



# Is Community Gardening for You?

The following information may be useful if you are thinking about becoming community gardener.

## A Typical Growing Season

A garden plot requires time and constant effort for about 6 months out of the year in order to produce a healthy harvest. **Here are some basic tasks that will be required of you:**

- **Preparing Your Plot:** Healthy soil leads to healthy plants, so chemical weed-killers, fertilizers and pesticides are not allowed. Clear your plot of weeds, loosen your soil and add compost before you plant to make your plants healthier and more resistant to pests and disease.
- **Planting:** *You must plant within 2 weeks of plot assignment.* Take care in planning your garden, placing plants in places where they will grow best, without overcrowding, and without shading your neighbor's plants.
- **Providing Water:** Springtime in Michigan is relatively wet, but your seedbeds may need to be hand-watered daily until sprouts appear above ground, usually the first 10-20 days. *Gardeners are responsible for watering their plot and gardening in community means using conservative and thoughtful water practices.* Water is a finite resource, so mulch the surface with leaves or straw to prevent further water loss while smothering weeds.
- **Weeding:** Plenty of time will be needed to keep weeds down in your plot and its surrounding pathways. *By getting to weeds early in the spring, you will save on time and effort later in the season.*
- **Harvesting:** As plants mature and begin to produce, you must be there to harvest the fruits of your labor –the best reward of gardening! *Keeping ripe produce picked reduces garden pests and vandalism.*
- **Preparing for Winter:** At the end of the season, *remove dead plant material and trellising from your plot.* Your soil will require a boost after giving so much to you throughout the growing season. Reward your soil by loosening it and incorporating compost and dried leaves.

## Do You Have the Time?

**Here is a general estimate of the time having a garden plot will require.**

As with any other part of life, the more time you invest in gardening, the better your garden plot will be.

GARDEN TASK	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Weeding/Bed Preparation	2 hours	2 hours	1 hour
Watering	1 hour	.5 hour	0 hour
Planting	1.5 hours	.5 hour	.5 hour
Harvesting	.5 hour	1 hour	1.5 hours
<b>Total Hours per Week</b>	<b>5 hours</b>	<b>4 hours</b>	<b>3 hours</b>

## **Involvement Outside of Your Plot**

Overall garden care and maintenance is the collective responsibility of all gardeners and requires your volunteer commitment. In addition to tending your own plot, there may be work days where you are required to contribute and tend common areas or participate in projects that benefit the garden as a whole. Some examples are maintaining paths, weeding common areas, planting donation plots, fixing tools, pruning back trees and bushes, and organizing social events. This can occur individually or through scheduled group work days.

## **Participatory & Inclusive Environment**

Community gardens are inclusive and welcoming to all people. Garden members shall not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, national, or ethnic origin, religious, marital status, age, sex, sexual orientation, or disability. By choosing to be in a community garden, you'll be gardening in close proximity to others. You can learn from these folks either actively (by asking questions) or passively (by observation). People of different cultural backgrounds garden differently; if your community garden is culturally diverse, you may be surprised at what you'll learn even if you've been gardening many years.

## **Benefits & Rewards of Community Gardening**

Despite the extra responsibilities, community gardening is immensely popular! If you've never gardened in a community garden before, you can look forward to more than fresh fruits and veggies.

### **Community Organizing:**

- Community gardens increase a sense of community ownership and stewardship.
- Community gardens foster the developments of a community identity & spirit.
- Community gardens bring people together from a wide variety of backgrounds (age, race, culture & social class).
- Community gardens build community leaders.
- Community gardens offer a local point for community organizing, and can lead to community-based efforts to deal with other social concerns.
- Community gardens are a civic space where people work to nourish themselves, their families and friends.
- Gardeners' shared labor builds a stronger sense of belonging to their physical environment and connection to others in their community.

### **Crime Prevention:**

- Community gardens provide opportunities to meet neighbors.
- Community gardens build block clubs.
- Community gardens increase eyes on the street.
- Community gardening is recognized by many police departments as an effective crime prevention strategy.

### **Cultural Opportunities:**

- Community gardens often set aside space for community get-togethers, serving as the modern-day equivalent of the ancient plazas in urban areas where people would gather to meet and spend time together.
- Community gardens offer unique opportunities for new immigrants to:
  - Produce traditional crops otherwise unavailable locally
  - Take advantage of the experience of elders to produce a significant amount of food for the household
  - Provide intergenerational exposure to cultural traditions
  - Community gardens are places of cultural exchange, sprouting friendships among diverse groups of people
- Community gardens offer neighborhoods access points to non-English speaking communities.
- Community gardens allow people from diverse backgrounds to work side-by-side on common goals without speaking the same language.

## **Food Production:**

- Many community gardeners, especially those from immigrant communities, take advantage of food production in community gardens to provide a significant source of food and/or income.
- Community gardens allow families and individuals without land of their own the opportunity to produce food.
- Community gardens provide access to nutritionally rich foods that may otherwise be unavailable to low-income families and individuals.
- Urban agriculture is 3-5 times more productive per acre than traditional large-scale farming!

## **Health:**

- Community gardens are common ground for growing plants that feed, heal and give aesthetic pleasure.
- Studies have shown that community gardeners & their children eat healthier diets than non-gardening families.
- Eating locally produced food reduces asthma rates because children are able to consume manageable amounts of local pollen and develop immunities.
- Exposure to green spaces reduces stress & increases a sense of wellness and belonging.
- Increasing the consumption of fresh local produce in one of the best ways to address childhood lead poisoning.
- The benefits of Horticultural Therapy can be and are used to great advantage in community gardens.

## **Green Spaces:**

- Community gardens encourage interaction with nature and nurture green spaces.
- Community gardens add beauty to the community and heighten people's awareness and appreciation for living things.
- Community gardens filter rainwater, helping keep lakes, rivers and groundwater clean.
- Community gardens restore oxygen to the air and help reduce pollution.
- Community gardens provide a place to retreat from the noise and commotion of urban environments.
- Community gardens provide much needed green space in lower income neighborhoods which typically have access to less green space than do other parts of the community.
- Development and maintenance of garden space is less expensive than that of parkland.
- Scientific studies show that crime decreases in neighborhoods as the amount of green space increases.
- Community gardens have been shown to actually increase property values in the immediate vicinity where they are located.

## **Youth:**

Community gardens offer unique opportunities to teach youth about:

- Where food comes from
- Practical math skills
- Basic business principles
- The importance of community and stewardship
- Issues of environmental sustainability
- Job & life skills
- Community gardening is a health, inexpensive activity for youth that can bring them closer to nature, and allow them to interact with each other in a socially meaningful and physically productive way.

## **Happy Gardening!**

Want more advice? Contact us! We'd be happy to provide you with resources and guidance on how to get the most of your garden and fresh produce!

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