



Louisville Grows Community Garden Toolkit

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Adapted from:

University of Missouri Extension Office: *Community Gardening Toolkit* and *Gardener's Welcome Packet*
Louisville Metro Government Department of Economic Growth and Innovation: *Community Gardens in Louisville: A Start-Up Guide*

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Introduction

Dear Community Garden Leaders,

We are thrilled that you've decided to start a community garden in your neighborhood, and are excited to work with you to build a more just and sustainable community! The benefits of participating in a community garden are countless, and it all starts with careful planning and consideration of all the material and immaterial parts needed to make the garden a success.

This guide is intended to help garden leaders prepare the garden site, responsibilities, regulations, and events associated with many high-functioning community gardens. It outlines the expectations and rewards for participants, and offers advice for including new and expert gardeners in the growth of this neighborhood program.

The structure and information provided have been adapted from the University of Missouri extension office's *Community Gardening Toolkit* and *Gardener's Welcome Packet*, as well as the Louisville Metro Government Department of Economic Growth and Innovation's *Community Gardens in Louisville: A Start-Up Guide*.

Feel free to modify any of the documents provided here as samples to better suit your community needs.

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Steps to Starting a Community Garden

This section of the toolkit is for the hopeful gardener with an idea, but no garden. It walks you through the steps from toward gathering interest and securing the land for the garden, all the way to planting

the first seed.

1. Determining Interest Level of Community

Before you set forth on acquiring the land, it's important to gauge the interest level of the surrounding community. Make sure you have a solid number of supporters (at least ten families) before you continue on your garden-founding path. Attend neighborhood association meetings, knock on doors, post on community Facebook pages, or mail letters. You may consider asking residents to fill out a survey with questions such as:

1. Would you like a community garden in your neighborhood?
2. Would you participate in a community garden in your neighborhood?
3. Do you have suggestions for a garden location?
4. What elements would you like to see in the garden (beehives, compost bins, picnic tables for community meetings, etc.)

Make sure to get the names and phone numbers of interested parties to keep them updated throughout this process!

2. Hold an Interest Meeting

Now that you have a solid number of community members, get them all together to address concerns and brainstorm desired outcomes for the garden. If you wish, invite area businesses and organizations that might be interested in supporting you through sponsorships or tool donations. Make sure someone takes notes on the meeting, so you don't lose any of the good ideas.

Identify key goals, such as garden purpose and values, possible locations, plot fees, features that the garden should have, and communication methods.

3. Explore Potential Garden Sites

Go forth into the neighborhood and start looking for plots of land that might make a suitable garden site. Don't forget that churches, non-profit organizations, and businesses with extra land could all be potential partners. While searching, pay special attention to concerns such as size, amount of sunlight, access to water, fencing, site history and any other factor that might affect the success of your community garden. Consider spaces by apartments without individual yards because there may be a higher demand for garden plots. Additionally, areas close to children's playgrounds or schools will attract more residents from the area.

- Some areas may have neighborhood plans in place, which describe the general layout of a neighborhood and will note if there area suggestions for future garden spaces. Research neighborhood plans at www.louisvilleky.gov/planningdesign/neighborhood+plans
- In order to determine who actually owns the land, you can also utilize <http://ags2.lojic.org/lojiconline>, a website for residents in Jefferson County to assess property ownership.

Before approaching a landowner about drafting a lease, it's necessary to already have a plan in place. Consider writing a project proposal, attaching a garden map, and including a vision for the garden to demonstrate how it will positively affect the area. Information about leases is in Step 7.

4. Test the Soil

Make sure you consider the nutrient and chemical levels in the soil before deciding on a garden site. You should test your soil before buying the land or drafting a lease with the property owner. Sometimes soil may look healthy, but it may contain dangerous levels of chemicals in the soil depending on the property's history. Soil tests are available from Jefferson County Extension Office, and can determine information about nutrients, pH, and lead in the soil. Soil tests normally cost \$10-30.

To test your soil, assemble a clean and sanitized spade and bucket. Sample 10-15 areas from the property. Dig 4-6 inches deep for a vegetable garden, and take a 1-inch thick slice from each area. Place each sample into the bucket, and mix all soil thoroughly. Spread mixture on clean paper and let air dry. Do not heat, and dry in a place where fertilizer, manure, or chemicals will not contaminate the sample. Take 2 cups of your mixed soil to the Extension Office for testing.

5. Identify Garden Resources and Water

While gardeners can provide some tools themselves, consider soliciting donations for large tools or buying gardening equipment in bulk. Think about where your garden will get seeds, if your garden will need a shed for equipment, and whether community members are willing to lend lawn mowers or weed trimmers.

The garden will also need a water source. Some properties already have water service, so you can call Louisville Water Company and have the account transferred to the garden or a representative. If there isn't water service on site, consider contacting neighboring businesses or organizations to hook up a hose to their water source for a fee. If the site has a water meter but no account, you can install a water service line and faucet by calling the Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD). If the site has no water meter or account, you will need to work with the Louisville Water Company and a plumber to install the meter, service line, and faucet. Visit www.louisvilleky.gov/LWC/customers/newservices.htm to get started.

Alternatively, you can purchase rain barrels to collect rainwater, and then dispense by using hoses hooked up to the elevated barrels. This is a great way to utilize runoff and lessen or eliminate your water bill.

6. Host a Second Meeting, Elect Leadership, & Plan Key Events

During this meeting, make sure you are still on the same page with your community about their concerns and hopes for a community garden. Begin to evaluate all the possible options for the garden's site. Review the list of frequently asked questions on page 13 before the meeting to troubleshoot any questions ahead of time.

Elect a garden leadership team, normally 2-3 people that are interested stakeholders and neighborhood residents. The leadership team should have good relationships with community members, business, and organizations, and gardening knowledge is always beneficial! The leadership team will research garden locations, draft garden rules, oversee the application process, and manage payment of bills (such as water) using plot fees.

Decide on key events throughout the gardening season using the sample event calendar on page 12. This will let anyone interested in a plot know when they can come complete and application, pay their plot fees, and actually begin working in the garden.

7. Prepare a Lease Agreement

Once you have decided on a site, have your team of volunteers work together to draft a lease agreement that outlines the responsibilities of both the garden and the landlord. A sample lease agreement, adapted from the American Community Gardening Association, is found on page 16. If you choose to lease land, remember that the property owner could change how they wish to use the land over time, so try to negotiate a lease for the garden for at least 3-5 years.

If the property is public land owned by Louisville Metro Government, the Landbank Authority, or Urban Renewal Commission, you will need to call the Department of Community Services and Revitalization.

8. Draft a Preliminary Garden Plan & Budget

With the property secured in a lease agreement, now you can begin to plan the arrangement of locations on your garden site. Most gardens include at least 15 plots (raised beds or in-ground plots), a watering system, bulletin board, seating areas/gathering spaces, tool shed with a lock, and a composting area. Some gardens also have a parking lot and a fence surrounding the property. Additional elements that you can install include beehives, fruit trees, children's play area, and greenhouses/hoop houses. Make sure to meet with all community garden plot holders to discuss the plan and elements of the garden.

The Leadership Team and Treasurer should also meet to discuss a budget for the garden, particularly for initial start-up costs. They should create a list of necessary items, draft a fundraising plan, write a donation letter with necessary items for the garden, and then ask businesses or organizations for financial or in-kind donations. It may be helpful to enlist someone with social media knowledge to create an online drive to spread the word about your garden, or even start a Kickstarter campaign.

9. Decide Gardener Guidelines & Application

Create an official list of guidelines to make sure all of your gardeners are on the same page. A sample list of gardener guidelines and an application form are included on page 14-15. Adapt them as you and your plot holders see fit. Gather all interested gardeners on a registration day to have them complete these forms and pay their plot fees.

10. Develop the Site on Build Day

It's finally time to do the physical work of building your garden. Schedule a day for gardeners, community members, and volunteers to begin the processes of tilling, trimming, and building to become a well-developed garden. Weekends are generally best. Advertise to community members, Master Gardeners, nonprofits, radio stations, newspapers, and social media. Make sure to organize food, water, and materials for the Build Day. Remember to call "Before-You-Dig" 811 (BUD) to have utility companies mark water, gas, and utility lines at least two days before build day.

11. Celebrate

Now that you've finally completed all the preparations for your first season, host a party where gardeners and other members of the community can get together and begin to

meet each other. Happy Growing!

Responsibilities and Benefits

Managing a successful community garden offers a variety of rewards to the gardeners and the surrounding community. However, for a garden to be successful, each member must take on certain responsibilities.

Responsibilities

There are two essential responsibilities of the community gardener:

1. The gardener makes sure to take care of their own plot.
2. The gardener contributes to garden maintenance and communal projects.

If every gardener both maintains their own plot and helps with shared responsibilities, the garden will be fully taken care of with less work required of each individual gardener.

Benefits

If run effectively (in other words, assuming each gardener fulfills their responsibilities), a community garden can have countless benefits. Here are a few of them.

Growing food: Perhaps the most obvious, having a garden grants the community access to high quality fruits and veggies at a low cost. Extra produce can be sold for additional income.

Health benefits: There are numerous health benefits to gardening. Gardeners tend to eat foods high in nutritional value, get exercise essential to good health, and improve their mental health. It has been shown that gardening reduces stress and improves one's sense of wellness and belonging.

Community building: The community garden is a space for people of diverse backgrounds to get together and work toward a common goal. It also provides space for community members to learn from each other, as well as a spot for children to explore gardening and community together.

Neighborhood benefits: Research indicates that community gardens reduce crime, increase property values, and improve various environmental conditions in the surrounding area.

Gardener Expectations

Community gardens are at their best when the expectations of work are spread out evenly among all members. Here are the expectations for gardeners that will make sure the garden is running well.

- **Tend to your plot at least two times a week during the growing season.** Regular visits are essential to maintaining your plot and the upkeep of the entire garden. It is easier to frequently come to the garden by setting a schedule for yourself or making plans to work when other gardeners do too. It may help to schedule a communal weekly work night so you can get advice from other gardeners and share information about what you're growing.
- **Attend meetings, workdays, and other scheduled events.** Workdays give gardeners a great opportunity to meet and work with each other. In addition, attending meetings and other community events will keep everyone on the same page about projects and maintenance.
- **Learn.** Gardeners should always be looking to check out gardening books from the library, finding classes to take, or even hunting for information online. Even if just one gardener learns something new, they can then become a resource for everyone in the garden.
- **Participate in garden maintenance and leadership groups.** Community gardens are best managed when all members volunteer to work on community projects. This ensures that the tasks of maintenance do not fall on the same person or small group of people. If each gardener chips in, there will be less work required of each gardener individually.
- **Help your neighbors.** If you notice a fellow gardener has extra weeds in their garden, offer to help pull them. Don't be afraid to reach out for help if you're going on vacation; let the garden leaders know so they can harvest for you and donate or keep the extra produce. And offer to share recipes or gardening tips – you may be surprised what you learn from the other plot holders!

Job Descriptions

Community gardens need every gardener to take a responsibility for a variety of different tasks. Here is a suggested list of different roles garden members can take on to help the division of labor.

Garden leader: Serves as main contact between garden and community. Makes sure each gardener has a job. Works to recruit new gardeners. Provides guidance for leadership team, plot holders, and volunteers.

Leadership team: Consists of the garden leader and three other gardeners. Works to edit and enforce all gardener guidelines. Responsible for soliciting donations, organizing garden layout, and scheduling meetings.

Treasurer: Collects and organizes plot fees, oversees garden bank accounts, and writes checks (tools, water, wood, etc).

Garden expert: must have at least 3 years of active gardening experience and can convey information to other gardeners regarding planting methods, pest and disease control, and harvesting. Makes relevant information available to hang on bulletin board. Available to mentor new gardeners.

Plot coordinator: Oversees plot applications. Assigns plots and makes garden map. Organizes all gardener information and makes accessible to other gardeners. Keeps plot holders accountable by calling gardeners who aren't tending to their plots. Can remove gardeners if necessary.

Grounds team: Maintains the garden's common areas. Mows grass, clears pathways, and removes trash. Regularly cleans shared tools, equipment, and hoses.

Composting team: Manages compost bins and system. Makes sure gardeners are aware of composting system with clear instructions via flyers, signs, or verbal communication. Explains who can use composting and how much is available. May host instructional workshop for gardeners about how to compost.

Events team: Plans regular events (weekly garden worknights, community yoga in the garden, monthly workshops) and special events (harvest party, movie night, canning party).

Communications team: Manages and circulates newsletter or blog about garden. Stays in communication with gardeners through email, phone calls, and meetings. Oversees garden bulletin board and makes sure to include information about neighborhood organizations and events.

Outreach and community relations team: Ensures that neighbors are included in garden events and planning. Can attend neighborhood association meetings to publicize the garden. Plans social events in the garden for neighbors with events crew.

Security: Works to decrease vandalism and theft in the garden by installing locks, cameras, and signage.

Job Sign-up and Contact Sheet

Job	Name(s)	Telephone	Email
Garden Leader			
Leadership Team			
Treasurer			
Garden Expert			
Plot Coordinator			
Grounds Team			
Composting Team			
Events Team			
Communications Team			
Outreach Team			
Security			

Garden Map

(Once plots are decided)

	A	B	C	D	E
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					

Event Calendar

Event	Date and Time	Location	Objectives
Planning Meeting			
Registration			
Opening Day			
Workdays			
Closing Day			
Workshops			
Social Events			

These questions arise for many different gardens. The answers may vary garden to garden based on what the co-leaders think best. They are included to help gardeners decide which practices and policies will be used at their community garden.

- What is the garden plot fee? Do I need to pay it before a certain date each year? Who do I pay?
- How big is the plot? Are raised beds available?
- How many plots can I sign up for?
- What tools are available at this site?
- Are volunteers available to help weed my plot or take care of common areas?
- Which events or meetings are required for me to attend?
- Can sprinklers or hoses be left on if I leave the garden?
- How much water am I able to use? Does the garden have rain barrels?
- What happens if the plot hasn't been used by a certain date?
- What happens if a plot gets too many weeds or isn't maintained? Do you give "weed warnings"?
- How does the compost system work? Can I bring produce from home to contribute? Can I use the compost at the garden in my plot?
- Is the garden organic? If so, what kinds of disease and pest management do you recommend?
- Are pesticides allowed? If so, which kind?
- How much time per week should I plan to spend at the garden?
- Where can I get gardening advice?
- What should I do if I see theft or vandalism?
- What is the protocol if I am harassed or threatened in the garden?

Sample Gardener Guidelines

The community members of this garden have agreed on the following set of rules. Please direct any questions or comments to the garden leadership team.

1. All gardeners must complete an application form and pay a fee of \$_____ by _____.
2. All gardeners must sign up for one of the jobs or jobs crews listed on page 8.
3. Garden meetings and work parties occur frequently throughout the season. All gardeners should attend to get to know the other gardeners and help keep the garden in good shape. If you cannot attend a scheduled meeting, please let the garden leadership team know at least 24 hours in advance.
4. All gardeners must take care of their plots. If a gardener is unable to tend to their plot due to an absence, they should contact a garden leader or the garden monitor. If the garden leaders cannot contact the absent gardener and their plot is untended, it may be reassigned to another gardener or mowed over.
5. All gardeners must clean their plot of plants and other materials (wooden trellis, string, etc.) by the end of the season. If a gardener's plot is not cleaned by _____, they may lose their plot for the next season.
6. Place weeds and dead plants in the compost bin. Diseased plants should be bagged and discarded.
7. All gardeners should pick up litter if they see it.
8. Do not plant tall plants and vines in locations that may interfere with or shade adjacent plots.
9. Do not pick or harvest from another person's plot.
10. Do not plant illegal plants. Violators may be subject to a fine and immediate removal from the garden.
11. Do not leave the water running attended. Violator may be subject to a fine to cover water bill costs.
12. Do not smoke or chew tobacco in the garden.
13. Do not bring pets, drugs, or alcohol into the garden.
14. If a gardener brings their child to the garden, they must supervise them.
15. All gardeners should only garden during daylight hours for safety purposes.
16. All gardeners should report instances of theft or vandalism to the garden co-leaders.
17. All gardeners should use common courtesy in dealing with their neighbors.
18. Any violators of gardener guidelines will be given a week to address the violation. If a problem persists, the violator may lose their plot and future gardening privileges.

Community Gardener Application

1. Gardener Name:

2. Partner Gardener, if applicable:

(they will need to complete a separate application)

3. Plot Number: _____

4. Address: _____

5. Phone: _____

6. Email: _____

7. Are you a returning gardener? Yes _____ No _____

8. Number of plots this year: _____ Fee/plot: \$_____ Total fee: \$_____

9. Please sign up for at least one of the following garden jobs (descriptions listed on page 3):

- Garden Leader
- Leadership Team
- Treasurer
- Garden Expert

- Plot Coordinator
- Founds Team
- Composting Team
- Events Team

- Communications Team
- Outreach Team
- Security

10. Photo permission: Occasionally other garden plot holders, garden leaders, media, and organizations may take photos of the garden.

- Check here if you do **NOT** give your permission for your photo to be published.

If you do not give permission, you are required to inform photographers if you see them in garden.

11. It is required to share your phone and email with garden leaders. Additionally, a gardener phone and email list is shared with other garden members.

- Check here if you do **NOT** give your permission to share your phone and email with all garden members. It will still be shared with garden leaders.

By signing below, I agree that I have reviewed the Gardener guidelines and fully understand them and the consequences of their violation. I also understand that the garden group or property owners can not be held liable for consequences of my own actions. I agree that in the event of damage or injury I will hold harmless the garden group and owners of the land.

Signature _____ Date _____

Sample Land Use Agreement

(Make sure your final version meets the specific concerns of both your garden group and your landowner.)

I, (Property Owner), give permission to (Community Garden Name) to use the property located at (Garden Street Address) as a community gardening project, for the term of (#) years, from (start date) to (end date), with a fee of (\$) per year.

This agreement may be renewed with the approval of both the property owner and the community garden organization at the end of the agreement period. If the community garden organization wants to renew the lease, they must provide written notice to the property owner 30 days before the lease expires. The two parties will then meet to renegotiate the terms of the lease as necessary.

All questions about the community garden, its nature, risks or hazards, have been discussed with the garden coordinator to property owner's satisfaction.

The community garden agrees to indemnify and save harmless the property owner from all damages and claims arising out of any act, omission or neglect by the community garden, and from any and all actions or causes of action arising from the community garden's occupation or use of the property.

The property owner agrees to notify the community gardening organization of any change in land ownership, development, or use 60 days prior to the change in status.

Land Owner Signature

Date

Garden Leader Signature

Date

Additional Resources

Community Gardens in Louisville: A Start-up Guide

louisville.edu/cepm/community-gardens-in-louisville-a-start-up-guide

A guide that covers the processes of finding land, acquiring water, testing soil, meeting city regulations, and general planning for a community garden.

Louisville Grows

louisvillegrows.org

The link takes you to Louisville Grows' homepage, where you can find additional agricultural resources, information about our Community Garden Grant program, and various gardening workshops and events.

Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky

www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/id/id128/id128.pdf

A PDF guide that is a good introduction to basic the planning and care required for a home garden or small garden plot in the state of Kentucky. A great resource to show to community garden members that just starting out.

How to Start a Community Garden

growinggardens.org/how-to-start-a-community-garden

A collection of links gathered by the organization Growing Gardens that detail the process of starting a community garden, the associated expenses, and the required maintenance of the garden.

University of Kentucky Horticulture Resources

www.uky.edu/hort/home-horticulture

Details on how to grow specific types of plants, as well as links to step-by-step guides to becoming a master gardener and video guides to topics in horticulture.

Contact Information and Acknowledgements

If you are interested in learning more about Louisville Grows, visit our website at louisvillegrows.org.

If you are interested in receiving regular updates on the organization, follow us:

- Facebook at facebook.com/louisvillegrows
- Twitter at twitter.com/louisvillegrows
- Instagram at [@LouisvilleGrows](https://www.instagram.com/LouisvilleGrows)
- Subscribe to our newsletter on louisvillegrows.org/get-involved/newsletter

For concerns about this document, please send us an email at info@louisvillegrows.org.

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