

## Growing Community Gardens A Partnership Between WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners and Local Community Gardens

Growing Community Gardens provides education on sustainable gardening practices to beginning and established community gardens that have demonstrated support from their members and neighborhoods.

This booklet gives tips on starting a community garden and outlines the ways in which the Skagit County Master Gardeners can help.



*Leslie Bunzel and Marcia Hunt in the Enabling Garden area of the Anacortes 29th Street Community Garden. Photo credit: WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener Jane Billingham*

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### 1 / Resources to Get You Started

The American Community Garden Association site ([www.communitygarden.org](http://www.communitygarden.org)) includes "10 Steps to Starting a Community Garden" and is a place where you can register your garden once it is up and running.

<http://createthegood.org/sites/default/files/how-to/CommunityGarden.pdf> also lays out how to start a community garden and has a good list of resources at the end. Or check out [http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/garden/articles/pdf/startup\\_guide.pdf](http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/garden/articles/pdf/startup_guide.pdf).

For local resources, visit <http://anacortescommunitygardens.org>, which lists community gardens in Skagit County. Their newsletter is a useful resource for seasonal tasks.

The WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener demonstration garden, The Discovery Garden, is located at the WSU Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center, 16650 State Route 536, Mount Vernon, WA.

## 2 / The Role of Community Garden Organizers

### Plan your vision for the garden

**Demand** Consider whether there is sufficient demand for a community garden in your neighborhood by drawing up a list of the names of ten families or individuals who are committed to using a neighborhood garden (experience indicates that a “critical mass” of ten families is necessary to maintain a community garden).

**Leadership** Consider what leadership capacity there is in your neighborhood for developing a community garden. Draw up a list of five people who are committed to taking a leadership role in developing the garden. These people will help (i) find a suitable site for the garden, (ii) design the garden, (iii) develop an operational plan, (iv) find resources for garden development, and (v) write the garden budget.

**Organizational Plan** Draw up an organizational plan for your garden that includes such concepts as:

What general rules will govern the maintenance and use of the garden? For example, who will be eligible to participate? What criteria will be used for accepting applicants? Who will make the decision?

- How will the garden operate in conjunction with the neighborhood association, parks department, or private landowner?

**How to Build** Some things to consider are:

- How to acquire materials for structures (fencing, raised beds, tool shed, bulletin board, compost bins, etc.), tools, and garden materials (soil, seeds).
- How will the garden be built, and who will do the work?

**Philosophy** What philosophical underpinnings would you like for your garden.

- Will it be organic? Till or no till?
- Will plots or produce be set aside for the local food bank?
- Will the garden be open for gardening year round?
- Will there be areas for children and gardeners with special needs?

**Education** Consider the long-term education of the gardeners.

- Identify seasoned gardeners in your community who can become involved with the garden
- Consider a monthly or seasonal newsletter to let gardeners know what tasks need to be done when in the garden.

### Research sites

**Maps** You can request a map of publicly owned lands in your neighborhood from the city; also look to churches and privately owned vacant or under-used lots.

**Public versus Private** Don't assume that public land is the best option for a community garden; more gardens on public land are lost than on private land. If it is public, which agency owns it, and how is it zoned? If it's privately owned, is the owner agreeable to a lease of at least three years? What is the site's current and past use?

**Neighborhood** Does the garden fit in with the neighborhood? It is ideal if the site is observable by nearby residents, which adds to the security of the site. Are the neighbors agreeable to the idea of a community garden?

## Evaluate sites

**Accessibility** Is the site accessible and convenient to the neighborhood by bus, foot, or personal vehicle? Is it on a relatively quiet street, protected from traffic?

**Topography** Flat is better. Avoid low-lying areas that get waterlogged. Avoid frost pockets if your community garden will operate year-round.

**Sunlight** The garden will need at least six hours of direct sunlight a day—and eight hours is even better. Consider trees that might block sunlight in the summer.

**Water** Perhaps the most important element is water. A new hose bibb (outdoor faucet) might be necessary if the water source is too far away.

**Soil** Good soil is essential. Raised beds are useful if soil has been compacted or is of poor quality. Most annuals require no more than 12 inches of soil, so, if necessary, new soil can be brought in to raise planting beds 12 to 18 inches off the ground. Raised beds also improve drainage and help the soil warm up more quickly in the spring.

**Soil Samples** If you are using the soil on-site, it is a good idea to have it tested to check nutrient levels and make sure it is not contaminated. The University of Massachusetts offers an inexpensive mail-in service (<http://www.umass.edu/soiltest>).

**Tree Roots** Place the garden away from tree and shrub roots, which compete with vegetables for water and nutrients and make the ground hard to dig.

**Shelter from Wind** A sheltered location is preferable as wind can dry out soil and damage structures and plants.

**Fencing** Your garden site may benefit from fencing to prevent vandalism or intrusion by animals.

**Enabling Beds** You may wish to include some raised beds for gardeners who have difficulty getting to ground level. There are examples out at the Master Gardener Discovery Garden, and plans are available at [www.skagit.wsu.edu/MG](http://www.skagit.wsu.edu/MG).

**Pathways** You will need pathways to get through the garden. Wood chips work well for general paths, and crushed gravel works well for wheelchair access. If you are including wheelchair paths, allow plenty of room for turnarounds.

**Tool Shed** A tool shed provides storage space and can serve as a focal point for the garden. It can also support an outdoor work bench or potting station.

**Compost Area** The garden will generate a lot of vegetative debris that can be composted on site. See the compost bins and the worm bin out at the Master Gardener Discovery Garden for examples.

**Wildflower Area** Wildflowers attract pollinators. Consider having an area within or around your garden dedicated to these plants.

**Seating Area** You may wish to incorporate a shady spot with benches where gardeners can socialize.

**Parking** Consider disabled spots if you have pathways and beds for disabled gardeners.

**Signage** Consider the placement and design of sturdy signs to advertise your garden to the public.

### Locate funding

List possible sources for funding/sponsorship and some ideas for group fundraising. For example, one community gardening group in another region raised money by selling square inches of garden for \$5.00. The names of those supporters were listed on a plaque at the garden site, along with an expression of thanks. The American Community Gardening Association has an article on fundraising at [www.communitygarden.org/cache/documents/19672.pdf](http://www.communitygarden.org/cache/documents/19672.pdf).

### Complete paperwork

Draw up agreements with the landowner and the gardeners, make sure that you have insurance coverage, and register your garden with the Anacortes Community Gardens <http://anacortescommunitygardens.org>, which is creating a database of community gardens in Skagit County, and with the American Community Garden Association, which lists community gardens nationwide.

## 3 / Help from WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners

Once you have decided how and where your garden will operate, and have your garden advisory committee in place, contact us. Master gardeners cannot do hands-on maintenance work in your community garden; however, we can offer gardening expertise in the following ways.

### Consult WSU Extension online resources

Visit <http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG> for

- “Notes from the Veggie Garden” and “Notes from the Small-Fruit Garden,” monthly news bulletins from the coordinators of the vegetable garden and the small-fruit garden at the Master Gardener Discovery Garden
- “Ask the Master Gardener” columns from the *Skagit Valley Herald*, which cover many topics including vegetable gardening
- Blueprints for the raised beds in the Discovery Garden Enabling Garden.

Visit <http://pubs.wsu.edu> for WSU Extension publications on a wide range of vegetable gardening topics.

Visit <http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense> for fact sheets on managing plant problems.

Visit the Western Washington Fruit Research Foundation (<http://www.wwfrf.org>) for information on growing fruit trees. (Their demonstration orchard is located behind the Master Gardener Discovery Garden on Memorial Highway.)

Check out the Growing Community Gardens Resource Package on this site for links to vegetable gardening information for our area.

Using our web site or Facebook, sign up for the WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners Facebook page at <http://facebook.com/skagitmg> for regular links to articles relevant to gardeners in our area.

Using the Request for Assistance form on this site, sign up to be notified of our annual community garden seed swap event for networking, education, and celebration.

### Check out regularly scheduled free public events

**Know & Grows:** Visit <http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG> to check the schedule for our free public Know & Grow workshops, which are held one Tuesday a month from April to November at the WSU-NWREC Auditorium next to the Discovery Garden, 16650 Memorial Highway, Mount Vernon.

**Plant Clinics:** Drop in to our Burlington and Anacortes plant clinics from April to October. Bring in specimens that show signs of disease or pest damage or drop by to ask general questions about vegetable gardening. Hours and locations are posted at <http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG>.

**Workdays at our Demonstration Garden:** Visit the vegetable and the small-fruit garden at the Discovery Garden on Tuesday mornings from April to October to talk to Master Gardeners about specific vegetable and small-fruit growing issues. The Discovery Garden is located at 16650 Memorial Highway, Mount Vernon.

### Request a PowerPoint presentation

We have PowerPoints on the following topics:

- Getting the Most Out of Your Garden Space
- Basic Vegetable Growing for Skagit County
- Basic Small-Fruit Growing for Skagit County
- Integrated Pest Management in the Garden

We can offer the presentation at your local library or other venue, and you can invite others in your neighborhood to join you.

### Request a site visit

We can arrange for a Master Gardener to come out to your garden for a couple of hours to demonstrate particular seasonal gardening techniques, to answer specific questions, or to provide general feedback on what is going on in your garden.

### Invite a Master Gardener to a garden planning meeting

Let us know if you would like to have input from a Master Gardener before you finalize site selection and the design of your garden.

To request Master Gardener assistance or to sign up for our community garden mailing list, please fill out our Request for Master Gardener Assistance form on this site.