



Community Gardening 101 for Faith Communities

Partners in Health & Wholeness 'Faith and Health' Summit • 20 October 2017

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this training, participants will be able to:

- Shape a garden project to reflect their faith communities' values, and contribute to goals for congregational life and mission
- Form a garden leadership team.
- Guide a garden group in developing a mission statement and leadership roles.
- Make informed decisions about garden management (e.g., allotment, communal) and develop guidelines and systems for shared maintenance.
- Assess potential garden sites using horticultural, safety, and tenure criteria.
- Help design and create a garden with plantings and infrastructure that support the garden group's goals, including infrastructure that promotes full inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Guide a garden group in using sustainable horticultural practices, and integrating the garden in a congregation's worship, fellowship, education, and/or mission.

MATERIALS NEEDED

General Supplies:	
• Presentation outline	
• Laptop (w/ presentation loaded), Projector, & Pointer	
• Sign-In Sheet	
• Handouts & Evaluations (1 per participant):	
○ Presentation slides packet w/ space for notes	
○ "Starting a Garden in your Faith Community" booklet	
○ "Garden Programs through the Year" worksheet (extra activity if time)	
○ Evaluation	

PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Title Slide

- Welcome to Community Gardening 101 for Faith Communities. I'm Megan Gregory:
 - **Coordinator of the Forsyth Community Gardening program at North Carolina Cooperative Extension** in Forsyth County.
 - I'm also a **member of a faith community in Winston-Salem that tends a garden as part of our congregational life and ministry**, so I am excited to be able to share that part of myself and my experience today.

- To start, I'd like to get a sense of **who's here, and how you hope to use what you learn today**. So please, raise your hand if you:
 - Are **considering starting a community garden in your faith community**.
 - Are **in the process of starting a faith community garden** – perhaps you've gotten together a group, or found a site, or both.
 - **Started a faith community garden recently**.
 - **Participate in an established faith community garden**.

- While **today's presentation walks through the steps of starting a faith community garden**, even **established gardens need to re-visit many of these 'steps'** as they reconsider the role of the garden in congregational life, get organized each year, or add new garden beds or other plantings. So, I hope that you all will take away something useful.

Outline

Here's what I have in mind for today:

- I'll start with some **community gardening basics** – what they are, and why people become involved.
- Then, I'll offer a few **general tips for faith communities that are organizing gardens**,
- Finally, we'll spend most of the workshop **walking through the steps to starting and sustaining an active faith community garden**.

COMMUNITY GARDENING BASICS

Community Gardens

- What is a community garden? **A community garden is**, first and foremost, **a community of people** who come together to garden. It's also **a public space** where members cultivate crops, flowers, shrubs, and trees -- according to the group's goals and interests, and the needs of their community.
- By this broad definition, community gardens are found in **diverse contexts** including: neighborhoods, schools and after-school programs, service agencies, recreation centers, and, of course, faith communities.

Benefits of Community Gardens

- People become involved with community gardens for many reasons. Community gardeners may be seeking:
 - **Improved food access and nutrition**, or
 - **Overall health and wellness** through the exercise, stress relief, and mental health benefits that gardening provides;
 - Many gardeners are motivated by a desire to **improve environmental quality** and provide urban green space,
 - And others seek to **provide education, build friendships, or organize their neighborhoods** around other common concerns.
- **Understanding what goals your faith community seeks to fulfill** through your community garden **is important when deciding:**
 - **How your garden will be organized and designed**, and
 - What kinds of **activities and programs** you'll have.

AS YOU GET STARTED...

This question of **purpose** brings us to **things to keep in mind as you get started**.

Root your garden in your faith tradition

- The first suggestion I have for faith communities is to 'root' your gardening activities in your faith tradition –
 - your **stories**,

- the **values** those stories express, and
- the **goals for your congregation's life and mission in the broader community** that you have discerned for this season of your ministry.
- A community garden can have **genuine connections to the values and mission goals of many faith communities**. By **discerning and naming** these connections, you can **integrate a garden into the life and mission of your congregation in meaningful ways**.
- (***click to show instructions***) To help us start making these connections, I'd like us to take a few minutes to **brainstorm in pairs**:
 - Each person should **identify a story from your faith tradition** that serves (or could serve) as a guide for your congregational life and mission. Our faith traditions are full of **stories that invite us into particular ways of living with the land, and with each other** – both within our faith communities and the broader society, so I trust you can call up one that is important for you.
 - Then consider: **how could a garden help you live into that story more fully?**

[Provide example if needed. Allow ~5 minutes for sharing in pairs, then invite a few people to share with the larger group.]

Connect with Cooperative Extension

- Once you've decided **what you want to accomplish through your garden** – whether it's improving food access and nutrition, or promoting environmentally sustainable practices – it will probably be **helpful to have technical support** in how to do it well.
- I may be biased, but **I recommend that you connect with your local Cooperative Extension office**.
- In every county across the state, Cooperative Extension **brings together local residents** with the information and resources of **North Carolina's two public agricultural schools: NC A&T and NC State Universities**, as well as **county government**.
- **Extension educators offer educational programming and technical assistance** in:
 - Agriculture and forestry,
 - Home and community gardening,
 - Environmental stewardship,
 - Youth development (through 4-H), and

- Family and Consumer Sciences, which includes health and nutrition, among other areas.
- So **Extension’s educational mission is quite broad, and can support ministries focused on agriculture, food and nutrition, health, or environmental issues.** We are always looking to partner with grassroots organizations, and congregations are really important in helping us connect with communities.

Emphasize Community Organizing

- My third general tip for groups starting a garden is to **emphasize community organizing.**
- Many **aspiring garden organizers – in faith communities and otherwise -- start by looking for land, or a grant, or a local business to donate** lumber and topsoil for raised beds.

Most Challenging Issues for Garden Organizers

- Yet, **in a national survey of experienced garden organizers, the most common challenge** they named was **getting new people involved and sustaining that participation** – more so than land or materials used in the garden.

Garden Success & Sustainability:

- To help current and aspiring garden organizers **get and keep people involved**, I draw heavily on a curriculum called ***Growing Communities***, from the American Community Gardening Association.
- The curriculum promotes an **Asset-Based Community Development approach of identifying, then building on a community’s strengths or assets.** These may include:
 - **Gifts and talents** of individual members,
 - **Small groups** within the congregation that already work together (like a ‘Green Team’ or a committee focused on addressing hunger)
 - Resources and support from your **national denomination**,
 - And **land or buildings** your congregation may have access to.
- The curriculum also outlines **guidelines for community organizing** which emphasize the importance of:

- **Personal relationships;**
 - **Organizational structures that promote support and accountability** (like shared leadership, and regular workdays);
 - **Continuous opportunities** for everyone to participate in **decision-making, leadership,** and building their knowledge and skills through **education.**
- Here I've summarized more than half of my 14-hour Community Garden Mentor training in one slide – but
 - I've made **copies of the key sections of the *Growing Communities* curriculum** for you to explore these ideas in more depth, and
 - I'll also offer some **organizing tips as we walk through the steps of starting and sustaining a garden.**

STARTING AND SUSTAINING A FAITH COMMUNITY GARDEN: STEPS TO SUCCESS

Steps to Success

- These steps include:
 - **1 -- Forming a Leadership Team**
 - **2 -- Choosing a Good Site and Secure Tenure** (formal permission to use the land)
 - **3 -- Organizing the Garden**
 - **4 -- Designing, Preparing, and Planting the Garden**
 - **5 -- Maintaining the garden with sustainable horticultural practices, and integrating it into your congregation's life and ministry.**
- I should note that these are the same general steps I recommend for any community garden, though I'll note some considerations that are specific to faith communities.

Resources

- I'll review each of these steps BREIFLY today, but I have copies of a guide, **Starting a Garden in Your Faith Community**, which is also available on PHW's website under 'resources.' The online version has live links to a wealth of resources to help you along the way, like:
 - **Worksheets**
 - **Sample documents** (such as garden leases, guidelines and plot-holder's agreements)
 - More detailed **garden start-up guides.**

Step 1: Form a Leadership Team

- The first step to success is **bringing together people** who are committed to making the garden a success.
- Forming your leadership team will start by **talking with your congregation, neighbors, and potential community partners** to identify people who are interested.
 - Many congregations have **committees dedicated to health, addressing hunger, social justice, or earth care...** all of which can connect with a community garden. Be sure to include these folks in your initial conversations.
 - You may want to **use an interest survey** to find out about participants' **availability, skills, and ideas** for the garden.
 - The **link** shown here is for a **packet of garden organizing worksheets**, which include **sample interest surveys** for neighborhood and school gardens in both English and Spanish. These questions could be adapted for your faith community garden.
- As you pull together a group, keep in mind that **the leadership should include:**
 - First and foremost, **actual gardeners**. Gardens organized by an outside group "for" others generally fail. The people who want to plant and maintain and harvest crops should be on the planning team.
 - Second, strive to involve people with a **variety of backgrounds and skills**, such as **horticultural knowledge, construction, volunteer management, and communications**. All of these skills can contribute to a community garden!
 - In faith communities, it's also a good idea to be in conversation with **clergy and lay leaders, volunteers who maintain your church grounds** (if the garden will be on your grounds), and **children and youth program leaders**.

Core Group Meetings

- Once you have 4-10 people together, you can organize several **core group meetings**. At these meeting, you'll want to:
 - **First, determine the feasibility of the garden**. The group should honestly answer the question – Is there really sufficient interest, or are you planning it and "hoping they will come"? If you're "hoping they will come," you may want to rethink the project until you have enough committed members.
 - If you decide that a new garden is a good idea, you can **plan next steps** and **assign everyone jobs** to accomplish before the next meeting. These may include:

- **Additional community outreach** (within and possibly beyond your congregation);
- **Finding and assessing potential sites**; and
- **Planning (and publicizing) an open organizational meeting.**

Step 2: Choose a Good Site & Secure Tenure

- Once you know that you have enough interest to create and sustain a garden, the next step is to **choose a good site and secure land tenure, or permission to use the land.**
 - Many faith communities are able to create a garden on their own land, which streamlines the process of getting permissions –
 - But others may not have a suitable site on their property, and will need to look nearby for other land.
- Horticulturally, those most important requirements for a vegetable garden site are a **water source, sunlight, and soil.**
- **If you plan to till the existing ground for in-ground beds** you need to make sure the soil is **free of soil contaminants** like heavy metals.
 - If the land has not been used for buildings or other industrial activity like dry cleaning, you probably don't need special tests for metals.
 - If it has, you should test for metals and other contaminants, and you probably want to use raised beds with imported soil.
 - There are a number of private labs that test soil for contaminants.
- Another consideration is **if you can install a good fence, sunk 6-12 inches into the ground.** This may solve many of the groundhog and deer problems that constantly plague gardens without solid fencing.

Choose a Good Site & Secure Tenure

- Turning to legal considerations to make sure you can gain formal permission to use the land for a garden:
- If the garden will be **located on the congregation's own property** and the **leadership is supportive**, then you **won't need a lease agreement.**
- If you plan to garden on other property:

- The first step in obtaining secure tenure is to **identify the land owner**. Most **Planning Departments have publicly available Geographic Information Systems, or GIS, tools** online, which you can use to find the owner of any parcel of land.
- Inquire with the landowner if they will grant a lease – written permission to use the land for a garden.
 - I encourage groups to choose a site where you can **obtain a long-term lease**, because then you can **invest in infrastructure, soil building, and perennial plantings** – things that will make your garden more enjoyable and productive.
- Other considerations for gardens on- and off-site:
 - **Insurance:**
 - I suggest **checking with your faith community’s insurance provider** to verify if it will cover gardening activities.
 - **If not, or if you are gardening at another site, you may need to get liability insurance.** The American Community Gardening Association has a partnership with Brunswick Companies to provide insurance for community gardens.
 - Finally, **check with your local Planning Department to find out if you need any permits** to start a community garden.
 - For example: Some gardens within the City of Winston-Salem do require a Special Use Permit, though this is not needed for gardens located on the same parcel as a faith community or school building.

Step 3. Organize the Garden

- The next step is to organize the garden – that is, **set up systems that will keep people working together smoothly**. This will occupy a **series of meetings**.
- **Key garden organization tasks** include:
 - Crafting a **mission statement**,
 - Deciding **key questions about garden management**,
 - **Developing guidelines and gardener agreements** (for allotment gardens), or **systems of shared garden maintenance and harvesting** (for communal gardens), and finally
 - **Developing leadership roles** to help implement the guidelines or systems.

The Garden Mission Statement

- **Crafting a garden mission statement** will focus and guide all your decisions and activities.
- So first, let's clarify what a garden mission statement is NOT. It's **NOT something one person makes up and writes down when you need to fill space in a grant application!**
 - If one person just makes it up without discussing it with others, that will NOT reflect everyone's ideas, and it will NOT help the group focus its activities.
- A mission statement is **developed by garden members together**. It states:
 - **Who** will be involved with or affected by the garden,
 - **What goals** the group wants to accomplish, and
 - **How** the group will accomplish those goals – that is, the group's major activities.

Example Mission Statement: Day Care Garden

- As one example, the mission of a day care garden I work with is, **"To provide preschool age children and their families with opportunities to:**
 - **Learn where food comes from and how to grow it,**
 - **Develop healthy eating habits, and**
 - **Develop a love for taking care of the environment."**
- This is an **excellent starting point for making decisions** about **what should be planted** in the garden, and **what activities** are important. The leaders of this garden:
 - **Involve children in tending vegetables,** and provide information about vegetable gardening and seeds to families,
 - They **use produce from their garden in meals and snacks** served at the day care center, and
 - Last year, they **established a garden with native plants to provide habitat for butterflies and other pollinators.**
- So they've very **intentionally addressed the goals in their mission statement** with garden plantings and activities to match.

Garden Management Decisions

- Once your participants and mission are clear, the group should decide if you will create an **allotment garden, communal garden, or some combination.**
 - In **allotment gardens, plots are assigned to individuals or families** for their use. This can be a **great service to congregation members and the broader community**, especially if you have ample land and there are many apartment dwellers nearby (who may not have other space to garden).
 - In **communal gardens, a larger space is cultivated collaboratively** by the whole group, which then splits the harvest (or in many cases, donates a large portion of it).
- Both systems have **advantages and disadvantages.**
- *Allotment gardens:*
 - **Advantages of allotments** include that:
 - **Gardeners tend to take more responsibility (at least for their own plots)**, because they benefit directly from diligent watering and weeding.
 - This style of garden management also requires **less coordination**; people can work on their own schedules.
 - **Disadvantages of allotments** are that:
 - There may be **less guidance for new gardeners**, and **potentially less opportunities for building community among the gardeners** (though many allotment gardens do have group workdays).
 - **Crop rotation can also be difficult**, unless each gardener has at least 4 distinct beds. Just moving your tomatoes over to the other side of a small garden bed will not eliminate soil borne diseases.
- *Communal gardens:*
 - **Advantages of communal gardens** include:
 - **More guidance for new gardeners**, and **potentially lots of opportunities for building community among the gardeners.**
 - It's also **easier to practice good crop rotation**, since the group can plant all crops of each family in their own areas and rotate them each year.
 - **Disadvantages of communal gardens** include:

- The **tendency for gardeners to take less responsibility**. In these gardens, **a few people usually end up doing most of the work**, though there are a few gardens that have successful systems in place.
- It also take **much more coordination and communication** to have a successful communal garden.

Garden Management Decisions

- That said, **all community gardens usually include common areas** such as **food donation plots, pollinator gardens or borders of native plants, and compost areas**.
- So it's essential to create **systems of accountability for common areas and tasks**, like
 - **Planned, collaborative workdays**.
 - For allotment gardens, I also recommend **writing a work requirement into the garden rules, specifying a minimum number of hours** that garden members need to devote to maintaining common areas, or **servicing on a committee** that benefits the entire garden.

Systems of Shared Responsibility

- This brings us to the next garden organization task: **Setting up those systems of shared responsibility**.
- If you create an allotment garden (****click to highlight****), there are MANY resources on garden organization. Your group will want to create **garden guidelines or rules**, and **written plot-holder's agreements**.

Garden Guidelines & Plot-Holder's Agreements

- There are **links to sample garden rules and plot-holder's agreements** from the "Starting a Garden" document on the PHW website. As a group, you'll need to decide on specifics like the ones listed here:

(If there will be **membership fees** to cover expenses, and if so, how you will keep garden membership accessible to people of limited resources; **Plot use and maintenance** (including end-of-season cleanup); **Gardening practices** (crops, permitted amendments, etc.); **Leadership or committee requirement; Common areas work requirement; Meeting and event attendance; Water and tool access and use; Acceptable behavior and activities** (e.g., no alcohol, smoking, or drugs); **Consequences** of rule violations.

Systems of Shared Responsibility

- If you create a **communal garden** (****click to highlight****), there are far fewer resources out there on how to organize yourselves. Here I will share the **model that I've seen work with reasonable success**. It has **two components**:

Workdays & Garden Stewards

- The first is **regular, usually monthly, family workdays**.
 - At these events, your group can accomplish **bigger tasks**: bed-building and repair, soil preparation (according to your soil test, of course), planting, cutting down cover crops, and larger harvests like sweet potatoes.
 - These offer lots of **opportunities for intergenerational fellowship, and education** for families who may have never gardened.
 - Of course, in between workdays, the garden has to be maintained, so
- The second component of this communal garden management model is a **rotation of people who sign up to tend the garden**, often for a week at a time.
 - These folks do the day-to-day things like watering, pruning, trellising, checking for pests and diseases, and harvesting things like spinach or tomatoes that come little by little.
 - You can use a **poster or whiteboard** for sign-ups, as in the photo on the top, or you can use an **online tool like SignUp Genuis**.
 - Either way, it's important for the stewards to have some **in-person orientation to garden tasks from an experienced gardener**. It's also a good idea for an experienced gardener to **send an update to the next steward each week listing what tasks need to be done, and what may be ready to harvest**.

Leadership Roles & Committees

- Once you know your priority goals and how the garden will be managed, you can **identify tasks and leadership roles that are needed** to implement the plan. These will vary depending on the garden, but here are some common roles:
 - **In allotment gardens, Plot Coordinators** assign plots and ensure they are being maintained. **In communal gardens, Garden Steward Coordinators** ensure that there's someone signed up for each week, and that these folks have an update on seasonal garden tasks.

- **Garden Planning** coordinators make up plant selection and crop rotation plans (especially for communal gardens).
- **Communications** team members might schedule workdays, put announcements about upcoming activities in the bulletin, and make reminder phone calls or text messages for workdays.
- **Workday Coordinators** plan and lead group workdays, and oversee management of common areas.
- **Tool and Supply Coordinators** secure needed materials like soil deliveries.
- An **Education Committee** can organize workshops and coordinate mentoring for new gardeners.
- And there may be other tasks and leadership roles, depending on your garden's goals. What other roles can you think of? *(Allow a few minutes for brainstorming).*

Leadership Roles & Committees (Continued)

- If possible, **give people the opportunity to sign up for a job or committee according to their interests and skills.** Try to have **co-leaders for each group.**
- It's **ideal for everyone to have an assigned job.** This strengthens members' sense of connection to the garden, and ensures that things get done. **IF IT IS NOT ASSIGNED, IT WILL NOT HAPPEN!**

Step 4: Design, Prepare, and Plant the Garden

- So **now we have: good people, good land, and good systems** for working together. **It's time to design, prepare, and plant the garden.**
- Begin by **brainstorming garden elements** people would like to include.
 - **Plantings** might include:
 - **Allotment and/or communal vegetable garden plots,** as well as
 - **Beds for perennials like berries and herbs,**
 - **Fruit trees,** and
 - **Native plant areas or borders,** to provide habitat for beneficial insects that pollinate crops or prey on pest insects.
 - **Infrastructure** elements might include a **toolshed or lockable bin, compost bins, picnic tables, play equipment,** or other elements.

Garden Accessibility

- I also encourage garden groups to **consider how the garden can be designed to enable full participation by people with disabilities.**
- The resource '**Accessible and Inclusive Gardens**' from the National Recreation and Parks Association, has much more detailed information on this topic; there is a link to it in the online Guide to Starting a Faith Community Garden.
- One common practice is to add **extra-tall raised beds**, which can be **tended by people in wheelchairs**, or may be easier to use for people with back problems.
- You will also need to **consider how paths are designed so people in wheelchairs can access the garden.** Paths intended for wheelchairs should:
 - Be **firm, smooth, and fairly level**,
 - They should also be **at least 5 feet wide**, so the person can turn around.

Design the Garden: Scale Map

- Once the group has selected the elements to include, these can be **sketched onto a scale map** of the site.
- Again, in the online Guide, there is a link to a **step-by-step guide of how to do this.**
- Here you can see an **example garden map** I drew with a group last summer for a new garden:
 - **Most of the garden is vegetable beds** with ample path space for maintenance.
 - There's also **enough open space in the front of the garden for deliveries** of compost or mulch.
 - They've **designated the back of the garden, where there is shade from trees, for a sitting area and toolshed.**

Identify & Gather Resources

- Once you have a clear vision, it's time to make it a reality!
- First, work with your team to **identify the resources you need.**

- For new **in-ground gardens**, you will need to **contract with a farmer** to provide initial tilling services.
- For **raised bed gardens**, you'll have to **acquire lumber and hardware**, and **arrange for a soil delivery**.
- Whichever model your group chooses, you'll need both **equipment and materials**.
- **Equipment** refers to **things that you'll only need on the build day**, and so could be borrowed. This might include:
 - **Stakes and strings** to mark the location of beds,
 - **Saws and drills** to construct raised beds, and so forth.
- **Materials** are those things that will stay in the garden, like **fencing, landscape fabric, soil amendments, irrigation supplies, or rock dust for paths**.
- **As you can see from this list, gardens do require financial resources to start AND maintain** – a reality which too few groups acknowledge and plan for!

Fundraising

- Most faith community gardens rely on a combination of **grassroots fundraising, in-kind donations** from individuals and local businesses, and **small grants**.
- There are **many sources of grants**:
 - Check with **your denomination, community foundations, hardware stores** (both Lowe's and Home Depot have community grant programs).
 - A number of **businesses and nonprofits also sponsor grants for community garden projects**, especially those that educate children and youth.
 - **PHW** has a minigrant program for congregations that join the PHW Collaborative.

Prepare & Plant the Garden

- Once you have the resources you need, you can plan **work parties** to **clean up the site, prepare or build the garden, and put in your first plantings**.
- The **committees** you established **all have a role to play** in these workdays. Have the:
 - **Communications** Committee publicize the workdays;
 - the **Tool and Supply** Coordinators ensure that all the materials you need are picked up or delivered;

- and the **Workday Coordinator** plans what tasks will be accomplished at each workday and who will supervise each task.

Step 5: Maintain the Garden with Sustainable Horticulture & Integrate it into Congregational Life

- Once the garden is established, the always-ongoing step to success is **maintaining the garden with sustainable horticultural practices, and integrating it into your congregation's life and mission.**
- Community gardens offer excellent opportunities for promoting **best practices in sustainable horticulture**, such as:
 - Crop rotation planning
 - Soil testing,
 - Cover cropping to protect and improve the soil
 - Cultural practices to manage insects, weeds, and diseases.

Your local Cooperative Extension office should be able to help you find information and develop a plan for your garden.

- I also encourage garden groups within faith communities to **integrate their efforts in all aspects of their congregation's life**. A garden offers so many opportunities to **enrich worship, fellowship, education, and mission in the broader community** (as we brainstormed at the beginning of this workshop!). I encourage groups to use their creativity and let the Spirit move to make those connections.

TIME FOR QUESTIONS

ACTIVITY (IF TIME): GARDENING THROUGH THE YEAR

- *Participants map out gardening activities throughout the year that connect with their congregation's life and mission.*