Starting A Community Garden in Your Community

Franklin County MGV Training
March 4, 2016

Mike Hogan
Extension Educator & Associate Professor
Ohio State University Extension – Franklin County
Community or Garden??

- Place to grow food, flowers, herbs
- Way to get physical activity
- Place of social gathering
- Place to reconnect with or understand nature
- Method for building community
Types of Community Gardens

- Neighborhood community garden
- School or youth garden
- Church or faith based garden
- Entrepreneur or job-training garden
- Communal garden
- Food pantry or food bank garden
- Therapy garden
History of Community Gardening in US

- Typically urban or suburban
- First recorded in Detroit in 1890’s
- 1900’s - for food shortages
- 1940’s – Victory Gardens
- 1970’s – rebirth due to urban renewal, inflation
- 2010’s – renewed interest due to economics, interest in local food systems, and food insecurity
How are Neighborhood Community Gardens Structured?

- Typically sponsored/organized/supported by a group
- Individuals/families tend plots in the garden, and produce food for their own use
- Overall management provided by one or more individuals
- Gardeners may share supplies, tools, expertise
- Land may be owned, rented, borrowed, squatted
Benefits of Community Gardening

- Increases food security and access
- Positively affects nutrition
- Source of physical activity
- Improves mental health
- Engages youth
- Educational – STEM disciplines
Benefits of Community Gardening

- Environmental benefits
- Builds a sense of community
- Prevents crime
- Increases property values
- Can be a source of family income
Where Do We Start?

- **Planning:**
  - Mission statement – based on your community’s values, should indicate why your garden exists
    - Faith, Hope, and Charity Gardens is an integral community service component of St. Michael’s RC Church. We seek to nourish the body with nutritious fruits and vegetables and feed the soul with compassionate service to needy members of our community.
  - Objectives – describes the future you wish to see
    - Reduce hunger and poverty in Near East Side neighborhoods
    - Teach more families how to grow food
  - Goals – S.M.A.R.T. statements
    - Develop one community garden in summer of 2015 and donate 1,500 pounds of vegetables to Fifth St. Mission Food Pantry
Where Do We Start?

• Communicate the plan to:
  • Interested gardeners
  • Leaders/administrators of organizations involved
  • Opinion leaders
  • Neighbors (especially those not involved in garden)
Where Do We Start?

- **Budget**
  - Land cost or rent
  - Insurance – liability and product liability
  - Site development (drainage, access, soil testing, renovation)
  - Tools, reusable supplies
  - Soil amendments
Where Do We Start?

- Budget
  - Seeds, plants, fertilizer
  - Water –many times the largest expense
  - Irrigation supplies
  - Storage shed
Getting Started – Site Evaluation

- Identify potential sites
- Physical layout and size
- Access (think truck and tractor)
- Drainage
- Current use – foot traffic, youth
- Slope
- Shade
Getting Started – Site Evaluation

- Access to water
- Permanency
- Microclimate
- Previous use:
  - Contamination
  - Debris
  - Compaction
Getting Started – Site Evaluation

- Evaluate soil
  - Fertility
  - Soil health or quality
  - Organic matter level
  - Soil structure – particle size, (sandy, loam, silt)
  - Don’t guess—soil test!
Raised Bed
Raised Bed
Getting Started – What Will You Grow?

- Vegetables, fruits, flowers, herbs
- How big is the garden?
- Who is the consumer?
  - What are their demographics?
  - What are their cultural needs/tastes?
Getting Started – Garden Layout & Management

- Cool season and warm season crops
- Sketch and journal
- Plan extra space for workers
- Locate perennial crops such as rhubarb and asparagus so they do not interfere with garden preparation
- Group tall crops together
Getting Started – Garden Layout & Management

• Plan to extend the season and the harvest:
  • Group crops which mature early
  • Stagger plantings of the same crop
  • Plant different cultivars of the same crop which have different maturities
  • Plant companion crops in the same row – radish or lettuce between cabbage
  • Double crop same space in garden
  • Row covers, low tunnels, high tunnels
Garden Tasks & Cultural Practices by Season

- Winter (December, January, February)
  - Planning
  - Reading, researching, learning
  - Order seeds
  - Start seeds indoors
  - Clean and sharpen garden tools
Garden Tasks & Cultural Practices by Season

• Spring (March, April, May)
  • Cultivating - lightly
  • Adding Soil amendments
  • Fertilizing
  • Building raised beds
  • Direct seeding in the garden
Garden Tasks & Cultural Practices by Season

- Spring (March, April, May)
  - Transplanting Seedlings
  - Mulching
  - Weeding
  - Begin scouting for pests
  - Build crop support structures
Garden Tasks & Cultural Practices by Season

- Summer (June, July, August)
  - Irrigation
  - More frequent scouting for pests
  - Harvesting
  - Weeding
  - Participate in GAPs Training
Garden Tasks & Cultural Practices by Season

- Summer (June, July, August)
  - Staking, tying, caging
  - Marketing or distribution
  - Seeding & transplanting fall crops
  - Pruning & thinning
  - Composting
  - Food preservation
Garden Tasks & Cultural Practices by Season

- Fall (September, October, November
  - Remove and compost plant trash
  - Liming
  - Weeding
  - Cut back or divide perennial crops
  - Adding organic matter
  - Soil test
  - Extend the season (row covers, low tunnels, high tunnels)
Challenges

• Sustainability
• Theft/vandalism
• Human resource management
• Leadership
• Land permanency
Success With Sustainability

- Develop networks with other gardens - GCGC
- Look for efficiencies
- Develop partnerships w/community groups
- Know where to get help (Extension, MGV’s, FPC)
- Develop long-term lease if applicable
- Revisit, review, revise plan
Success With Sustainability

• To be sustainable, the garden should:

• Be grass-roots (not forced on community or neighborhood)

• Reflect the strengths, needs, desires, culture of the community or neighborhood

• Utilize participatory management
Success With Sustainability

- To be sustainable, the garden should be enjoyable!
Questions?