



Putting Community First

"Gardening can be an incredibly powerful tool because it is such a non-threatening way to bring people together. You can do so much so quickly. You can change the face of a neighborhood in a day." -- Karen Hobbs, Chicago, Illinois

Over Night versus Over Time

In a weekend, a community garden project can transform a trash-filled vacant lot to an inviting space for people from the community to enjoy. However, for this garden to have maximum beneficial impact on the community, local residents need to be invested in the project.

For a garden to truly transform and empower members of the community, the ideas, energy, commitment, and skills for building and sustaining the community garden must come from the community itself. When community development is the goal of the garden, patient and sometimes difficult community organizing must precede and follow any miraculous overnight transformations. By inviting the larger community into the garden, the garden will have more friends, more hands, more skill, more energy and more synergy.

Community Building Principles...

The following principles, based on the experience of successful community garden programs around the country, can help make community gardens stronger, more effective, and sustainable.

- Build on the community's own ideas and priorities
- Listen to all parties
- Reach out to encourage community commitment
- Identify local assets (organizations, individual skills and talents, resources of money, materials, and unique landscape features, etc.)
- Respond to 'non-gardening' needs (needs like a play area, meeting place, summer employment, basketball hoop)
- Create formal and informal opportunities to come together
- Create common space in the garden
- Spend time building relationships
- Honor your community's ethnicities, languages and cultural diversity by including these in the garden.
- Identify community resources (such as city or county agencies or non-profit organizations in the neighborhood which offer assistance in the areas of food, housing, healthcare, clothing, transportation, and employment)
- Form broad-based community coalitions (enlist faith-based groups, schools, civic organizations, public agencies to contribute and participate in the community garden)

Gardening Matters sponsors an annual two-day workshop, *Growing Communities Workshop*, each spring where community gardeners can learn how to put these principles into action and nurture a sustainable community garden. This workshop was developed over the last 25 years and continually refined by the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA).

For more information about these principles and how to utilize them, please contact Gardening Matters at 612-492-8964 or info@gardeningmatters.org.

Text adapted from "Cultivating Community: Principles and Practices for Community Gardening As a Community-Building Tool", American Community Gardening Association, 2001 (p. 5-8).

