- ❏ Help to develop the site by
 - clearing unwanted vegetation
 - bringing compost and water
- ❏ Assist groups in the search for funding (e.g. grants etc.)

Other Considerations

The many benefits of starting your community garden on City land are balanced by several potential drawbacks.

- ☞ Staff time and resources are in high demand so assistance may be limited.
- ☞ Starting a community garden on City land can take up to two years
- ☞ The tenure of land agreements for City land can vary between one to twenty years, although the most commonplace is five years. Additionally, the permit can be terminated with 30 days notice at anytime.

City Contact Information

To inquire about the requirements and process of starting your garden on City land, contact:

Devorah Kahn

City of Vancouver Food Policy Coordinator
Social Planning Department
604-871-6324 or devorah.kahn@vancouver.ca

Choosing Your Site

In addition to the location and availability of the site you have in mind, there are many physical aspects to consider before you make the final decision. These physical characteristics will influence how suitable the space is for gardening in general and for what you envision for your project.

Almost any physical aspect can be improved or amended. For example, you can install raised planter boxes and bring in fresh soil and compost to compensate for poor or questionable soils. The disadvantage of site amendments is that they can be costly in terms of money and labour. However, some creativity and legwork can go a long way (see page 22).

Below is a checklist of important characteristics to assess before you select your site.

Checklist for Physical Aspects

Research Site History

- Historical Uses:** who used it and for what activities?
- Current Uses:** who uses it now and for what activities?
- Contamination:** any possible sources from historical uses or neighbouring activities and what types of contaminants?

Initial Physical Assessment

- Size of Area:** is it large enough to suit your needs?
- Water:** availability, supply, access?
- Slope and Drainage:** sufficient or will amendments be required?
- Exposure:** how exposed are different parts of the site to light, wind, runoff?
- Biological Problems:** presence of invasive species, noxious weeds, pests?
- Space for Structures** (e.g.: storage units, compost bins, etc.): is there sufficient space?

Access and Safety

- Transportation:** proximity to public and self-propelled transportation?
- Inclusive Accessibility:** can the site be accessed by the differently-abled?
- Personal Safety:** are there features that might negatively affect personal security?




Site Plan and Guidelines

A site plan is a highly useful tool that can help you to visualise what features your garden will include; map out how these features will be organised; and maximise use of your space. You may already know how your garden design will look like before you find and finalise a location. However, a site plan will be most useful to you after you have secured a physical space. The dimensions of your location will influence what features it can accommodate and may even create opportunities for different elements and layouts. Many beautiful and care-free gardens harmonise their designs with the natural characteristics of their sites.

A site plan is also necessary if you are starting your garden on Parks or City land. See the Parks website for Parks guidelines (see page 15) and [APPENDIX D](#) for City guidelines.

There are many books available on how to draw a site plan. The following are some basic elements of what your plan should include. It can also be helpful to look at successful community gardens around the city and how they are laid out.


Checklist for What to Include in a Site Plan

 <u>General Elements</u>	 <u>Basic Features</u>	 <u>Characteristics of Features</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Size and slope dimensions of your site	<input type="checkbox"/> Entrances and exits	<input type="checkbox"/> Location
<input type="checkbox"/> List of all the features in your garden	<input type="checkbox"/> Pathways	<input type="checkbox"/> Number
<input type="checkbox"/> Dimension of all the features	<input type="checkbox"/> Existing vegetation (e.g. trees)	<input type="checkbox"/> Size
<input type="checkbox"/> Location of all features	<input type="checkbox"/> Garden plots	<input type="checkbox"/> Shape
	<input type="checkbox"/> Communal gardening and meeting spaces	<input type="checkbox"/> Width
	<input type="checkbox"/> Existing and planned structures	<input type="checkbox"/> Function
	<input type="checkbox"/> Water lines and sources	

Your site plan does not need to be professional, even if it is to be submitted to the City or Parks Board for approval. It should just be legible and clear. If you feel you would like professional assistance, consider working with students at local landscape architecture programs. Many would be happy to take your site plan on as a project. Before you agree to partner with a student, put together a scope of work that works for both of you. This is especially if the student takes this on as class-work, since the class will have its own deadlines for completing the project.

Landscape Architecture Program Contact Information

 UBC Landscape Architecture Program
Phone: 604-822-6916
Email: larc@interchange.ubc.ca

 UBC Certificate in Garden Design
Phone: 604-822-1444
Email: information@cstudies.ubc.ca

Site Preparations



Much site preparation work can be done by hand, especially if members of your group and community are very involved.

After you have found the appropriate land, gathered community support, raised the necessary funds and capital, and have the green light to transform your space into a community garden, the site may need some preparation prior to the first growing season.

Depending on the size of your site and how much funding or volunteer people-power you have, preparations can be done by machinery or with elbow grease in a series of work parties. For example, members of the My Own Back Yard garden chose to shovel a mountain of fill to level their site over several months rather than move it by machine. If you are starting your garden on City or Parks land, these authorities provide some assistance with site preparations. Please see pages 15-18 for more details.

Below is a checklist of some important site preparation tasks. This list is not exhaustive, and as many experienced community gardeners have suggested, creating a community garden is a dynamic process with new challenges around every corner.


Checklist for Site Preparation

- Remove unwanted ground cover, grass, and other structures
- Level the ground
- Test the soil for toxic heavy metals & nutrient levels
 - See [APPENDIX E](#) for list of local companies that are willing to complete soil tests on contact
 - See [APPENDICES F](#) and [G](#) for additional information regarding soil sampling
- Bring in soil and compost as needed
 - See [APPENDIX H](#) for information on compost pricing and delivery
- Connect or provide access to water

Economic

Costs and Funding

Funding is often an issue with the start up, and at times the maintenance, of a community garden. Costs may include:

-  land use fees
-  application fees
-  water and utilities
-  facilities use fees
-  tools and machinery
-  seeds and transplants
-  materials for infrastructure
-  etc.

City of Vancouver Food Policy Coordinator Devorah Kahn estimated that starting a new community garden will cost around \$7,000-10,000 on average. However, it depends on what materials and services your garden needs and how creative you are in obtaining them. Some gardens have been extremely resourceful in getting donations of materials, time, labour, and skill. For example, the Tea Swamp Community Garden at E15th Avenue and Sofia created their garden on a shoestring budget of \$500.

Be creative and resourceful when seeking out donations. For donations of materials, look around your neighbourhood or ask neighbours for unused items that can be re-used or re-fashioned into something beautiful or handy. Also try approaching local hardware stores and other community businesses and ask if they would be interested in donating either funds or materials. In [APPENDIX I](#) is an example template donation letter that can serve as a basis for your own. For donations of time and skill, hold scheduled work parties and always be ready to recruit new volunteers, especially students and professional that have specialized knowledge in agriculture, construction, community organization, and other areas of expertise.



City Farmer built this cold frame using donated plexiglass windows.

Another source of funding is grant money. There are numerous small, one-time grants that can provide several hundred to a few thousand dollars to your project. Local Community Credit Unions have also been instrumental in helping a number of the existing community gardens. See [APPENDIX J](#) for a list of some of the granting and funding sources that will fund Community Garden type projects. However, some have certain restrictions, such as being available only for non-profit or charitable non-profit organizations, read the requirements and restrictions carefully before applying.

Non-Profit Status

An organisation with legal non-profit status is an organisation that does not distribute its profits, if any are generated, among shareholders. Instead, any money earned by the organization goes into funding programs and salaries.

It is not necessary for your group to become acquire non-profit status in order to successfully start and maintain a community garden. However, the status does afford some advantages. It can:

- ❏ own its own property and its own bank account
- ❏ continue to do the work that you have started after you and key organizers have left the project
- ❏ protect you and others involved in your organization from liability issues
- ❏ enable you to start a community garden on City or Parks land, since both authorities require groups to have non-profit status in order to do so
- ❏ make your group eligible for more grants, as many are available only to non-profit or charitable non-profit organisations
- ❏ allow you to charge membership fees that will help pay garden expenses.

There are two ways to obtain non-profit status:

1) Partner with an existing non-profit organization.

- ❏ New gardens can partner up with an established garden that is run by a non-profit organisation. See [APPENDIX A](#), which lists several community gardens in Vancouver that have expressed interest in providing this type of advice and guidance.
- ❏ Another avenue may also be to partner with an established environment non-governmental organization (NGO) that promotes urban agriculture. See [APPENDIX K](#), which lists many NGOs in Vancouver that are involved in agriculture and gardening.

2) Establish a new non-profit society

- ❏ You can obtain non-profit status by incorporating your group. A great how-to resource is also available at the Charity Village website: <http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/guides/guide4.asp>
- ❏ You will need to file articles of incorporation with either the provincial or federal government. You can find these documents and step-by-step instructions at the following websites:
- ❏ BC Government: <http://www.fin.gov.bc.ca/registries/corppg/forms/reg20.pdf>
- ❏ Federal Government: http://www.strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/site/cd-dgc.nsf/en/h_cs02145e.html

Further Considerations for Continued Success

Management






Once you have started the ball rolling in the process of getting your garden established, an important consideration is a plan of how your garden will be managed. Formalising this before the garden is actually created helps to show the authorities that are in charge of your site (i.e.: City or Parks Board) that your group is committed to this endeavour for the long term and is investing thought in the future of the garden.





A management plan will include guidelines on all the aspects of your garden's operations. These will provide structure for your day-to-day activities as well as broad directions in which to develop the garden. Many successful gardens have found it important that their management plans encourage active involvement by its members.

What your management plan includes will be guided by what your members find works for them. Here are some example guidelines and advice that we have garnered from existing community gardens.



Active community involvement at work!

-  Have a transparent democratically elected executive that is elected on an annual basis
-  Have regular bi-weekly or monthly meetings where the garden can be assessed, concerns can be aired, and ideas can be shared.
-  Make sure that the minutes from garden meetings are recorded and made available ([APPENDIX L](#), is an example provided by Maple Community Gardens)
-  Create a Membership Guidelines contract (example in [APPENDIX M](#))
-  Have a Member fee (usually around \$5-\$10 a year) and Plot fee (a general range is \$15- \$40 a year). Having two fees can allow those that do not want an individual plot the option to garden in a communal section. These fees contribute to the long-term sustainability of many gardens and help pay for materials or costs.

-  Have a bank or credit union account for the garden.
-  Have a reliable and fair waiting list system that is renewed on an annual basis. By renewing annually you prevent flagging interest and ensure that the people on the waiting list are still interested and have not moved on.
-  Have communal maintenance parties a couple of times a year and make it mandatory for all members to attend a minimum number.
-  Make sure that you have a good relationship with your surrounding neighbourhood by being conscious of “eye sores” (garbage and tools lying around) and noise (i.e.: don't use any power tools or weed-eaters early on Sunday morning).

Maintenance

Most gardens do not require a lot of capital once they have been started, since the main costs are generated by the creation of the garden. However, there are continuing maintenance fees and other costs that need to be accounted for. Annual costs range approximately \$350-\$700, depending on how large the garden is and what the maintenance needs for that year were. The following is a list of some of the approximate costs that most gardens incur on an annual basis.










- 👉 **Water:** \$250
- 👉 **Land rent:** \$1-25
- depending on who owns the land
- 👉 **Fencing and plot maintenance:** \$50 - \$200
- this is not necessarily annual, but if you invest in a good fence to begin with, there is lower maintenance costs required)
- 👉 **Seeds and plants** for communal area: \$50-\$100
- 👉 **Food** for meetings/work parties: \$50
- this cost is optional; you can take the potluck option in which everyone contributes
- 👉 **Fixing up or buying new tools:** \$100
- depends on how well tools are cared for
- 👉 **Compost:** \$10/5m²
- this depends on whether you have your own compost or get it from the City; and whether you have it delivered or you pick it up
- compost from the City is free for non-profit organisation
- 👉 **Garden ornaments** (i.e.: bricks, lumber, bird baths, etc.): variable
- many gardens search for materials that can be recycled and re-used, such as bricks and wood from construction sites.
- 👉 **Any paper-work** that requires printing or professional skills (i.e.: accounting): variable
- 👉 **Miscellaneous:** \$40- \$80
- it is important to account for un-thought of fees

With strong membership and involvement, many of these maintenance costs can be paid for through membership and/or plot fees and in-kind donations. In addition to member fees and applying for grants, here are some creative ways to fund-raise for your community garden and to gather the community together.

- 👉 Invite musicians to donate their time and have a picnic in the garden when people donate money for the music to the garden
- 👉 Have a benefit dance with an entrance fee with proceeds going to the garden
- 👉 If you obtain non-profit and charitable status, advertise that donations can receive tax-deductible receipts for their contributions
- 👉 Have an annual plant sale
- 👉 Have a community barbeque

Words of Wisdom

Organisers and members of existing community gardens are such rich sources of advice so do not hesitate to get in touch with them (many are listed in our resource page in [APPENDIX K](#)). Here are some words of wisdom from some of the garden coordinators.

-  **[Community] garden seeds take a lot longer to germinate than plant seeds** - Neville West, WPG Gardens
-  **It is hard work initially, but once you get started it gets easy** - Mark Sobers, Frog Hollow Neighborhood House and Strathcona Gardens
-  **Communication is everything... If you're not talking to people, you're out of the loop** - Jason O'Brien, My Own Back Yard (MOBY)
-  **It is important that the surrounding community is happy with the community garden** - Terry Dixon, General Manager of Engineering Services
-  **You definitely need a handyperson if you're going to build a community garden from scratch** - Niki Westman, Tea Swamp Community Gardens
-  **In regards to applying for grants and funding apply often, with as many letters of support as possible especially from organizations** - Mardel Greenough, Molehill Community Gardens
-  **Scout out the neighbourhood for materials you can recycle for free ... A community garden doesn't need to cost thousands of dollars, as long as the coordinator is resourceful and is or knows a couple of handy people** - Niki Westman, Tea Swamp Community Gardens
-  **Make sure that you set up good and strong guidelines and have a democratic executive structure to keep the garden well maintained and smoothly run** - Cathy Gole, Maple Community Gardens
-  **Keep all PR and press information on the garden – you can use it to show public support** - Maureen Ryan, Cypress Community Gardens



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
Thank you for your willingness to talk about your experiences and to share with us your knowledge! It is your tried and true advice that peppers these pages.

-  **Christine Boyle**, Grandview Community Garden coordinator
-  **Devorah Kahn**, City of Vancouver Food Policy Coordinator
-  **Jason O'Brien**, MOBY Project coordinator
-  **Dr. Jolie Mayer-Smith**, UBC Faculty of Education Intergenerational Landed Learning Project
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-  **Juan Solorzano**, Vancouver Parks Community Arts Program Assistant
-  **Mardel Greenough**, Molehill Community Garden coordinator
-  **Mary Nola**, Cottonwood Gardens community coordinator
-  **Maureen Ryan**, Cypress Community Garden manager
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-  **Neville West**, West Point Grey Community Garden coordinator
-  **Niki Westman**, Tea Swamp Community Garden coordinator
-  **Terri Dixon**, City of Vancouver General Manager of Engineering Services

A hearty and big thank you to you, dear reader and aspiring community gardener. We hope that this has been of some help to you and we look forward to seeing community gardens sprout around Vancouver!

Our biggest thank you is for Dr. Kathrine Richardson, Professor of Geography 447. You created the space for us to dream, experiment, make mistakes, learn, and achieve. We would not have gotten here without your mentorship and guidance.

Sincerely (from left to right),

-  Polly Ng
-  Anjuli Solanki
-  Jing Niu
-  Gehron Burkholder

