Merrymeeting Food Council

Community Garden Toolkit

This toolkit is intended for individuals or groups starting or maintaining community gardens in Maine.

Community Garden Planning Guides

- Missouri Extension Service: Community Gardening Toolkit
- Minnesota Community Garden: Community Garden Resource Guide
- Food Security Network of Newfoundland and Labrador: Community Garden Best Practice Guide
- Maine Cooperative Extension: Community Garden Manual & Planning a Community Giving Garden
- Iowa Cooperative Extension: Community Garden Start-Up Guide

Management

Garden management varies by garden type. Generally speaking the manager, or management team is responsible for garden guidelines, rule enforcement, volunteer organization, plot assignment and basic admin, communications and conflict resolutions. While the specific tasks vary, the ultimate responsibility lies with this person or group.

- Community Garden Management Toolkit - Extensive resource compiled by the Springfield, MA Food Policy Council
- Community Garden Best Practices - Guide for community organizations from Newfoundland
- Missouri Extension Service Garden Guide - https://extension2.missouri.edu/mp906

Template Documents & Other Communication Tools

- Community Garden Planning Checklist
  - Look at any of the above listed community garden planning guides for examples
- Draft Membership Application, Garden Guidelines and Membership Agreements:
  - A robust membership agreement is key. This membership agreement will clearly state the goals of the garden, member responsibilities, and will cover common issues such as whether dogs are allowed, smoking, etc.

Often these documents are combined in some form. See below for examples.

- Tom Settlemire Community Garden's [application and garden guidelines](#)
- Allen Day Community Garden's [plot lease agreement and garden guidelines](#)

- Garden Orientation or Garden Welcome Packets
  - Missouri Cooperative Extension's [Gardener Welcome Packet Template](#)
  - [Portland Oregon Garden Orientation Slides](#)
- Garden Newsletters or Emails
  - Keeps gardeners aware of issues, changes and events
  - Provides pest and harvest updates
  - Announces celebrations and milestones
  - Can be done via email, or with a free newsletter software such as [Mailchimp](#)

Garden Types

- Plot System: Garden broken into plots, or plot rows and rented to community members, groups or families for production of food for their own use. They can be either volunteer led, or non-profit led.

- Community Plot System: 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.

- Food Pantry/ Common Good Gardens: Food pantry gardens may be established at a food pantry, food bank, within an existing community garden or other location. Produce is grown by volunteers, food pantry clients, or both and donated to the food pantry.

- Educational Program: gardens are typically established by nonprofit 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

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- 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 can be 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.

- Food Forests: edible forest garden, containing a diverse mix of plants like fungi, herbaceous ground covers, perennial vegetables, fruit and nut bearing vines, shrubs, and trees. For more information look to The Center for an Ecology Based Economy or The Resilience Hub.

- Cooperative: gardens where there is loose land sharing agreement between a landholder and a gardener, or between a landholder and a group of gardeners. This is a growing type of gardening arrangement in Maine, look for information specific to your area on Facebook, on community bulletin boards and through Land in Common.

- 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.

*Much of this section pulled from the Missouri Cooperative Extension's toolkit

Resources and Common Challenges
- Information Library For Gardeners
  - Build a Resource Library at the garden, it should include at least some of the following
    - Publications, books, fact sheets, pest information, etc
    - Tool booklets for any mechanical tools at the garden
    - Material Safety Data Sheets for any cleaners or chemicals in the garden
    - Safety checklist and First Aid kit
  - The Maine Cooperative Extension sells a number of informative bulletins as posters, that information can be found here.

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- Pest Control: Cooperative Extension's list of pest control resources and management bulletins

- Pesticide use: there is a Maine state law that prohibits pesticide use without landowner permission (including organic or homemade chemicals)
  - Some communities in Maine have put pesticide use policies into effect. See list here.
  - Board of Pesticide Control a Maine resource

- Water and Soil Testing: Fundamental parts of the garden.
  - Here is the Cooperative Extension's list of testing resources in Maine
  - Lead: Even if raised beds are being built, it is strongly recommended that you test your soils for heavy metals including lead. Here is the Cooperative Extension's information regarding soil lead and avoiding lead in foods and when present in gardens.
  - Soil Testing
    - Soil tests indicate soil pH and the levels of nutrients that are available for plant growth.
      - UMaine Soil Testing Lab
      - Cooperative Extension's info on soil testing
  - Water Testing
    - Well Water In general the water source for any garden should be known and potable. Don't use water if there is an "upstream" pollutant.
    - See above Cooperative Extension testing resources, their video on water testing for food producers or this list of information on contaminants.

- Water Access
  - In order to have a community garden there must be adequate access to water. There either needs to be a well and water system on site, or access to some other other water source.
    - Be sure to test the water. Town/city water can be high in salts, chemicals and other inopportune compounds. Well water can be high in chemical contaminants that are dangerous to humans.
    - Have a clear water access agreement in place (as applicable), management guidelines and responsible persons in place. For ex.

If a well and pump are used, who is responsible for setting it up each season and caring for the power source?
- Water Tanks can be used at gardens without an onsite water source
  - Consider water capacity as related to garden need
  - Consider placement
  - Consider how to acquire the water, how they will be filled, who will be responsible for maintenance
- Leadership
  - Different community gardens have different management structures based on what type of garden they are and whether they are volunteer or organizationally led.
  - Volunteer led gardens can often struggle to maintain a leadership team due to competing obligations or over-work.
    - It is suggested that the leadership team always be seeking to engage new leadership in the process. Don't be afraid to ask long time plot holders. Don't be afraid of getting a "no".
    - Decrease the number of responsibilities the management team is managing.
      - Have team lead volunteers that handle specific tasks. Ex. mowing, turn on water system, etc
      - If possible, raise funds to pay a part-time employee to manage some aspects of the garden management.
  - Coordinator led Gardens benefit from having volunteer input in the management of the garden
    - Volunteers take on certain tasks and lead the group who does them (ex. mowing)
    - Volunteers work with Coordinator on fundraising, materials management and social activities in the garden
  - The Cooperative Extension has Master Gardener Volunteers who may be able to offer technical advice, help address challenges or provide other support
    - Contact your county extension office for more information

- Volunteer Management and Data Tracking
  - Make sure garden data, files (application, plot map, etc) are available to the entire management team and aren't stored on an individual's computer.

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- Use a cloud-based (online) program where information can be shared and/or edited. Ex. Dropbox, Google Drive, or Microsoft 360, etc.
  - Volunteer management is necessary if it is required of plot holders as the way to maintain the garden, or if a food pantry, educational or other volunteer led program is offered at the garden.
    - Create a point person (or team) for managing volunteer sign-up and garden work days. This can also help avoid some common problems like maintaining communal areas of the garden (outside of plots).
    - It is suggested that volunteers submit their own hours through an email, a shared spreadsheet, a Google Form, or a volunteer log, or similar.
    - Mentorship: encourage mentorship of new gardeners to build consistent garden norms.

- Challenges:
  - Liability: establishing liability is important in the event that someone is harmed at the garden or by partaking in the garden. This can be avoided or mitigated by
    - Partnering with a land organization, school, town, or non-profit that has an applicable insurance policy.
    - Purchasing liability insurance. This may require entity formation and/or fundraising.
    - Have clear and defined rules about use of chemicals, power tools or anything potentially dangerous
  - Theft: this can take the form of plot holders taking from other plots, taking garden tools or non plot holders entering the garden and taking items.
    - Lock up communal tools in a shed, chain together wheelbarrows, and/or have plot holders bring their own tools.
    - Lock the gate to the garden, give only the plotholders the combination.
    - Clearly label all garden tools so they are not accidently taken home and can be returned if taken accidently.
    - Clearly post signage stating the garden rules to discourage stealing, or unintended stealing.
    - Speak with the thief directly if known to ensure they understand the rules. Expel them from the garden if necessary.

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- Member Conflict: Not all plot holders will have compatible personalities and intervention may be necessary.
  - Clearly mark plot boundaries, if possible with physical barriers.
  - Design conflict resolution guidelines.
  - Move conflicting plot holders away from one another in subsequent years.
  - Clearly post garden rules, ensure that all plotholders sign garden agreement, guidelines, or similar. This can be used to remind plot holders what they agreed to when joining the garden.

- Helpful Contacts
  - Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association: Great resources for Mainers, including a directory of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) locations.
  - American Community Gardening Association: This national organization provides resources on ways to create and improve your community garden along with holding events, releasing publications, and working to help community gardens achieve the most they can.
  - Cultivating Community: A Portland-area organization that is committed to strengthening communities by growing food, preparing youth leaders and
  - University of Maine Cooperative Extension Staff:
    - Contact information for Cooperative Extension staff by County
    - Also can contact about local Master Gardener Volunteers who may be able to offer on the ground support
  - Local zoning contacts - check with your town office
  - UMA Community Gardens: Focusing on the social and psychological aspects of creating a community garden.
    - For Bangor: contact Dr. Corlew (phone: 207-262-7752 | e-mail kate.corlew@maine.edu).
    - For Augusta: contact Dr. Cook (phone: 207-621-3190 | e-mail james.m.cook@maine.edu).
  - Connect with nearby community gardens through the Maine Food Atlas or this list of community gardens in Maine.

- Resource for Working with Local Governments
  - Cultivating Community Garden's Guide to working with local government
  - CDC's Community Garden benefits information

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■ Includes case studies outlining garden benefits

Funding

Where can gardens get funding for staff time and materials?

● Local businesses, banks and community development funds: great sources of start up funds
● Local community food council: check Maine Network of Community Food Councils for local council contact information- may be able to integrate garden funding needs into other grant proposals or know of local funding sources
● SEEDMoney: a great crowdfunding site to obtain startup and ongoing funds
● Maine Community Foundation: works with donors and other partners to improve the quality of life for all Maine people.
● New England Grassroots Environment Fund: seeks to energize and nurture long term civic engagement in local initiatives that create and maintain healthy, just, safe and environmentally sustainable communities.
● Food Corps: regularly shares grant opportunities
● Maine School Garden Network: regularly shares grant opportunities
● NRCM Seed Grant: Goal is to advance sustainable community initiatives throughout the state. They offer seed grants for organized committees and start-up groups. Applications are not to exceed $500.
● Fiskers Project Orange Thumb: supports programs that celebrate innovation, education and biodiversity. Their grants aim to make a real impact by supporting schools and community gardening initiatives across North America.
● Network for Good: lots of great resources on how to fundraise, how to thank donors, etc.
● Community groups (rotary club, land trust partnerships, etc)

How to thank your funders?

● For start up funding: consider a ribbon cutting event with press, signage for funders
● For all funders: press releases, social media, newsletter, or website coverage thanking funders, personal note
● Offer an end of season Harvest Supper, or Plotluck for gardeners and funders. This is especially useful with localized, or community based funder.

COVID-19 Resources for Community Gardens

● Garden Policy Examples

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- - NC Cooperative Extension [Covid-19 Best Practice for Community Gardens](#)
  - [COVID-19 FAQs for Community Gardens](#)
  - Florida Cooperative Extension's [Covid-19 Best Practice for Community Gardens](#)
  - Vermont Community Garden Network's [Covid-19 Best Practice for Community Gardens](#)
- Maine Cooperative Extension's [Guidelines for Community Gardens During the Times of Social Distancing](#)
- New Hampshire Cooperative Extension's [Volunteering During Covid Safety Training](#)
- Food Handling/Growing Resources from the Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Food Handling:
  - [Guidelines for Growers and Producers](#)
  - [Food Manufacturing Safety Protocols for Covid-19](#)
- Slide-based Garden Orientation for Remote Orientation
  - Tool for conducting electronic/online orientation when in person isn't possible
  - [Portland Oregon Garden Orientation Slides](#)
- Protocol Design- Guideline Building
  - Maine Cooperative Extension tool for designing protocols: [How to Build Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)](#)