

# Community Gardens

Community gardens are a resource that many cities and towns use to increase access to healthy food. These gardens not only are a way to provide local produce, but they increase social interactions and bring about other benefits. They may also assist in reducing blighted areas by creating an active use in an area that may be run down or vacant. Community gardens are run and managed in a variety of different ways. Some are municipally sponsored, some are organized by non-profits, others are associated with schools or daycare facilities. Food grown can be consumed by those associated with the garden, given to those in need, or be sold at local farmers markets. Community gardens can be either temporary or permanent. They can be used as an educational tool to teach community members and youth about the importance of local, healthy food.

## HOW CAN THIS BE IMPLEMENTED?

Research your local zoning code to ensure that your targeted community allows community gardens.

Determine if a local community garden ordinance exists, and if so, follow it. If not, check out the City of Springfield's ordinance as a model to replicate:

[https://www3.springfield-ma.gov/planning/fileadmin/Planning\\_files/Community\\_Gardens2-FINAL\\_\\_2\\_x.pdf](https://www3.springfield-ma.gov/planning/fileadmin/Planning_files/Community_Gardens2-FINAL__2_x.pdf)

Assessing best locations to create community gardens is a good next step. Some areas that should be considered are: low income neighborhoods, blighted areas, and schools zones. Pocket parks may be good locations for community gardens since a garden can bring more people to the area, and those already in the vicinity can learn about the community garden.

It is important that the land has access to water and adequate sun (at least six hours per day in summer). Water may be provided by a connection to municipal or household supply, rainwater catchment (typically off of a roof), or a new well (typically prohibitively expensive). It is best to locate a community garden in a location that has access to public water. Check with the local government to determine how to access water.

The quality of soil is a key factor in garden success. Soil should be assessed for fertility and prior contamination. Soil tests can be performed by UMASS. See their webpage at:

<http://soiltest.umass.edu/>

In urban locations that have previously been developed, clean soil is typically brought into the garden and placed in raised beds. In areas with clean soil, follow the recommendations of soil tests and begin building fertility as soon as possible.



Plot sizes vary from garden to garden. 20x20' is a typical size for a plot intended to feed a family in a location with plentiful land and adequate native soil. Raised beds are typically about 8'x4' or smaller.

## CHALLENGES COMMUNITY GARDENS ENCOUNTER

### Management

Community gardens are management intensive. They demand patience, time and the capacity to work with and organize people and projects. They also typically require systems to enforce rules and resolve conflicts.

### Maintenance

Community gardens are maintenance intensive. Grass will need to be mowed, gardens weeded, equipment will need to be repaired, and plant debris will need to be composted, among other things.

### Participation

From year to year, gardeners and garden leaders come and go from community gardens for a variety of reasons. Because of this, it can be challenging to maintain a sense of community and consistency at gardens.

### Theft and vandalism

Theft and vandalism are commonplace at many community gardens. If the garden has a toolshed, it may need to be locked and the garden may need to be fenced.

### Gardening skills

Many new and some returning gardeners don't know a lot about gardening. Gardeners who lack gardening skills and have poor gardening experiences may be more likely to give up. Successful community gardens partner beginning gardeners with more experienced gardeners and/or provide training.

### Leadership skills

Like any community-based effort, community gardens require effective leadership. Successful gardens actively cultivate new leaders so that the organization can sustain itself.

### Services and supplies

Plowing, tilling and the delivery of compost and mulch can be challenging and/or expensive services for gardeners to arrange for themselves, but their may be not-for-profit organizations or municipal services available to help.



## Site tenure

Most community gardens are located on borrowed land that has been temporarily made available for garden use. Be sure that investments made in garden infrastructure are appropriate to the amount of time that the garden is guaranteed to exist. Gardens can negotiate leases or other agreements that ensure the garden will not be disrupted or displaced during the growing season.

## TYPES OF COMMUNITY GARDENS

**Traditional community gardens** are large lots sub-divided into plots gardened separately by individuals or families. Each gardener decides what to grow and is responsible for planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, etc. Typically, gardeners are responsible for a certain number of community service hours to maintain the spaces between plots and help run the garden organization.

**Youth/school gardens** expose young people to gardening and nature, give them the opportunity to do some of their own gardening and/or educate them in a variety of subject areas. These gardens are typically associated with a formal or semi-formal program that incorporates classroom lessons with hands-on gardening activities. Gardens may be located on school grounds, at a community center, in neighborhoods or on other parcels of land.

**Entrepreneurial/job training market gardens** are typically established by non-profit organizations or other agencies to teach business or job skills to youth or other groups. They grow and sell the produce they raise. Proceeds from the sale of garden products are used to pay the participants for their work. Programs typically rely on outside sources of funding to offset costs.

**Communal gardens** are typically organized and gardened by a group of people who share in the work and rewards. Plots are not subdivided for individual or family use. Produce is distributed among group members. Sometimes produce is donated to a local food pantry.

**Food pantry gardens** may be established at a food pantry, food bank or other location. Produce is grown by volunteers, food pantry clients, or both and donated to the food pantry.

**Therapy gardens** provide horticultural therapy to hospital patients and others. A trained horticulture therapist often leads programs and classes. Gardens may be located at hospitals, senior centers, prisons or other places. Demonstration gardens show different types of gardening methods, plant varieties, composting techniques and more.

**Demonstration gardens** located at working community gardens are often open to the general public for display and classes. They may be managed and maintained by garden



members or a participating gardening group such as extension Master Gardeners, community members who receive training in home horticulture and then serve as volunteers to educate the public about gardening.

## LINKS TO MORE INFORMATION

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY GARDEN,  
VISIT THE LINK BELOW

[http://www.bostonnatural.org/cgOr\\_Resources.htm](http://www.bostonnatural.org/cgOr_Resources.htm)

<https://communitygarden.org/resources/community-garden-start-up-resources/>

<http://www.pvgrows.net/>

<http://www.growfoodnorthampton.com/>

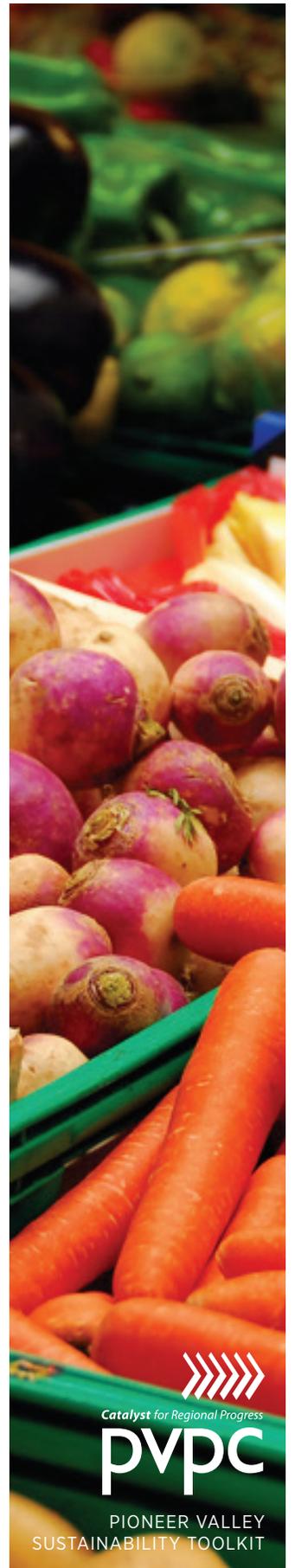
---

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission  
413-781-6045

60 Congress Street, Floor 1  
Springfield, MA 01104-3419

[www.pvpc.org](http://www.pvpc.org)



Catalyst for Regional Progress

**PVPC**

PIONEER VALLEY  
SUSTAINABILITY TOOLKIT