

Tips for Garden Leaders

We all want to have the widest possible participation in garden activities.

Here are a few tips that can help.

First, establish as many lines of communication as you can with your gardeners. A **Facebook account** might be useful; an **e-mail address** is one of the more efficient ways to get messages back and forth to/from the group. You may be lucky enough to place a **bulletin board** on site if you have a shed or an adjoining building, like a business (Northwind Garden has a bulletin board inside the East Lansing Food Coop). (Note that a business may be willing to give you space if you're providing them with traffic.) Perhaps you can find a volunteer to publish a **regular newsletter**.

If you have members who don't have email, you may want to create a **phone brigade**—where one passes the message onto two others and so forth. This could be used for date specific announcements, such as a common workday.

Find some place to **post common chores**, perhaps with a checklist that allows people to initial when they've completed the chore. Find any possible way for gardeners to contribute, even if that seems minimal to you. We recently appointed a 'rain monitor' who will notify members of cumulative weekly rainfall, since rain at the garden doesn't always coincide with rain a mile or two away at the residences.

Create teams or pairings as much as possible. The sense of unity and responsibility toward the garden is enhanced by these teams or pairings.

Pass on compliments or comments about the garden to the members. This helps **build pride** in the garden project and a sense of community. You may want to seek media recognition for the efforts put into the garden. Local media are often receptive to a community-based story.

Involve all the members in **decision-making** as much as possible. Sometimes this means holding off on an action, but the sense of engagement you're building with the members will be worth it in the long run.

It's generally better to **praise good examples** than criticize poor ones. I've found that other gardeners are often envious of the attention a member gets for a good effort or outcome and wants to follow that model. This is also a good way to spread innovative or more effective ideas. You could encourage gardeners to try what others have done successfully, "You may want to try what Susie has done because . . ."

Schedule common work dates with **specific objectives**. The membership grows closer by sharing an accomplishment.

You may also want to schedule **purely social gatherings**. For example, Northwind has four or five potlucks at the garden each year. Gardeners get to know each other and can swap ideas or resources at these events.

As a garden leader, try to find a way to **vent your frustrations** without taking them out on the members. There will always be a hose left out or a plot not properly weeded; it's helpful to voice your complaints or difficulties to someone other than a garden member. Once you've 'let off steam' you may be able to handle the problem more effectively.

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