



## 10 Awesome Tips for Inclusive Community Gardening

As part of the Can you dig it initiative, we see the community coming first in creating a community garden. Our goal is to not only grow food, but also to cultivate relationships. In working together, we have discovered some golden rules that lead to successfully building and maintaining a community gardens. Let's review them together:

### 1. Be welcoming

#### **Reach out to a wide variety of people in your community.**

Gardening is a powerful tool to bring people together, and is used all around the world as a community binder. When you garden, it doesn't matter where you come from, or what you do for a living. Everyone can connect over the same activity. This offers an opportunity to establish relationships with people from diverse life experiences and to transform strangers into friends. Be welcoming and intentional as you reach out to a wide variety of people in your neighbourhood by:

- distributing flyers in your neighbourhood,
- contacting local community organizations,
- connecting with other community gardens, or
- creating a Facebook page.

Look to develop a diverse, vibrant and resilient community. Try inviting people from Seniors Centres, elementary schools, churches and local associations. Connect with neighbourhood houses, community living agencies, or organizations serving immigrants and refugees. Working together, you will develop a garden that strengthens your community.

Once you have gathered a group, set up your first meeting to talk about what people would like to see happen in the garden and why. Be open to new ideas and brainstorm a variety of possibilities for your garden. By creating a shared vision, your community garden will develop into an inclusive space.

### 2. Celebrate people's gifts and abilities

#### **Everyone has contribution to make. Discover the talents of the people in your community.**

When people actively participate and contribute to a project, they experience a true sense of belonging. People don't only want to live in a community, they want to belong and be part of it. Everyone has contribution to make and our gifts are like pieces of puzzles that can complete each other. Instead of focusing your energy on what is missing in your organization, focus on what you have. Abundance is created when you believe there is plenty of good to go around - time, energy and resources.

### 3. Be flexible

#### **Try different ideas or strategies on how to involve a variety of people in your garden.**

The idea you have in your mind about your community garden might change depending on everyone's input and abilities. Get people to agree on a vision or a core set of principles, but be flexible about the strategies you will use to get you there. Examples may include deciding to have an organic garden, or whether or not to include bee keeping on site. Conflicts are often the result of unspoken and unmet



needs. If you can identify and express your needs for the garden, it makes the discussion about strategies much easier. There are as many ways of doing, as there are people. Building a garden and the community around it is a process, not a destination. Enjoy it every step of the way!

#### 4. Get organized

##### **Form a planning/executive committee to establish, develop and maintain the garden.**

Coordinating a community garden is a lot of work for one person. Share the workload and form a planning/executing committee. Determine the roles and responsibilities of committee members and fellow gardeners, and then let people decide how they would like to get involved based on their interests and expertise.

Having a leader or a team of coordinators to lead a specific project is an effective way of organizing work. Set up regular work parties and be ready to get dirt under your nails! Also spend time in the garden. Take a look at how things grow and ensure the space is cared for. The more you invest in your garden and learn about your community, the more they will give back to you.

#### 5. Design and build your community garden in partnership with neighbours

##### **Step 1. Find suitable the land**

Look for empty lots and for proprietaries with big open spaces, like churches and school yards. Consider the amount of daily sunshine (vegetables need at least six hours a day), water sources nearby, and the possibility of contaminated soil. Next, find out who owns the land, and if it is possible to get a minimum 3-year lease with the owner. Look into the need for public liability insurance.

You can also create a garden at home with a couple of garden beds in your backyard, or some containers on your balcony. If you have some space and the neighbors to join you, you can create your own community garden!

##### **Step 2. Design the space with other gardeners**

Members must decide how many plots are available, what size they will be and how they will be assigned. When designing the garden, don't forget to allow space for storing tools, a rain-proof announcement board, a seating or special events area, composting and of course pathways between plots. Consider planting flowers or shrubs (edible shrubs are the best!) around the garden's edges to beautify and promote good will with non-gardening neighbors, passersby and municipal authorities.

##### **Step 3. Gather community resources and build your garden**

Plan what you need to do first, and get everyone to commit to a full day of building. Organize volunteer work crews to prepare the site and build the garden. A garden is a dynamic space, always changing and evolving, and you don't have to do everything at once. Most likely the garden will be built over several days and that's okay. That will give you things to do to maintain the interest and commitment of the gardeners over the seasons.



## 6. Get support

**Reach out to businesses, partner with other organizations, work with your municipality, and look for funders. Ongoing support can keep the garden growing over time.**

You might get surprised at how much local businesses can get very enthusiastic about your project and decide to support you with resources, money, expertise or man power! Getting involved in an inclusive community garden is often for them a chance to give back to their community and enhance their profile. Local associations, community serving agencies and municipalities are examples of bodies that can provide assistance and add strength to your organization. Look for green community grants in your neighbourhood and other sources of funding. Consider organizing fundraising with the support of your community.

## 7. Establish the ground 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. Address people's concerns and come up with strategies to meet individuals' needs for safety, equity, and clarity. Brainstorm about rules and put them in writing. Rules can be amended later as the project is taking form.

## 8. Communicate, communicate, communicate!

**Good communication ensures a strong community garden with active participation by all.**

Some ways to do this are to:

- post messages on a bulletin board in the garden
- form a telephone tree
- create an email list or Facebook page
- have regular celebrations

Good communication ensures a strong community garden with active participation by all. Create a space where gardeners and partners feel free to share their ideas and receive each other's thoughts in a positive way. Some ways to do this are to form a telephone tree, create an email list, install a rainproof bulletin board in the garden, or have regular meetings and celebrations in the garden.

## 9. Share your yield

**Give back a percentage of your yield to food depots, community kitchens, neighbours and friends.**

Consider growing an extra row or creating a communal gardening space where people work in collaboration and distribute the produce to people in need. Giving back part of the produce to your community is not only empowering, it puts you at the giving end of the social spectrum and can change the way you think about yourself. Giving back is an act of generosity and engagement. It is a beautiful way of setting an example for others and being the change you want to see in your community.

## 10. Have fun!

**Organize gatherings, potlucks and parties.**

Take the time to chat with other gardeners. Enjoy the process of growing food for yourself, your family and your community!