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Fresh Fruits & Vegetables at your Finger Tips: How to Start a Community Garden

Resources for Faith Communities

You may be wondering, what is a community garden? A community garden is a plot of land that is shared by a community - families, friends and neighbors - for growing a variety of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Community gardens offer a place for communities to socialize, learn, be physically active and grow healthy foods. They also provide a wonderful opportunity for faith members to reach out to others and teach about the importance of caring for the body, mind and soul. Faith communities often have rights to private land they can use to grow a garden. Finding land is often the biggest hurdle in starting a community garden. This blessing can be used to improve the lives of others. Below are some basic steps to get your garden growing.

Why plant a community garden?

- Community outreach
- Fellowship opportunity
- Improve the health of the community
- Prevent childhood obesity
- Strengthen relationships
- Grow and share fresh produce
- Increase access to healthy food options
- Educate children and families about nutritious foods and the environment
- Give to local food banks
- Reduce crime by putting more eyes on the street

Basic Steps to Get Started:

- **Introduce the idea to your faith community and invite them to get involved.**
Ask faith leaders, families, friends and neighbors to participate.
- **Form a planning committee.** Planning committees are important to maintain an overall vision for the garden. A planning committee can help organize, make decisions, divide up work and establish garden rules. A planning committee should be comprised of people who can dedicate time to the garden and feel committed in the process.
- **Scope out the land.** Look around your faith community for potential garden sites. Make sure each proposed site receives plenty of sunlight (most vegetables require 6-8 hours of direct sunlight every day). Make sure the site has access to water and that it is visible to the community. Visibility is important not only for safety, but to keep interest and excitement. You may also want to test the soil for contaminants or pollutants before using the site.
- **Ask permission. Talk to your faith leader and any groups that use the land near the potential garden site to get their approval. If the property is not on faith community premises,** find out who owns the land. There are often varying regulations for placing community gardens on both public and private land. Whether the garden is planned for public, private or faith community-owned land, check in with your municipality to become familiar with any of the local requirements. If the garden is not on faith community-owned property, contact the owner to ask permission. Write a letter, make a phone call, or schedule an appointment. Discuss the benefits of community gardens and ask questions about their expectations.
- **Raise funds.** You do not need to spend a lot of money to start a community garden, but it does require some funds. Be creative. Hold a car wash, auction or raffle. Try something new like selling fresh fruits and vegetables.

Basic Steps to Get Started:

- **Plan & prepare.** Plan a meeting to develop the design of the garden. Decide how the garden space will be used (storage area for tools, bulletin board for communicating, benches and chairs to relax, garden waste, etc). Decide how many plots the garden will have and what type of plants your garden will grow. Establish garden rules. Organize a group of volunteers to clean the site and gather materials.
- **Plan a kick-off event & Get Digging!** Invite everyone to join the day you break ground. Even if you have to start small, plant a few seeds to keep community interest and excitement.
- **Assign lots or responsibilities.** In order to keep momentum and continued investment in the garden, assign plots or tasks to congregants and community members who would like to be involved. If there are not enough plots for everyone, consider sharing plots or having individuals help with general maintenance in return for a share of the garden's bounty.
- **Maintenance.** Make sure your planning committee is meeting at least once a month. Keep in touch with all your volunteers. Don't forget to keep volunteers organized and stick to your plan and overall vision for the garden.

For more information, visit the links below:

Master Gardeners

<http://www.mastergardeners.org/>

Victory Gardens San Diego

<http://www.victorygardenssandiego.com/resources/CommunityGardenStart-upHandbook.pdf>

American Community Gardening Association

<http://communitygarden.org/learn/starting-a-community-garden.php>

Source: Victory Gardens San Diego (VGSD). (2009). Community garden startup handbook. Retrieved September 13, 2009 from <http://www.victorygardenssandiego.com/resources.html>

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