



Garden Leadership Committee Toolkit

Hosting a spring garden orientation

Overview

Facilitate spring opening meetings to explain garden guidelines, operations and other important information. Member orientation establishes a common understanding among new and returning gardeners to build a sense of community and prevent potential issues.

Time commitment: Prepare, host and follow-up on one pre-season event annually between March and May

Keys to success

- Send orientation invitations to all gardeners via multiple communication channels: phone calls/text, email invites, posted at garden site, etc.
- Host the orientation meeting right before the garden opens in the spring.
- At orientation, provide all gardeners with printed copy of gardens guidelines.
- Make orientation accessible to garden registrants through coordination interpreters, translated garden guidelines and virtual meetings as needed.
- Follow up to schedule one-on-one orientations with those who cannot attend.

Preparing a spring orientation

When to host a spring orientation meeting

Consider hosting immediately before the garden opens in the spring. For no-till gardens this may be as early as March, and for tilled gardens, as late as May.

Where to meet

The garden is great setting for an orientation meeting if the weather allows, but nearby community centers, churches and the Garden Project Resource Center are also options.

Send out a meeting invitation to all registered gardeners at least two weeks in advance.

For gardeners speaking languages other than English, make sure appropriate interpretation is provided. Reach out to Garden Project if you need assistance acquiring interpretation or translation services.

Set your goals and remember, the orientation meeting is an opportunity to build community among gardeners!

Setting an orientation agenda

1. Introductions

Introduce the leadership committee and their roles within the garden. Invite all gardeners to participate in the leadership committee based on their own interests and skills.

Have each gardener introduce themselves and share what brings them to the garden, their gardening experience and something about themselves.

Prompts for group discussion:

- What does it mean to be part of a community garden?
- What are your visions for this garden? How do you want the space to feel?
- What skills do you have to contribute to the garden?
- What do we value as a community? How can we practice those values?
- For those uncomfortable sharing their opinions in a group, consider requesting feedback through an anonymous online form before or after the meeting such as a suggestion box in the garden or online survey.

2. Garden Guidelines

Introduce and thoroughly review garden guidelines. A printed gardener handbook is helpful – see additional documents for examples.

Share how gardeners can communicate with leadership committee members:

- Your availability and best ways to get in touch with you.
- To whom, how and when to ask questions.

- Modes of communication and appropriate times to use them: Message board in the shed, Facebook, WhatsApp, email, phone, text, etc.

Guideline accountability expectations (led by the Community Building Committee Member):

- Communicate the importance of all gardeners adhering to the garden guidelines for the benefit of all. Clearly outline consequences for not adhering to garden rules and guidelines (e.g. missing planting deadlines, letting plot get overgrown with weeds, etc.)
- Outline and provide examples of how to resolve conflicts in the garden if they arise and who is available to assist.

3. Garden tour, plot assignment & closing

- Tour the garden as a group to orient to the space and key spaces (e.g. shed, tools, spigots, message board, etc.).
- If possible, show every gardener where the garden's main irrigation valve is, so in case of an irrigation break, every gardener knows how to shut off water.
- Show gardeners their assigned plot and post the garden map.
- Give thanks to everyone for coming and for committing to participate in the community garden!
- Consider having a potluck meal together or continuing the gathering of gardeners informally at a local community hangout.

Orientation follow-up

- Email all garden guidelines and meeting notes so gardeners have a written record of what was discussed.
- Individually follow-up with anyone not in attendance. **Orientation should be mandatory before gardening can begin.** Set up a phone, video or small group meeting for those who were unable to attend the group meeting.

In their own words

From Linda at Unitarian Universalist Community Garden:

The beginning of the season is the only time I can be sure to see all gardeners, so it's worth requiring gardeners to come to an orientation session. I schedule from 3 to 5 sessions across a couple of weeks, and text the gardeners the orientation options. If none of the scheduled times work, I meet them at a time that does.

Everyone can only take in so much info at one time, so something written to take home helps ensure that people remember what is said. We put together a garden handbook. For English-language learners, simple language and lots of pictures are important (even if the gardeners can't yet read the text, they often have someone at home who can).

I use the handbook to structure the orientation, so there are visuals as we go along, as well as walking about the garden and demonstrating as much as possible. I try to make the orientation a conversation, not a straightforward presentation, but I follow the order of the handbook to make sure we've covered everything. We include some gardening tips as well as the rules.

After going through the handbook, I show them a calendar with color-coded entries, and we go through it briefly.

Throughout, I have two goals in mind:

I want to use the orientation to help build a sense of community so everyone feels like they belong and can get their needs met, and everyone contributes to maintaining the garden.

I want to prevent problems before they start, especially with issues like weeding. This year we are adding a section to the handbook about what it means to clean up your plot, since that was a problem last year with a couple of gardeners.

Additional documents

- [Sample opening emails](#)
- [Foster, St. Luke's and Add'l Garden Guidelines Samples](#)
- [Gardener Handbook-UU Garden](#)
- [Prompts for setting garden guidelines](#)
- [Whys of setting guidelines as a community](#)