



Garden Development Best-Practices

The benefits of growing and eating fresh organic produce are widely recognized today. This leads many schools, workplaces, churches, municipalities, and other community groups to consider starting a vegetable garden on their underutilized properties.

These projects are most commonly *allotment* gardens, where individuals and families grow food for their own personal consumption by renting a small plot. If these gardens are open to the general public for plot rental, they are called *community* gardens. In other cases, *program* gardens serve a specific educational, therapeutic, vocational, or charitable goal of the sponsoring organization.

Wasatch Community Gardens (WCG) has vibrant partnerships with many municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and schools. Depending on your needs it may be possible to contract with WCG to support or manage your new garden project, or for you to participate in already existing WCG programming. Whether WCG is involved or not, here are some space and leadership factors that may influence your project's success:

Physical space requirements

- Ownership of the land, or a lease agreement with clear terms and expectations, such as water access.
- A minimum of 6-8 hours of daily sunlight.
- A location beyond the drip lines of trees, to avoid competition from their canopies and roots.
- Convenient proximity to irrigation hook-ups, parking, and bathrooms.
- Accessibility features such as wheelchair accessible paths and some raised garden beds 24-30" high.
- Soil testing for contaminants, which could require remediation or the addition of new soil.
- A budget for materials and contract labor. Depending on the size of the garden and the willingness of organizers to seek donated/used materials or to do installation tasks themselves, garden development can cost anywhere from around \$1000 to over \$10,000. Plan for the following expenses:
 - Site preparation such as turf removal, soil tilling, and amending the soil with compost
 - Basic infrastructure features like fencing, signage, shed, compost bins, drip irrigation, automatic timers, and a gathering area with tables, benches, and shade structure
 - Accessibility features such as raised garden boxes, ramps to sheds, and concrete pathways to key pieces of infrastructure
 - Ongoing expenses like tools and repairs
- A manageable footprint
 - Determine what area your organization can realistically manage by starting small. Then you won't be stuck with an abandoned infrastructure investment if excitement wanes, and you can always scale up later as appropriate. For allotment gardens where gardeners themselves maintain the site, we recommend no more than 200 sq ft of space per gardener to ensure that site maintenance will not be excessive for your participant pool.

Project leadership requirements:

- Early consultation and buy-in of all stakeholders
 - While a few passionate individuals may act as the catalyst for establishing a new garden, broad engagement with decision makers, funders, facilities crews, and program staff is necessary *early in the process* to ensure that the garden will have sustained support.
- Strong participant demand
 - Just because your organization's decision makers think a garden is a great idea doesn't mean that there is any community demand or interest. Organizers should do as much outreach as possible at every stage of project planning and development, to survey interested participants and ensure that the garden will meet real and lasting needs.
 - For community gardens, this often includes going door-to-door, posting on community bulletin boards, hosting public meetings, speaking to the media, and reaching out to community groups such as churches, non-profits, and community councils.
 - For program gardens that serve specific populations, this could include focus groups, needs assessments of program staff and prospective participants, site visits to similar projects of other organizations, etc.
 - Asking people to sign a support petition is an easy way to collect supporter contact information to build your organizing group. However, nearly everyone will sign on to support a garden project in general, but that does not mean they will volunteer their limited time to install the garden, or are personally interested in growing their own food there. When collecting feedback and statements of support, make sure people can specify which level of participation they are interested in.
 - In order to determine an accurate level of interest in the project, we suggest reducing your total support figures by 75%, as the majority of people who initially express interest will not actually follow through. So, if you received 100 prospective participants stating they want to garden, you should anticipate only 25, and design your site accordingly. Later, if even more people actually want to participate, don't worry! Some active participants will change their mind mid-season as well, so it's helpful to have a waiting list as a backup.
- Broad participation in project development
 - Once you feel confident in the level of community demand, continue to encourage the broad participation of stakeholders during site development to increase project commitment and ownership. During this time, it's important to clearly define what types of decisions are open for input and discussion, and which are more executive. You can collaborate with stakeholders to:
 - Determine the garden name, logo, and mission statement
 - Create the site design and garden layout
 - Design murals or other art features
 - Mulch pathways and amend garden soil
 - Install amenities such as the shed, raised bed boxes, pergolas and drip irrigation
 - Hold fun events such as potlucks, seed shares, or workshops
 - Collect used tool donations
- Garden management staffing
 - Gardens require regular planting, weeding, harvesting, pest management, and infrastructure repairs - often in triple digit temperatures. In allotment gardens where people grow food for themselves, participants have a strong self-interest to show up and do the necessary work, so they can be organized into committees to assist with many tasks.
 - Even so, we recommend having at least one dedicated staff member whose job duties include site management, participant engagement, rules enforcement, and off-season administrative tasks like plot signups, fee processing, and member orientations. For program gardens, having a dedicated staff member is especially useful to handle tasks when other participants are not available, such as during the summer break at a school garden.