

# 10 STEPS TO STARTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN IN THE TOWN OF CARY

*The following steps are adapted from the American Community Garden Association's guidelines for launching a successful community garden.*

## **1. ORGANIZE your group**

Gather a group of interested people to determine your garden goals, what you generally want to grow there, those involved, and those who benefit. Some community gardens rent plots for a small fee to neighbors to grow their own food. Other community gardens share the work of the whole space to create beautiful neighborhood spaces with flowers and shrubs. Depending on your garden's location or goals invite people who might be interested in participating; for example, neighbors, tenants, HOA board members, scout groups, church groups, nonprofits, and garden clubs.

## **2. VISUALIZE your goal**

To begin it is helpful to write a mission statement that lists your goals as an organization. When doing this, don't forget to name your community garden group. This will serve as a foundation for all of your future success. Keep it simple while creating a planning group with set tasks to coordinate the fruition of your garden. This group can be comprised of people who feel committed to the creation of the garden and who have the time to devote to it, at least at this initial stage. Choose well-organized persons as garden coordinators. Form committees to tackle specific tasks that are important to your end goal: funding and partnerships, youth activities, construction, and communication.

## **3. IDENTIFY your tasks**

Create a list of tasks around answering the questions "Who? What? When? Where? How? and Why?" Who will be benefiting from your garden? What are your goals? What is your timeline? Where will you garden be located? How do you accomplish your goals? Why are you motivated to create and maintain this garden? To answer each question, target your local resources by doing a community asset assessment. What skills and resources already exist in the community that can aide in the garden's creation? Contact local sources of information or assistance to help define what you plan to do and how to make it happen (see local resource index at end of document). Begin discussions with neighborhood land owners that may be interested in partnering with your project and brainstorm financial and material needs for getting started. Contact the Town of Cary Planning Department (919) 469-4082 for feedback on your location choice and to learn about the Town's sign ordinance if you will be installing a sign. Being clear on why you are creating your community garden, it's essential to ensure your group's focus to work together for a common goal.

## **4. Gather your SUPPORT**

Some gardens "self-support" through membership dues and/or plot rentals, others partner with a sponsor for donations of land, tools, seeds, or money, but most community gardens support through a combination of both. Knowing your focused motivation of "why" is very helpful here. For instance, if you are planning on using significant garden space to help feed local people in need through a food bank or soup kitchen, you should seek out grant funding to support your efforts. Some community gardens get "adopted" into a preexisting nonprofit to increase their success in obtaining grant funding. Other community gardens are born out of preexisting goals of already established organizations such as schools, churches, and private businesses

that have their own goals and commitments in creating health, education, environmental stewardship, and community involvement. Approaching such organizations with a partnership plan can be a great way to meet both your and their goals through creating a community garden together. Neighborhoods that want to keep it local can approach HOA associations about land use for shared public spaces and can then hold fund raisers and benefits to help meet your financial goals.

### **5. ESTABLISH your site**

Be clear about who owns the land, the land use and lease agreement, and over how much time your group can use the land. Research and determine if public liability insurance is necessary. A Minor Site Alteration Plan may be required by the Town of Cary's Planning Department prior to breaking ground with your community garden. Consider the amount of daily sunshine (vegetables need at least six hours a day), availability of water, and access to parking for your location. Free soil testing kits for possible pollutants and soil quality can be obtained through the Wake County Extension Service (see Index for contact info).

### **6. PREPARE your site**

In most cases, the land will need considerable preparation for planting. Organize volunteer work crews to clean it, turn and amend the soil as needed, gather materials, and decide on the design and plot arrangement. Contact the Planning Department (919) 469-4082 if you are interested in making a chicken coop or tending a bee hive as part of your gardening efforts.

### **7. PLAN your garden**

Members must decide how many plots are available, how they will be assigned or how the work will be divided, and how to sign up to participate. Allow space for storing tools, making compost and don't forget the pathways between plots! Consider building a fence or planting a hedge row of flowers or shrubs around the garden's edges to keep the outside of your space looking neat and discouraging animals from coming in. Community Gardens within the Town of Cary may not use barbed wire or electric fencing. Adding to the beauty of your garden with statues, picnic tables, arbors, and benches can attract more support to your garden by making it a place that people want to enjoy.

### **8. REACH OUT to your community**

Consider creating a special garden just for kids--including them is essential. Keep in mind that most children delight in the process of gardening and reap life-long lessons and rewards from their multi-sensory garden experience. You may decide to have an educational plot or section that is focused on garden work and education for children. Promote your community garden's success, needs, or goals at public meetings or events that allow booths and/or presentations. If space and liabilities allow, it's also fun to hold tours for groups and individuals that want to learn more about gardening and community gardens. The Town of Cary currently has a program known as the "Neighborhood Improvement Grant Program" this funding opportunity may be a good fit for some community garden projects. Don't forget that in our age of technology, having a website and accessing other social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, is a great way to connect to people. Annual celebrations/workdays held in the garden are a fun ways to enjoy the community garden that your have created with old and new friends.

### **9. DETERMINE your rules**

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. Think of the rules as a code of behavior. Some examples of issues that are best dealt with by agreed upon rules are: Dues, how will the money be used? How are plots assigned? Will gardeners share tools, meet regularly, handle basic maintenance? What consequences will there be for gardeners who “abandon” plots? (See Index for more examples of community garden rules and bylaws). It is always helpful to revisit your original goals/mission statement and work from there.

## **10. COMMUNICATE about your garden**

Good communication ensures a strong community garden with active participation by all. Some ways to do this are: form a telephone tree, create an email list; install a rainproof bulletin board in the garden; have regular celebrations. Sometimes local media sources wish to highlight the important work of community gardens and are a great way to communicate with the larger community that your garden resides in. Community gardens are all about creating and strengthening communities, and we at the Town of Cary understand that our award-winning community is made truly remarkable by its dedicated citizens.

## **INDEX**

### **A list of local, regional, and national resources for starting a community garden in the Town of Cary.**

- \* Town of Cary Planning Department, a source for information regarding Neighborhood Support Grant Program, Minor Site Alteration Plan forms, and other ordinances:  
[www.townofcary.org](http://www.townofcary.org) (919) 469-4082
- \* [Wake County Master Gardener Association](http://www.wakegov.com/mastergardener), Master Gardener Volunteers are available to answer questions by phone or email Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-12 p.m. and 1-4 p.m., Phone: (919) 250-1084, Email: [mgardener@wakegov.com](mailto:mgardener@wakegov.com)
- \* NC Cooperative Extension, Local Foods Page, a source for information and workshops  
<http://wake.ces.ncsu.edu/categories/agriculture-food/local-foods/>
- \* Advocates for Health In Action, a source of information about local foods and community gardening. Hosts a yearly community and backyard gardening summit in early March called Dig In. <http://www.advocatesforhealthinaction.org/>
- \* Wake County Garden Club <http://www.gardenersofwakecounty.org/>
- \* American Community Gardening Association, a comprehensive guide to creating community gardens, national examples of community garden success stories, and other garden resources  
<http://www.communitygarden.org/>
- \* North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, a source for free soil testing kits and other agricultural information (919) 733-2655  
<http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/sthome.htm>