



Create More Beauty: Planting a Community Garden

Held annually the first Saturday after Labor Day (Sept. 8, 2018), [National Planting Day](#) kicks off the fall planting season for Keep America Beautiful's network of more than 600 affiliates and other community partners with events taking place through October.

While fall might not be the prime time to plant your community garden, here are some tips to get a head start preparing for your spring planting project in your community.

Check out the ideas below and find inspiration by learning more about projects implemented by Keep America Beautiful affiliates nationwide at kab.org/news-info/affiliate-updates.

Find a local Keep America Beautiful affiliate at kab.org/volunteer.

CREATING AND PLANTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

Not only do community gardens provide fresh fruits and vegetables, they also can bring people together for a common cause, teach our children where their food comes from, and how to eat a more healthy diet.

There are many different types of community gardens. This guide should only serve as a starter as you gather facts to begin your journey in building a community garden. Gardens require a long-term commitment if they are to remain healthy and vibrant.

Organize a Community Garden Group

People may look to you for community gardening opportunities, or you may need to seek out gardeners to participate in your garden. When looking for gardeners, begin by checking in the immediate neighborhood where the garden is to be located. Other ways include posting fliers at nearby community centers or library, and checking with local gardening clubs.

Once you have a committed group of volunteers, it's important to meet to discuss your vision, goals, action steps and assignments for getting your garden launched. During your initial meetings it's a good idea to adopt a charter, and/or rules for your garden. This will help maintain order as your community garden grows over time.

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Locating a Site

You may need to find a site for your community garden. Brainstorm ideas of possible locations in your community. You may be able to find an unused piece of land at a community center, faith-based institution, school or other location on city property, which you may be able to share.

Another option is to survey your targeted neighborhood for possible abandoned vacant lots or other pieces of available land.

Remember to research who owns the proposed property and get permission in writing. You may also have to get a waiver and guarantee to hold the owner harmless. Start with asking for a small commitment by asking for test a period of one year and then as your garden progresses you would work out an extension for a longer period of time based on your success for the first year.

Conduct a Site Analysis

A simple soil test should be conducted to determine the quality of the soil on the property. The test will also help you in determining whether there are any contaminants in the soil. Also determine what the drainage is in and around the garden.

Determine if there are any utilities on the property. This can be done with checking with the local government or utility companies. Utility companies will also come to the site to mark where underground wires or pipes are located.

Note where the nearest source for water, this is an important element in feeding your plants. Another important element is sunlight, so determine how much sun the site gets throughout the day. Most vegetables prefer full sun (six to eight hours of direct sunlight a day).

Design Your Garden

Before you begin to build your garden you need to come up with a plan. The first process in your plan should be to meet with the gardeners and brainstorm elements that they would like included in the garden. This way you can attempt to include what is meaningful to those who will be using the garden, and build greater ownership from those who will use the garden the most.

Consider the type of soil that the site has in determining what type of beds to build. If the site has poor soil quality you may want to build raised garden beds, if you have to amend the soil, raised beds are your best option. There are also a number of different options of materials that can used to construct your beds including concrete block, lumber, and other creative re-use/re-purposing of materials.

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Garden containers, such as large pots, can be used in your garden to give it an eclectic look.

Consider what types of plants you will be growing when designing your garden. The right plant-right place can make all the difference in a planting a successful garden. Consider soil conditions, light exposure, and the plant's size at maturity.

You may want to ask for assistance in drawing up your plan. Check to see if one of your community gardeners has any experience with landscape design.

Local master gardeners, landscape designers are additional options for assistance.

Garden Structures

Many community gardens include different structures in their design. Some popular elements include:

- Benches & picnic tables: Allow for people to rest, and talk with each other.
- Compost bins: Allows you to turn organic waste from the garden into compost.
- Storage: You will need a place to store all your tools, pots, and other items for the garden.
- Bulletin board: A great tool for keeping all your community gardeners informed on what's going on at the garden.
- Trellises: Will give a place for vine plants to grow.

Sourcing Plants

There are a number of places to source your plants from, depending on what you would like your garden to look like and what your budget is.

If you want your garden to have a finished look on build day and you have the budget, purchasing plants from your local nursery or home improvement store is a great option. The plants will bear fruit much sooner than if you started them from seed.

A much less inexpensive option is to start your own plants from seeds. This will take longer for the plants to grow; consult the grow time on your seed packet. If you are able to sow your seeds well in advance you may have quality plants ready for your build day.

Maintenance

Develop a maintenance schedule with your community gardening team. There's no shortage of maintenance that needs to be done in gardens. Scheduling work days allows everyone to share in the work.

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Typical tasks include:

- **Watering:** Water your plants deeply once or twice a week, depending on your weather. It is better to water them deeply a few times, than giving them a quick sprinkle every day. Water in the early part of the day, to prevent fungal diseases. Water slowly and softly, and direct water to the roots.
- **Weeding:** Weeds compete with plants for nutrients, space, and light. Pull by hand to get as much of the roots as possible.
- **Mulching:** Mulch will help keep the soil moist, warm, help control weeds, and add organic matter into your soil. Make sure to keep the mulch away from the stems of your plants to keep them from developing disease or rotting.
- **Harvesting:** Determine/research the best time to harvest your crop. It will vary depending on what you are growing. Harvest too soon and your crop may not fully develop, too late and you may end up with bug infestation, disease or scavengers.
- **Fall cleanup:** This is a good time to add to your compost piles and prepare your plot for winter or begin a winter crop. Remove spent plants, stems and put them in your compost pile. Any weeds with seeds or bug infested plants should be put in the trash, so they don't infect your garden next year. It's also a good time to amend the soil and add organic matter or shredded leaves to your garden.

Building a garden is a continual learning process. Build upon your knowledge of gardening by continue to research other methods and by experimenting yourself.

Tools & Safety Equipment

Tools and safety equipment that your volunteers will find useful include:

- Rakes (steel & leaf)
- Shovels (flat & round tipped)
- Hoes
- Pitchforks
- Hand trowels
- Hand cultivators
- Pruners/loppers
- Wheelbarrows/gardening carts
- Hose, garden sprinkler, watering cans
- Gloves
- Goggles

Build day tools include:

- Hammers
- Saws
- Drills
- Screwdrivers

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