



Communal Gardening Toolkit

Acknowledgements

This publication was made possible by the support of :



Growing Together Community Gardens, Fargo, ND
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Foundation for Agriculture and Rural Resource Management and Sustainability
<http://www.farrms.org/>



United States
Department of
Agriculture

National Institute
of Food and
Agriculture

USDA, National Institute for Agriculture via a Beginning Farmer Rancher Development
Project, Award Number: 2016-70017-25414

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Introduction

Growing Together has over 10 years of experience managing communal gardens. It now has six locations in Fargo Moorhead that meet weekly to grow food and friendship. There are over 180 families that participate in the garden each season. The success of the Growing Together gardens has attracted the attention of other groups working in the gardening and local food industry.

Each year, Growing Together is approached by local groups and churches regarding how to establish a community garden. Growing Together and its volunteers have mentored over 12 community gardens start-ups in the Fargo Moorhead area. This toolkit has been created as a lasting document of reference for those wishing to establish their own community garden.

The Communal Model

Community gardens have various models and formats. The magic of the Growing Together model of community gardening lies in the communal nature of the garden. The entire garden is worked together as a group and the harvest is shared equally among participants. This communal model allows participants to grow relationships with each other and encourages inclusion. People come to the gardens for many reasons, but they stay for the camaraderie.

This guide specializes in the communal model of gardening. Communal gardening offers an amazing opportunity to build true community among its members. It also brings a few challenges that are different from the standard rent-a-plot community garden, mostly in the leadership arena. But the rewards are worth the extra effort. The communal garden often solves many issues that can be challenging in the rent-a-plot garden: gardening skill, maintenance, services/supplies, and participation. The gardens become a place that people truly enjoy, socialize, and learn.

Using the Tool Kit

This tool kit is provided as a basic frame work for the establishment of a communal garden. It is written to address the issues and challenges of the shared work and harvest garden model rather than an allotment or plot garden.

This Tool Kit address The Big Three: Land, Water, and Leadership. With these three things at your disposal, your community garden is sure to be a success!

This guide will assist with the process of acquiring those three necessary items as well as provide some tips, tricks, and best practices to get your community garden group started. Each garden group has its own personality and runs in a slightly different manner. Please adjust the running and organization of your garden according to the needs of your own participant base.

There is a descriptive section for each of The Big Three along with a set of checklists and timelines in the back of the Tool Kit for easy reference. There is also a section on best practices filled with stories of learning through failure and learning through success. The stories are based on the many years that Growing Together leaders have spent working in gardens and building community.

The Communal Garden presents unique challenges and benefits

Challenges

Increased leadership

The skills of the leadership team extend beyond simple coordination. The team should work together to offer a vision, to build a community and to demonstrate skills. This takes practice and communication.

Benefits

Social Relationships

Working together to achieve a common goal brings the gardeners together into a community. Friendship and mutual trust is developed among the gardeners. The community atmosphere encourages participation year after year.

Assured Weed Control

Many rent-a-plot gardens struggle to control weeds in certain plots. This is eliminated in the communal garden model. When one person takes the week off, the garden is still worked by remaining participants. First thing is first each week- weed!

Services and Supplies

Tilling, compost, and tools can be a challenge for individual gardeners to acquire. The communal model eases that burden by sharing tools, services, and supplies.

Gardening skill

The communal garden model allows even the most novice of gardeners to begin to garden. One of the most important aspects of the communal garden is people learning skills from each other.

Abundance

Intensive production practices allow for higher yields in a small patch of garden. The abundance is shared so that everyone benefits. There isn't one gardener that is left with crop failure while the rest experience success.

Five Core Beliefs of Working in Groups**

Core Belief No. 1

"There are many ways to start and manage a community garden."

Although this may be a given, it helps to remember that community gardens can serve many purposes and take many forms.

Core Belief No. 2

"In order for a garden to be sustainable as a true community resource, it must grow from local conditions and reflect the strengths, needs and desires of the local community."

Assistance from people or organizations outside of the community can be helpful. However, those who will be using the garden should make most of the decisions about how the garden is developed and managed.

Core Belief No. 3

"Diverse participation and leadership, at all phases of garden operation, enrich and strengthen a community garden."

Gardens can be stronger when they are developed and led by people from different backgrounds.

Core Belief No. 4

"Each community member has something to contribute."

Useful skills and good suggestions are often overlooked because of how people communicate. People should be given a chance to make their own unique contributions to the garden.

Core Belief No. 5

"Gardens are communities in themselves, as well as part of a larger community."

This is a reminder to involve and be aware of the larger community when making decisions.

**From the American Community Gardening Association's "Growing Communities Curriculum: Community Building and Organizational Development through Community Gardening", Jeanette Abi-Nader, Kendall Dunnigan, Kristen Markley, and David Buckley.

Land and Water Access

Land space is a necessity for a garden. But land space can be found in surprising ways. Growing Together has partnerships with many organizations that provide land access free of charge: churches, the parks system, a non-profit organization, and a private business.

Look around your community for a place that has an unused sunny location. The garden does not need to be large. Many gardens are extra green areas of larger lots. For example, many businesses have large unused green spaces that can easily be converted from lawn to garden. Make sure to work with your land provider on access, water, parking, and hours among other things. If possible, have a written agreement that addresses those key issues. Designate one volunteer to be the contact for the land provider for ease of communications.

For a more detailed list of considerations and an action plan, refer to the Land Access Checklist at the back of this tool kit.

Leadership

Leadership Roles

Leadership is the key to a successful sustainable communal garden. Land and water access tend to fall into place when the leadership group is on track. However, without leadership, the group will falter even though land and water are plentiful.

Leaders empower, leaders listen, leaders encourage, leaders provide opportunity, leaders provide guidance, leaders coordinate. Your garden leadership team is there to open the opportunity for the garden participants and to guide to creation of community connections.

“Leadership involves opening rather than occupying space-opening spaces in which people feel invited to create communities of mutual support.”

- Parker Palmer

Reflect on this quote by Parker Palmer and think about community gardens. What does this tell you about the roles of a community garden leader?

What does “people feel invited” mean?

What does “create communities” mean to you?

What does this mean about ownership of a garden space?

“Each person can make a difference in this world for the better.”

- Jack Wood

How does this thought relate to a community garden and its leadership team? When we build a team of people, we all bring different talents and skills to the table. Each team member can make a difference, even if their talents are not our talents. We need to recognize the talents in others.

Often, we take this quote “each person can make a difference” as a directive. “you” can make a difference, “you” can make a difference, so go out and make a difference. But when you look around your team and your gardens, it is important to think “that person” can make a difference or “that individual” can make a difference. Each team member makes a difference, contributes, holds value. Use them! Use their value, use their skills! Rely on each other.

It is important to focus on building the team and the culture of the garden in the beginning year. There are unlimited choices and activities that can be added to enhance your garden in later years. There are many possible administration and leadership roles for the garden. For now, just focus on the basics of setting up your garden, coordinating as a team, and enjoying the experience.

We found the following breakdown of roles to be most helpful during our experiences with numerous communal gardens. There will be other duties and tasks as your garden continues to grow and take shape. However, we recommend the following five to get things started. The people filling these 5 roles will act as a team both in the garden and outside of the garden. Keep in mind that one person could fill more than one role depending on their skill set and availability.

Garden Lead Recruiter:

This is the person who has the spark to make the garden come to fruition. Often this person takes on one of the other roles below depending on their personality and skill set. Other times this is a project manager from an organization that would like to offer a community garden to its neighbors.

Duties:

- Find Garden Coordinator, Gardening Expert, Garden Team Builder, and Garden Participant Recruiter

Garden Coordinator:

This person has an eye for details and is organized. Coordination contributes to a smooth-running garden.

Duties:

- Overall lead contact for the garden, assures communication between organizers, participants, sponsors, and landowners
- Maintains database of contact information for participants, sponsors, and volunteers
- Weekly email announcements, social media updates
- Track garden needs and requests for donations

Gardening Expert:

Every garden needs that expert who knows the soil, climate, and gardening techniques to match. This person will be able to identify what needs to happen in the garden each week to keep it productive. This person will work closely with the Garden Team Builder to get the work done on a weekly basis.

Duties:

- Attends garden weekly
- Determines cultivation duties and what needs to be done

Garden Team Builder:

Personality matters! This person is the congenial host that brings people together. This person can assign groups, keep them motivated, and have fun while doing it.

Duties:

- Attends garden weekly
- Organizes task teams for working in the garden
- Good at demonstrating tasks, motivating participants, and retention

Garden Participant Recruiter:

It wouldn't be much of a garden without gardeners. This person can entice others to join the garden as participants. This person feels comfortable reaching out into the community and promoting the garden.

- Contacts community of participants and recruits participants

Build the Team

Mission

People come to community gardens for many different reasons. But what gives the group stability is the shared mission and values. You feel it when you enter a successful garden. There is a sense of unity and solidarity that brings people together to work as one community. That unity and solidarity reflects the purpose and mission of your community garden. It reflects that values of the community that we are building as a group.

Mission, purpose, and culture are important guides to how your garden will function. It is important for all garden leaders to be on the same page with regards to mission, purpose, and culture. These can be tough conversations to have. It involves deeper thinking. But overall, your team will function better if everyone agrees and works toward that same mission, purpose, and understands the culture that drives the group.

For example, Growing Together's **purpose** is gardening, harvesting and sharing food. For most community gardens, this is your purpose. This is how you accomplish your mission. Sometimes mission and purpose are very close. Purpose is what people on the outside see. Mission is what drives your team.

At Growing Together our **mission is** "To create a safe space for our new American neighbors to meet new friends and grow food and relationships." The mission helps our leadership team focus on what we want to do for our gardeners.

Each garden team should talk about what their mission is. Why are you building a garden space? What do you want to do in the garden space?

Build the Team

Values

Values can be sticky point for many groups not just gardening groups. It is best to write down what you value about the community garden. Often, values stem from the mission and purpose. Shared values help keep a group on track when challenges arise. Values can inform the rules and policies of your garden.

Potential values include: production, sharing, healthy food access, healthy activity, making friends, donating produce, food security, fun and entertainment, sharing and caring for each other, children and families, learning, the list goes on.

Work with your team to define and prioritize your values. What happens when there are competing values? Which values take precedence? Which values help you address challenges? What methods will you use to address these challenges?

For example, which is more important: sharing according to hours worked or sharing that includes everyone? Growing Together has a policy of earning a half share through 8 hours of garden work and a full share through 16 hours of garden work. This policy has encouraged gardeners to participate in those first weeks of the garden when weeds and work are heavy but produce is not yet harvestable. When a new person showed up late in the season, they worked at the garden for 2 hours that day but did not receive a share because they had not “earned” it yet. After the harvest was distributed according to policy, several gardeners re-distributed their vegetables to the newcomers. Competing values were “share according to work done” versus “addressing food security”. What would your garden do? Share to all who come? Share according to effort?

Recruitment

Establishing a community garden is a fabulous way to build the relationships in your community and enjoy time outdoors. Once your leadership team is in place, you are ready to recruit your gardeners.

There are many ways to form a garden community. The gardeners that you invite could be sourced from many groups. It is likely that composition of your leadership team was informed by the group you want to work with. Below are a few suggestions to consider.

Neighborhood or location. Many times, the simplest method of recruiting gardeners is based on proximity to the garden location. Neighbors will have a chance to get to know each other and solidify relationships through the garden. This works especially well in suburban areas.

Business or work group. Land space offered by a private business may encourage employees of that business to participate. Working in teams outside of the job can build team work on the job as well. Think of it similar to the company baseball team.

Church or other charity membership. There may be a church leader that would spearhead a church garden for the members. Potentially, a garden could be part of the outreach and ministry of the church.

Age. Age based groups are a great way to recruit garden participants. Does your garden want to focus on youth? What about older retired folks? Maybe new moms looking for companionship?

Language group. There may be a need in your community to bring together folks who are from elsewhere. If you have a large immigrant population, consider forming a community garden as a space for people to socialize with a purpose.

Other. Look around your community. What other organizations or groups do you see? Which would be interested in outdoor fun?

Recruitment

Asset Mapping

Asset mapping is a process that helps identify the strengths and resources of a community and can help uncover solutions. Your group can use this process to identify resources in your community to support your garden. Associations are the power base of any community effort. Seeking out groups and organizations is a great way to locate people who are invested in their community and who can work productively within a group. Whenever possible, engage the full group in your efforts rather than one individual.

Thinking about the garden leadership roles, and other resources that may need to be met for your garden, where could you go, who could you ask for help? What are the resources in your neighborhood and network that could offer support? Jump start your recruitment by beginning with a brainstorming session to list possible resources. When creating your list, remember to be specific. Don't just list "local churches" or "neighborhood business", instead write down the name of a specific church or specific business. Do this as a team. You can feed off each other's ideas to keep the ball rolling. Then remember to assign each potential resource to a team member for follow up.

In asset mapping, the community is broken down into 4 categories:

Public Institutions

Private Institution

Associations

Individuals

You can use these categories to spark your brainstorm session and broaden how you think about potential resources.

Recruitment

Community Meetings

The story and success of Growing Together Community Gardens starts with community meetings. A group of concerned citizens gathered to discuss how to reach out to the New American community. They felt a calling to serve the newest members of their community by finding a way to welcome them into their neighborhoods and lives.

There were a series of meetings held to discuss the situation. The initial few organizers invited immigrants, leaders of the refugee communities, church leaders, general community members, and school leaders to the meetings. The broad group of leaders, including the target audience of the efforts, brought a diversity of ideas and methods to the table. Eventually, someone mentioned gardens. From the crowd, a voice could be heard, "We are farmers!" Farming and gardening was a familiar and enticing activity to the many immigrants in the community meetings.

Once the platform of a community garden was in place, the organizing committee sought out gardening expertise by bringing in more groups and individuals with a passion for gardening.

Community meetings helped Growing Together to:

- work with the people that they wanted to help
- involve a broad group of leaders (including refugee community leaders)
- choose something familiar to the participants
- seek outside help when they needed it

To make your community meetings a success, follow the tips below. For a more detailed list of considerations and an action plan, refer to the Community Meeting Checklist at the back of this tool kit.

- Be selective about time and location
- Set up the room before hand
- Clarify the role that each leader or organizer will take at the meeting
- Clear goals for the meeting
- Have an agenda that everyone can see or read
- Actively recruit people!

Best Practices

Weekly gardening time slot rain or shine, wind or calm

This has been the key to success with the communal garden environment. Every participant will know the day and time that gardening takes place. Be consistent. If someone needs to miss a week, that is OK. Resist the urge to change times or vary the days. This allows people to develop the habit of gardening and in the long term allows people to plan gardening day into their schedule.

Story connection:

In Growing Together's first years, gardening day was held on Tuesdays at 1:00pm. Every Tuesday at 12:30 pm without fail, a new gardener named Chandra would call the garden leader Jack on the phone. "Are we gardening today?" would be the question. Every phone call, Jack shot back, "Is it Tuesday?" "Yes," would come Chandra's reply. "Then we are gardening today," confirmed Jack. Eventually, after 3 months of Tuesdays, Chandra just showed up at the garden at 1:00 pm without phoning first.

Having a set day and time prevents unnecessary phone calls, emails, and confusion. Pick a day and time and stick to it!

Shared purpose of the garden

Many people come to the garden for various reasons. However, the overall purpose or mission of the garden will dictate the culture that is created among the individual participants. For example, at Growing Together the mission is to be a safe place for our new American neighbors. That leads to a culture of inclusion and a focus on the people rather than the production. Gardening has become the vehicle for creating relationships that build social capital and resiliency. Your group will need to set the purpose or mission of your garden. As within any group, having a set purpose will drive the decisions that you make.

Story connection:

Growing Together faced a similar problem each growing season. At the beginning of the season, gardeners would register, come each week and work hard in those early weeks of planting and weeding before the harvest came in. Every year, when the harvest started coming in, word got around. Each week a few more people would show up to work and to take home vegetables. There was plenty of produce to share. The

leaders of the garden and many of the gardeners wanted to include everyone. The garden culture valued the building of community over production of food. The group knew that many were on limited incomes and needed the fresh produce. Yet there was a lingering feeling that it was not fair to allow some to benefit without putting in the same amount of work. As the garden grew from a few families to over 40 families, the sense of unfairness increased.

The gardeners decided upon a compromise. You could join the garden at any stage. But the “shares” were broken into full, half, and quarter sizes. You must work 16 hours (8 weeks) to reach full share status; 8 hours (4 weeks) for half share; any amount for quarter share. This model allowed them to build community by sharing with people regardless of when they joined the garden but also to address fairness by rewarding consistent workers.

Communication among the team leaders

Communication among the team leaders is crucial. The garden expert may instinctively know what needs to be done, but those tasks must be communicated to the other team leaders and the participants. It can take some time to get used to working in a group atmosphere. Allow yourself plenty of time to get set up each week and talk amongst the team leaders about what needs to happen in the garden. If team leaders arrive 15-30 minutes before the other participants, you will have time to greet each other, check over the garden, list out the tasks, and list out the tools required. Then you are ready to go and engage your participants when they begin to arrive.

Story connection:

The Catalyst garden was in its second year. Sanjay was a returning leader, Beth and Marla were newly recruited leaders. They all had gardening expertise. Sanjay and Marla had prior experience in group gardening but Marla had never been a leader. Beth was new to group gardening. Each week, Marla and Beth met 30 minutes before the garden start time to organize the tasks and tools for the day. As people started to arrive, they set groups to work on the tasks. Sanjay arrived a little late due to his work schedule. He was always ready to dive in and lead teams in the garden. Because he had missed the prior meeting with Beth and Marla, he was unaware of their list of tasks. Many times, he would pull people from one task and set them to work on another task. This caused confusion as gardeners were getting mixed directions from the 3 leaders. Some tasks were left uncompleted. The last 20 minutes of gardening was a scramble to get everything accomplished. Over the course of the season, Beth became increasingly frustrated with the situation. She began to pull Marla in to the discussions between her and Sanjay. Marla was uncomfortable acting as a referee between Beth and Sanjay.

The garden continued throughout the season. The harvest was plentiful and the participants enjoyed the garden. But when the season wrapped, Beth decided she no longer wanted to be involved in the gardens. The discord on the leadership team which played out in the garden led to the loss of one of the leaders and a garden expert.

If something is not working, take time to brainstorm a solution. Not responding to the frustration in a timely manner ultimately led to the loss of a great volunteer leader.

Garden plan and raised beds

Multiple people working in the garden simultaneously causes specific challenges in the mapping and planning of a garden. There needs to be enough room for people to pass each other between the rows. Harvesting large quantities also means the use of wheel barrows or garden carts for the heavier, abundant produce going between the rows. Additionally, research shows that people will generally walk down a 20 foot row. If the row is longer than 20 feet, people will take a short cut and walk through the row causing disturbance to the plants and compacting the soil.

Growing Together recommends using a raised bed system with 30 inch beds (narrow enough to reach into the center) and 30 inch walk paths (wide enough to pass a garden cart or two people). This system allows intensive planting in the beds similar to square foot gardening. By July, the plants should be touching each other thus forming a canopy to shade out further weed growth in the beds. Foot traffic in the walk paths reduces weed growth.

Story connection:

Growing Together is in an area with heavy clay soil. Although very fertile, it still caused issue with ponding after heavy rains, compaction from foot and wheel barrow traffic, and difficulty with persistent weeds. The leadership team decided to try a raised bed method promoted by Jean-Martin Fortier in his book [The Market Gardener](#). One garden was chosen for this new plan as an experiment to see if there was an improvement in ponding, compaction, and weed pressure.

JM Fortier recommended 30 inch beds with 18 inch walkways in order to maximize production space. It didn't take long for the team to realize that 18 inch walkways were not enough! After digging several examples of bed spacing (18, 24, and 30 inches), the group decided that 30 inches was necessary for the ease of movement of the 40 plus gardeners that come weekly.



It was important not to step in the beds to avoid compaction of the soil, one of the goals of the raised bed system. This first year, the beds and walkways were constructed along the entire width of the garden, 50 feet. As people worked and moved through the garden, they were constantly opting to cross through the beds to take short cuts. The garden leaders became frustrated by repeating the instruction “don’t step in the bed” over and over. The next year when the success of the raised beds was rolled out to other communal gardens, a central walkway was created allowing people to move through the gardens in a more direct pattern. This reduced the temptation to walk through the beds.

The beds/walkways pattern also reduced time spent weeding, led to larger harvests, and improved traffic flow in the gardens.

Timelines and Checklists

This toolkit includes several timelines and checklists for your convenience. Timelines and checklists should be used by the leadership team to track their progress through the establishment of the communal garden.

Recruitment and organization timeline

The first person in place is the Garden Lead Recruiter. This person has the task of recruiting the others who will fulfill the team leader roles. It is recommended to have your team in place as early as possible before the garden season opens. There is much to be done for organizing before the gardening begins. Ideally, the entire leadership team will attend the Growing Together Garden Leadership Workshop.

January/February	Recruit Team Leaders
March	Attend Growing Together Garden Leadership Workshop
	Determine rules and guidelines
	Hold a community meeting(s)
	Establish partnerships
	Determine purpose of garden
	Recruit gardeners
April	Determine garden location and size
	Secure funding and/or supplies
	Develop a garden plan
	Determine gardening practices
	Determine what to plant
	Create a garden map
	Secure seeds and plants
May	Launching!
	Determine weekly day and time
	Prepare garden space for planting
	Break ground and garden!

Basic Tool List

5-10 shovels

5-10 hoes

2-3 rakes

15- 25 Food grade buckets

2-3 wheel barrows or carts

Wooden stakes

2-3, 2 lb sledge hammers

Twine

garden hose, to reach from faucet to garden edge

10 x 10 storage shed if possible

Plants Per Person Estimate

Beans 15

Beets 10

Broccoli 2

Buttercup Squash 1

Cabbage 2

Carrots 12

Cucumbers 2

Eggplant 3

Pumpkins 1

Okra 1

Peas 15

Peppers 5

Swiss Chard 3

Tomatoes 12

Zucchini 2

Onions 15

Lettuce 5

Mustard greens 5

Kale 3

Greens mix 5

spinach 5

Radish 15

kohlrabi 5

cilantro 4

Basil 2



LAND ACCESS CHECKLIST

SUITABILITY OF SOIL AND GARDEN SPACE

- Is the garden space level?
- Does the garden space receive 8 hours of full sun in the summer?
- Is the space sufficient for the number of gardeners? Is there space to grow for the future?
- Will buried utility lines or irrigation/sprinkler lines be a problem?
- How has the space been used in the past? Could there be any contaminants in the soil? Could there be any old garbage piles or rubble?
- Is there water available on site for irrigation needs?
- Is there storage available on site for tools?

ASSESSIBILITY OF THE LOCATION

- Is the location handy for the gardeners?
- Is parking space adequate?
- Is there fencing?
- Can delivery trucks or tilling equipment easily access the garden space if needed?
- Can vehicles cross the other greenspace to reach the garden if need be? It is allowed by the land provider?
- Is the garden space visible? This contributes to safety and community support.

LAND PROVIDER QUESTIONS

- What hours can your group access the garden space?
- Will extra parked cars be an issue with the land provider?
- Where can you access water? Who will pay for water usage if there is a cost?
- Can you place a storage shed near the garden for tools and supplies?
- Is there a fee for using the land? How much and when should it be paid?
- If there are damages to the land, buildings, or greenspace, who is responsible?
- Does your garden require insurance, or will the land owner provide it?
- Make sure you have name, phone, email for land provider.
- Make sure land provider has name, phone, email for designated garden leader.



RECRUITMENT CHECKLIST

LEADERSHIP TEAM

- Garden Lead Recruiter:
- Garden Coordinator:
- Gardening Expert:
- Garden Team Builder:
- Garden participant Recruiter:
- Leadership team participates in the Growing Together Garden Leadership Workshop.
- Leadership team participates in the Growing Together Garden Leadership follow up mentor phone calls.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Make a list of needed resources such as tools, equipment, seeds or plants.
 - Make a list of your community's resources- who could you partner with?
 - Assign each potential community resource to a team leader for follow up
 - Reach out to local businesses and volunteer groups for tools, supplies, or sponsorship.
 - Can you work with any local food pantries or food distribution sites if you have excess produce?
 - Reach out to neighborhood groups to help recruit gardeners.
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COMMUNITY MEETING CHECKLIST

PREPARE COMMUNITY MEETING

- Work with local groups or neighbors to find a location for your community meeting.
- Work with venue to set date and time for community meeting.
- Reach out to local groups and neighbors to advertise community meeting. Provide a flyer or poster for distribution.
- Set up the room before hand
- Clarify the role that each leader or organizer will take at the meeting
- Set clear goals for the meeting
- Have an agenda that everyone can see or read
- Actively recruit people!

AT THE COMMUNITY MEETING

- Distribute agenda.
 - Determine purpose and mission of garden.
 - Set a weekly time for the garden to meet.
 - Set rules of the garden.
 - Collect names and contact info for interested gardeners.
 - Set the next community meeting if needed.
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Growing Together Community Garden leaders. Find Growing Together on facebook at
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