

Guide to starting a Community Garden

Gather your Group

Gather your group. Your group will need a core of people who are actively committed to setting up the garden. This core of people may be two or three or more.

It is always good to remember that a community garden is an opportunity to socialise and celebrate food. It is a place to relax with the beauty of plants. If you are having fun and enjoying the moment then you are probably on the right track.

Considerations when planning your garden

Time Available

First task is to assess how much Time you have available **easily** for the project. For example, how many hours a week and on what days do you have Time Available. This is the first critical step to success. One of the frequent problems with voluntary organisations is burnout by the enthusiastic few. All other features of your community garden need to be measured against Time Available.

Purpose

Decide on your purpose. Are you growing vegetables for yourselves, or for food banks or for the neighbourhood or for a community organisation e.g. church, hungry children. Check that your purpose fits in with Time Available and adjust it if necessary.

Draft Vision

Here are some questions you may need to ask.

- What picture do you have for the end result? Do you see a small garden tucked away in a quiet corner or do you see a large garden which is part of a wider neighbourhood / workplace / ...?
- Do you want to grow flowers/ vegetables, herbs, plants for bees?
- If your purpose is to grow for more than yourselves, you will need to call a meeting of your neighbourhood, organisation, or workplace and present your draft vision.
- Do you see allotments for individuals or organisations or a single garden grown collectively?
- How will your garden benefit the surrounding area? Biodiversity, Landscape?
- Who will benefit from your garden? local community, neighbourhood, children, elderly, local government.?
- Do you see art as being part of your garden?

Organise a meeting of interested people

Present your purpose and you draft vision. Determine whether there is interest in your vision and whether people at the meeting share the draft or similar vision. Is there interest in your project? Invite neighbours, workmates, CCC Strengthening Communities Team, Horticulture Society, Canterbury Community Gardens Association, Soil and Health, schools and anybody who could be interested.

Form a Planning Management Group

After your meeting form a management group. This group can be comprised of people who feel committed to the creation of the garden and have identified their Time Available.

The Management Group needs to set up a structure i.e. meeting times, chair, treasurer etc. The committee needs to identify major tasks such as funding and partnerships, youth activities, construction and communication. The group also needs to appoint a liaison person.

The management group will need to consider whether or not to set up as a charitable organisation. www.societies.govt.nz/cms/charitable-trusts

Land

Often people envisage a community garden as sitting on a ¼ acre or similar size piece of land. However there are many other types of land for growing. For example Delta Community Gardens is sited on a narrow strip of what was once concrete wasteland. In Vancouver there is a community garden sprouting up in between the rails of an old railway line.

If you are hunting for land you will find more if you keep your vision wide and creative. It is amazing what you can grow on a small piece of land.

Private land

This could be as simple as reorganising the fences with your neighbours to create a communal growing space or working with an organisation like a church or school or workplace or other benefactor. Other possibilities are health and community centres.

Your Management Committee should always have a written agreement with the land owner. Your written agreement with the land owner will need to include the following:

- Plan of the garden
- Access to water
- Tenure of the land
- Agreement to growing techniques e.g. organic.
- Agreed Access to the garden – When, who and how many
- Communication updates to landholder
- An agreed vision of what a well maintained garden looks like
- Disputes procedures
- Responsibilities of gardeners and owners

- Harvest agreement – How will the harvest be distributed.
- Cessation of the garden – what happens

Public Land

The Christchurch City Council Process.

In line with the CCC Food resilience policy the CCC sees as its role to enable and encourage community gardening and other edible growing spaces. The Christchurch City Council has set up the following process.

The CCC has set up a “ Go To Person” who will guide you through the process of setting up a community garden / edible growing space on CCC land.

Summary of Processes

- The CCC will only work with a Management Group in the setting up of a Community Garden. The council will not lease of licence land to and individual.
- You will need to send a written proposal with a description of your group, your purpose, vision, skills and competencies. The Guide to a written proposal can be obtained from the ‘Go To person” or can be down loaded from..... on the CCC web site or CCGA web site or obtained from your public library.
- Parks and Gardens???. Assesses each proposal on a case-by-case basis according to the criteria and process described below. A flowchart showing the Council's decision-making process can be obtained from the Go To Person or down loaded from the CCC web site.
- The Complete set of regulations governing the set up of a Community Garden on CC land will be available from the ‘GO To Person’ or may be down loaded from the .. CCC web site...
- The Management Group will be required to sign a deed of lease or licence. A Copy of the standard (generic / template?) Deed of lease or Licence can be obtained from the GO To Person or down loaded from. CCC web site...

FAQ

When on CCC land:

IT is the responsibility of the Management Group to secure funding for the garden's operation.

A garden cannot be used for personal profit

Choose a Site

The selection of a site needs to consider the following factors.

Community

- Does the site fit your purpose?
- Is the garden close to the community? It will be much harder to maintain a site that is distant from the community the garden is to serve. Remember that 'Community' is the first word in Community Garden.
- Adequate access
- Provision for children
- Is it a safe site in terms of health and safety issues e.g. eroded banks, high traffic density.
- Spaces for relaxation and enjoyment
- Well being of neighbours
- Potential conflict with adjacent land users
- Toilets

Growing

- Water – Adequate supply
- Sunlight – It needs to be open with 6 or more hours of sunlight per day.
- Soil type
- Former use of land – e.g. has the land been used for the storage of horticulture chemicals or been a former petrol station etc
- Is there a problem with weeds rubbish or rock?
- Space for shed, compost,

Written Guidelines for your shared community garden.

The guidelines will depend on the type of community garden you are designing.

The gardeners themselves devise the best ground rules. We are more willing to comply with rules that we have had a hand in creating. Ground rules help gardeners to know what is expected of them. The essence of good rules is ensuring their clarity.

This will include:

- Code of behaviour
- Gardening techniques
- Maintaining an attractive environment
- Weed and pest control
- Composting
- Maintenance and storage of tools and materials
- Distribution of harvest
- Communication to members
- Collaboration

Written guideline for an **allotment garden**

Eligibility – Who is eligible to have a plot? How do you deal with changing circumstances or extended absences?

Allocation – Who gets the plot? Preference can be given to people who do not have their own private garden or who live closest to the community garden.

Commitment – You need to clarify what you expect from plot holders. This can include paying annual fees (including how much), helping look after the gardens communal facilities, or supporting the organisation in its promotion or fundraising work.

Responsibilities – What do you expect from gardeners in the way they manage their plots? This can include individual responsibilities that apply to the plot itself such as the general maintenance of the plot, types of plants grown, types of fencing, AND communal responsibilities, such as maintaining the general appearance and functionality of the garden, i.e. maintaining pathways, compost facilities, and communal plantings.

Access – When can people use the garden and how do they keep it secure?

Resource management - How do you disperse information and deal with rubbish, compost, water, tools, and chemical use?

Other matters – such as noise, visitor protocol, animals, and eviction.

Resources and People

People

People all contribute many different skills to your group. It is good to make a skill set summary or set up a skill bank.

Who has growing skills, accountancy skills, legal skills, composting skills, strength, friendliness, carpentry, and plumbing etc?

There could well be neighbourhood resources. E.g Christchurch South has a compost materials collection scheme with the neighbourhood.

Local landscapers can provide composting materials.

Resources

Composting materials e.g. manure, straw, sea weed, grass clippings

A Community Gardens Buddy (Sister garden?)

There are over 25 Community Gardens in Christchurch. It is recommended that you develop a relationship with an established garden to benefit from their experience and share resources.

Key Contacts

Community Gardens Association www.ccgga.org.nz

Soil and Health www.organicnz.org.nz/

Libraries

www.weedbusters.org.nz

Overseas links

Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network

<http://communitygarden.org.au/>

American Community Gardens Assoc

www.communitygarden.org/resources/category/community-garden-management/

Budget

On the whole a community garden run by volunteers requires a low budget.

You will need to budget for

- Tools – many can be purchased second hand – these include spades, trowels, hoes, a rake a wheel barrow
- Hoses or watering system
- Seeds
- Lime
- Signs

You may also need to budget for

- A shed,
- Garden furniture
- Fruit trees
- Materials for paths
- Outdoor cooking e.g. barbecue

However if you want to employ a paid coordinator you will need to budget for wages and develop consistent funding. In this case you will need to be a charitable trust or come under the umbrella of a charitable trust.

Signage

Signs are important. They can contain the name of your garden and the rules of your garden. Communication boards can also be an attractive part of your signage.





Aesthetics are important

A beautiful growing space attracts insects, butterflies, bees, adults, and children. A garden that is lush with food, flowers and herbs becomes a centre of relaxation and renewal. One of the more difficult aspects of maintaining a garden is the pathways. There is often as much work in maintaining the pathways as the garden. Making your pathways a mower width can greatly reduce this maintenance difficulty and easily leave your garden a haven of enjoyment.

Education

If in your garden you have people who are skilled gardeners, it is good to recruit them to teach others. Growing education is available at New Brighton Gardens. They publish a list of their workshops on their website www.nbgardens.org.nz/.

Delta community Gardens provides Grow Your Own free Lunch which is a course in blocks of five weeks. You will learn beginner gardening skills and how to harvest and cook from the garden www.deltatrust.org.nz/

A Place of Learning also provides The Simple Organic Gardening Course. This course is for beginner gardeners. Community gardens and groups can also book their own group sessions for learning the basics of growing food. www.aplaceoflearning.co.nz

Vandalism

This is often the first question asked by people contemplating growing in open community situations. The level of vandalism will depend on your area. Our experience to date is generally that vandals have limited perception of "green stuff". On the whole in Christchurch it is fine to grow in open situations. Christchurch South Community Gardens have been an open garden since 1999. They experience

occasional damage but usually they have little difficulty. Packe St Community Garden have also been operating in an open situation since 1996.

Grow to suit your situation i.e. cherry tomatoes as opposed to big lush tomatoes that can turn into objects to be thrown. It is good to find a way of separating the garden from it's surrounds e.g. Churchill Park. (photo to insert) Your garden can also be fully fenced but fences are often attractants to vandals as opposed to deterrents.

The best deterrent is to invite your community into your garden. The more people watching and caring for your garden the better it is.