

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Published by:
Alternative Energy
Resources Organization

Thank you to our funders,
the High Stakes Foundation
and the Fanwood Foundation
for making this publication
possible.

Special thanks to: Working
for Equality and Economic
Liberation (WEEL).

Thanks to the following for
your vision, guidance, and
support as the founding
Growing Community Project
Steering Committee:

Jim Barngrover, *AERO Ag
Program Manager*; Alan
Peura, *City Commissioner*;
Maureen Shaughnessy,
Landscape Designer; Selena
Held, *Community Organizer*;
WEEL Staff: Mary Caferro,
Rachael Conn, Brian Coplin,
Layna George, Olivia Riutta;
Rence Driesen, *Project for
Alternative Learning, Executive
Director*; Jeri Rittel, *Project for
Alternative Learning*; Mary Ellen
Halverson, *Nutritionist*; Richard
Thieltges, *Technical Garden
Advisor*; Bethany Flint,
Exploration Works! Museum;
Randy Lilje, *Helena Parks
Department*; Ann Waickman,
Helena Food Share; Jonda
Crosby, *AERO Executive Director*;

Montana Legal Services and
the Volunteers in Service to
America (VISTA) program

Helena Citizens Council

Helena Food Share

Suzanne Wilcox and
Becca Leaphart of
Exploration Works! Museum

Tim Hall and Josh Slotnick,
of Missouala's community
garden network, Garden City
Harvest

Thank you to all those who
with their time, positive
energy, and generosity have
contributed to the Helena
Growing Community Project
and to this community
gardening manual.

BUILDING COMMUNITY GARDENS



BY KATHRYN GREAR HUTCHISON



ALTERNATIVE ENERGY RESOURCES ORGANIZATION

432 North Last Chance Gulch

Helena, Montana 59601

(406) 443-7272 • fax: (406) 442-9120

email aero@acromt.org

www.acromt.org

BUILDING COMMUNITY GARDENS IN MONTANA

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Starting a Garden	3
Start a steering committee	3
Identify stakeholders	4
Get community feedback and support	4
Hold an informational meeting	4
Approach a Sponsor	6
Publicity/Outreach.....	6
Chapter 2: Finding the Right Site for Your Garden	7
Evaluating Land	7
Soil Testing	8
Choosing your site	9
Talking to the landowner.....	9
Lease agreements and use-agreements.....	9
Buying Land	10
Using public land.....	10
Water	11
Liability Insurance	12
Chapter 3 Designing Your Garden.....	13
Designing your garden with community in mind	13
Incorporating food assistance programs.....	16
Chapter 4: Building Your Garden.....	17
Gathering Supplies	17
Volunteer work days	18
Chapter 5: Garden Organization.....	19
Managing Your Garden.....	19
Membership Dues	19
Garden guidelines.....	19
Additional Ideas.....	20
Chapter 6: Success!.....	21
Montana’s Community Gardens:	21
Garden City Harvest	21
Helena Community Garden Project	23
Appendices	
A. Garden Designs.....	A-25
B. Sample Letters of Support	B-29
C. Land Assessment Checklist	C-33
D. Sample Lease agreement	D-34
E. Sample Outreach Material	E-37
F. Sample Garden Guidelines.....	F-43
G. Sample Gardeners Contracts.....	G-48
H. Garden City Harvest Surveys	H-50
I. Master Event Planning Schedule.....	I-53
J. Applying for Non-Profit Status	J-55
K. Resources	K-57

INTRODUCTION

Growing your own food in community gardens is a practical, affordable step toward a healthy, vibrant Montana food system and ecology.

Community gardens have grown in popularity across Montana, and the time has never been better to start a community garden in your own community. Community gardens are an equitable, ecological, and healthy contribution to communities. They benefit whole communities by restoring vibrancy to often vacant land and by bringing neighbors together. Community gardens improve the quality of life, social interactions, and self-reliance of urban and semi-urban neighborhoods in Montana by creating safe public space, conserving energy and resources, and preserving green space.

For those who choose active involvement in community gardens, the benefits are innumerable. Community gardens

allow people to provide themselves with healthy, nutritious, delicious, and affordable food. They encourage an active lifestyle and bring families, friends, and neighbors together in a positive and safe environment. They give access to land for people who wouldn't otherwise grow their own food. Community gardens can save individuals and families money on their grocery bills and save energy in the cost of food transportation.

In the last several decades, Montana's food system has drastically changed the way Montanans get their food. Whereas Montana produced 70% of its own food in the 1940s it produces less than 10% today. A portion of the former percentage was comprised of backyard and community



World War I era
US poster by James
Montgomery Flagg,
1918, lithograph, color;
56 x 36 cm. Columbia
urges civilians to raise
their own food to free up
resources for the war effort.



Victory garden poster, World War II



MAUREEN SHAUGHNESSY, NATIVE DESIGN, HELENA, MT.

Florence Crittenden Home Garden, Helena.

gardening. As means of transportation were made more efficient, the global food system began to deliver food from all over the world through an extremely energy-intensive transportation process. Many are looking to rebuild a more sustainable, self-reliant food system in Montana. Growing your own food in community gardens is a practical, affordable step toward a healthy, vibrant Montana food system and ecology.

Community gardens have an intriguing national history. Once supported as a patriotic effort during wartime, community gardens, known as Victory Gardens, have been a significant presence in urban

areas across America in the past. During World War I, the Great Depression, and WWII, the US Department of Agriculture estimates that more than 20 million victory gardens were planted in backyards, on rooftops, and in vacant lots across the country in response to a call to support the troops and conserve energy and materials by growing one's own food. As part of the resurgence of community gardens, First Lady Michelle Obama has followed the lead of Eleanor Roosevelt and planted an organic vegetable garden on the grounds of the White House. Food from the garden supplies the White House and a Washington, D.C. food bank.

CHAPTER 1: STARTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

Though it is a multi-step process, starting a community garden is not nearly as daunting as it may at times seem.

There are many steps involved in starting a community garden. This manual is meant to address the basic process, common issues and possible solutions to starting your garden. Decide which practices are best for your project. Community gardens can be initiated in a variety of ways, and there are abundant resources available. It could be that a piece of land is offered to an interested group, or that an organization offers support. Sometimes there are no obvious leads beyond interest from neighborhood residents. This interest is plenty to begin your project.

Though it is a multi-step process, starting a community garden is not nearly as daunting as it may at times seem. There may be temporary setbacks, but these can be overcome, and a garden can be planned in relatively short order. Depending on the size and scope of your plans, it may take very little prep time at all.

It is important to have a healthy-sized group of people willing to help before planning and building your garden. It takes a significant amount of work to put together a well planned garden, and having a number of people to share the necessary tasks will make the entire process more manageable and fun. Generally, with at least ten committed community members willing to volunteer their time, you'll be off to a good start.

START A PLANNING COMMITTEE

When organizing a community garden, your first step is to gather a planning committee, which will oversee the initial steps of the process and create an overarching vision for the garden.

In the best scenario a few neighbors, friends, or community members will have

already discussed starting a community garden when you begin. Sometimes those interested in helping to start a community garden are not actually interested in using the garden themselves. Their interest may come from being avid gardeners or farmers, or from a philosophical or community development perspective. Whatever the case may be, volunteers of this nature are excellent assets to your project; just remember to be conscientious about notifying the neighborhood around your garden site of meeting times and plans; this will keep potential gardeners in the loop of planning and building the garden.

When starting a planning committee, you should aim for diversity in representation at your meetings. Neighborhood residents, interested gardeners, allied organizations' membership, City Council members, the City Parks Department, and civic groups are all good places to find planning committee members. Consider your needs and who can help meet them. People who will use the garden, people who live in the area, and those who can help access resources (city parks department, local businesses, or volunteer labor pools) are important groups to include in the planning process.

A good way to get started is to have an organizational meeting with your developing planning committee, followed by a general community meeting in the neighborhood to propose your idea and gather input from residents and interested gardeners.

The planning committee's first organizational meeting can include a number of items in the agenda, but make sure to come up with a few basics: a general plan of what the garden should look like,



MAUREEN SHAUGHNESSY, NATIVE DESIGN,
HELENA, MT.

a few different land options, and what the focus of the garden should be. Assess the assets in your community to determine any resources that may be helpful to you. Though your initial plans may change, you'll want to bring a well-developed idea to a community meeting; this will ensure meaningful response and input from the rest of the community.

Subsequent planning committee meetings may include a discussion of what decision making methods the committee will use (consensus decision making, voting, etc.) and establishing sub-committees to carry out the work of the group. Pertinent subcommittees may be Communications, Fundraising, Construction, Outreach/Publicity, and Garden Site Development. Within your planning committee, it will be helpful to identify a garden coordinator who will call and facilitate meetings, organize the general neighborhood meeting, follow subcommittee progress, and eventually maintain contact with the gardeners.

IDENTIFY ADDITIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

Consider involving city officials such as City Council members, members of the Parks and Recreation Board, city staff, landscape designers, leadership of nearby neighborhood associations, interested gardeners, and property owners in the garden planning process. If a community

member targeted by your group as an essential member of the planning committee cannot attend the meetings, ask whether your group might send them meeting minutes so that they are aware of the project's progress. The more diverse the steering committee and sponsorship are, the more resources will be available to you as needs arise.

GETTING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND SUPPORT

Initial outreach is essential for a truly community-supported garden. First, you will need to know who will be using the garden in order to design and plan it. If the garden is intended to benefit a particular neighborhood, group or population, be sure that they are involved in the planning from the beginning and that their needs are being met throughout the planning phase. Your project will benefit immensely from this kind of input, from picking a site, to brainstorming garden designs, to gathering labor and supplies.

HOLD AN INFORMATIONAL MEETING

Libraries, schools, and parks are good places to hold general informational meetings. Be prepared to provide refreshments, snacks and free childcare and advertise these in outreach material. This will significantly increase attendance and participation in your project.

A community meeting to discuss ideas for a new garden. Public input is a vital part of your planning process.

Begin the meeting with introductions and speak generally about the many benefits of community gardens. Follow with a concise, clear, and organized presentation of your vision for the garden, including any visual representation you may have (drawings, photos, etc.). Briefly outline the steps that need to be taken to build a garden and how long you anticipate it will take until the garden is ready for planting. Emphasize that the garden is a public space and that all are welcome to participate. Be prepared to answer questions about your garden's design and location. Most importantly, ask for input. What kind of garden would the community like to see (flowers, vegetables, fruit)? Should the garden target special populations within the community? If so, who? Where is the preferred location?

At the meeting, respond to and record comments, concerns, and suggestions from attendees. Consider this feedback while developing plans, and always regard the garden site's neighborhood as an ally in the project. There will be a wealth of

information and good ideas coming from the community. Constructive criticism can also be applied to your plans at this development stage. Remember, responding to criticism now will garner a broader base of support for the garden from the beginning.

You may also choose to follow this meeting up by sending letters to residents in neighboring areas, or by going door-to-door with a survey to gather support and ideas from people who were unable, or uninterested, in attending the meeting. The more early input you have, the better prepared you will be to build a community-based garden and to avoid obstacles in the future.

If you are using public land to build the garden, a specific public input process may be necessary to avoid problems down the road. In fact, the City Parks Department may have a specific survey process that will need to be followed for your project to be approved. Be sure to contact your Parks Department for local requirements.

A visible sign can help attract visitors, gardeners, and publicity to your garden.



MAUREEN SHAUGHNESSY, NATIVE DESIGN, HELENA, MT.

APPROACH A SPONSOR

A sponsor is an individual or organization that commits to support a project. Site sponsorship can be a tremendous asset. Sponsors may donate equipment or agree to house lease agreements, insurance, and funding, all of which may require the presence of a steady entity such as an incorporated non-profit or LLC in order to enter into these legal agreements.

PUBLICITY AND OUTREACH

Once you have created a planning committee and a general informational meeting for the community has been held, get ready to do some outreach, and plan for publicity. Create a name for your garden. If you have secured your site, promi-

nently place a colorful sign announcing, “Future site of _____ Community Garden.”

Take advantage of your town’s newspapers. Local reporters are often eager to cover positive local events, such as the creation of a community garden. The publicity and support you may receive from the media along the way will greatly benefit your project. This support will manifest in many ways, from attracting volunteers and donors to lending more legitimacy to your project for future funding. When you contact the press, be prepared with talking points and a written press release. Be aware that the media may wait for a big event such as the first big work day building the garden, or a ribbon cutting ceremony.