



GARDEN DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

All things to know and
consider before starting a
community garden

<https://pierced.org/194/Community-Gardens>



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ABOUT HARVEST PIERCE COUNTY

OUR HISTORY

Harvest Pierce County was founded in 2010 through a collaborative effort led by the ACHIEVE coalition. The City of Tacoma took a leadership role in supporting the efforts of community gardeners county-wide. In 2012 the program was established as a permanent program of the Pierce Conservation District. As an organization we work to create a community of abundance through reconnecting people to their food system and to each other through community gardens, gleaning, education, and celebration.

VISION

To support our region in having a thriving community engaged in a just and healthy food system.

MISSION

Investing in people to foster and sustain an equitable and healthy community-based food system throughout Pierce County.



“TO FORGET HOW TO DIG THE EARTH AND TO TEND THE SOIL IS TO FORGET OURSELVES.”
GANDHI

ALL ABOUT

COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS



Community food projects include community gardens, orchards, food forests as well as the many ways communities are coming together to create a more just, healthy and sustainable food system. Whatever size and shape a community food project is, it is a “community-managed open space”. Harvest Pierce County believes in supporting the community to design, build, and sustain these nourishing spaces.

Why Grow Food In Community?

IMPROVE COMMUNITY HEALTH

Research shows that the experience of growing food is correlated with its consumption; the more experience people have growing food, the more likely they are to eat it.

1



CREATE CONNECTIONS TO BUILD STRONGER & SAFER COMMUNITIES

Being involved in a community food project helps fulfil our hunger for connection to one another and to our earth.

2

COMBAT FOOD INSECURITY AND REDUCE WASTE

Increases food security by providing fresh, local, affordable, and culturally appropriate means of growing one's own produce.

3



Our 4 step process for Creating a Community Garden

1

Initial Start-up Phase: Focusing on community outreach and selecting a site.

2

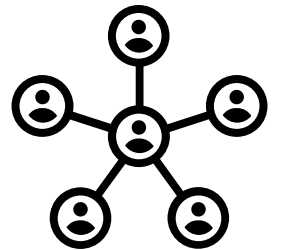
Organizational Phase: How to create an organizational framework.

3

Design Phase: How to design a garden and factors to consider.

4

Building Phase: Developing a plan for resource acquisition.



1. INITIAL START-UP

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The most important step in building a community garden is to assemble a community of people. A community garden without interested gardeners is just a vacant lot.

Harvest Pierce County is available at this stage to help plan and facilitate a kick-off gathering where interested people can meet one another and begin envisioning their project.



KEEP YOUR EYE OUT FOR...

Early Leadership: In the beginning it is important to have a small group of people willing to do the hard work of organizing and committing to get the project off the ground.

Building the Garden: There are often technical skills needed for building the garden, these people are important for making the garden a reality and may or may not be interested in gardening long term.

Long Term Gardeners: Make sure you have a healthy list of people that will steward the garden long term. Without them, you will have a hard time sustaining a garden.

General Community Support: It is important to have the support of the community, even those who do not intend to garden. Neighbors can keep an eye on the site, local business can donate food or other resources for work parties, and community members can donate.

OUTREACH TIPS

- Start by talking to your neighbors and friends – word of mouth is the most common way folks become informed and involved.
- Identify other neighborhood groups (Churches, Neighborhood Councils, PTAs) and attend their meetings – let them know what you are doing and how they can get involved.
- Connect with local online gardening groups in Pierce County through Nextdoor, Meetup, and Facebook.





SELECTING A SITE

Your group may or may not already have a site chosen. Community gardens, orchards, and food forests come in all different shapes and sizes – the most important thing is that the site works for the people who will be managing the site.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING A SITE

Visibility: It is a benefit to have the garden in a clearly visible location. Visible gardens are often the most successful because they serve as community gathering areas. To encourage positive use of the garden it is also important to have the garden in a place where passersby's can have 'eyes' on the site.

Sun: The vast majority of vegetables and fruits don't do well without at least 6-8 hours of full sunlight daily.

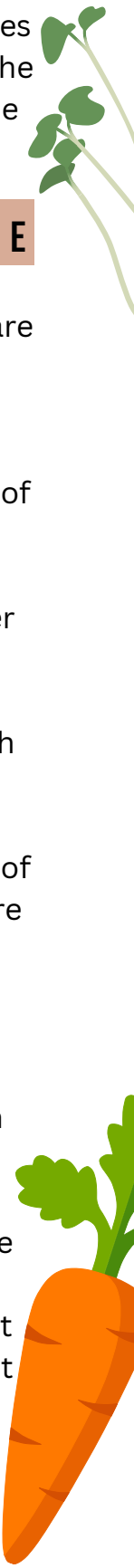
Access: It is important for the garden to be accessible to both gardeners and larger vehicles such as delivery trucks. Think about parking, where the bus routes are, whether someone with limited physical mobility could enter the site, and whether a large truck trying to deliver compost could get to the garden.

Landowner considerations (public vs. private): Different types of landowners come with different benefits and challenges to the garden – both in initial development, and long term stability. Ask your HPC representative for further details on land considerations.

Water: There are three types of cost related to water. 1. Water Meter – this can be one of the largest up-front costs. 2. Pipe installation– to get the water from the meter to where the garden is and throughout the garden. 3. Ongoing water expense – no matter what type of ownership, gardeners are often held responsible for the cost of the water they use throughout a growing season.

Insurance: If the landowner is a public agency that is used to insuring its public spaces, then treating the garden like a public space (and/or having gardeners sign a waiver) can often satisfy their requirements. Churches or other land-owning non-profits are also familiar with insurance costs for insuring the land they own. A property owned by a private citizen should probably seek out a third party insurance company that would be willing to support the community garden by handling this piece (ex. Brunswick).

Access to resources: Different ownership structures may make you eligible for different resources to assist with building the garden. In general, if the garden is on public land, it is easier to access public dollars. Private dollars can be sought to develop a garden on public or private land.



2. ORGANIZATION

CREATING AN ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Community Food Projects are volunteer-led initiatives that require internal processes and communication systems to function well. In support, Harvest Pierce County can host meetings to guide communities in completing an organizational framework using the document, “Questions to Consider when Starting a Community Food Project.” These questions are aimed at developing a coherent document that describes the communities plan for project management and group decision making.

6 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Visions & Purpose

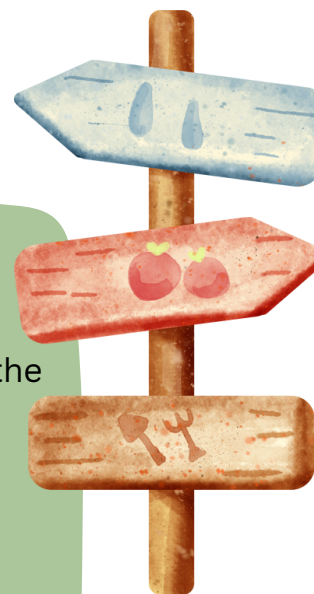
Goal: Allow every participant to voice their ideas and hopes for the space – what is calling each person to participate? This will inform the way you develop the project.

- What type of community project does the group want to create?
- What is the purpose of the project?
- Who will the project serve?

Structure & Leadership 2.

Goal: Agree upon a system for how participants will work together to manage the project and make decisions into the future.

- What type of organizational and leadership structure makes sense?
- What type of decision-making structure will you use?
- Which decisions are made by the smaller group and which decisions are made by all gardeners?
- How will you change the rules once you’ve made them?
- What roles do we need to be successful? (People can perform multiple roles).



6 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER CONTINUED

3. Participation & Maintenance

Goal: Clarify systems for maintaining the site and how that work will be accomplished – at both the individual and communal level.

- What level of participation do we expect at the individual level and the communal level?
- How will we provide opportunities to participate (assign tasks, work parties)?
- How will we handle individuals who don't participate at the expected level? What are the consequences?
- How will we manage the site in times of high demand as well as low demand? How are extra plots assigned? How are communal spaces managed?

4. Communication

Goal: Agree upon tools and practices that we will use to make sure that all participants and stakeholders are able to communicate.

- What is the best way to communicate? How will we ensure no one is left out?
- When should meetings take place? How often? Where?
- How will other people and organizations know about the group and the garden? How do we involve the neighbors that aren't here? How do we maintain communications with the non-participants stakeholders over time (i.e. neighbors)?

5. Conflict Resolution

Goal: Develop a system for managing conflict so that disagreements can be processed in a way that strengthens the group.

- How will we handle issues where people do not agree?
- How we will ensure that our garden is a welcoming place for all to contribute ideas?
- How will we ensure that our decision-making process is transparent?

6 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER CONTINUED

Group Processes

6.

Goal: Develop any necessary procedures for managing the administrative or other supportive processes.

- Tracking money – will you collect money from participants? How will you make decisions about spending it? How will you maintain transparency in the management of money? Will there be a sliding scale or other system to ensure money is not a barrier to participation?
- Fundraising - Will you write grants or request donations to support projects at the site? How will the grants be processed (Do you have 501c3 status? Who is your 501c3?) How will the money be managed?
- Water access - How will you gain access to water and who will be responsible for the water bill?
- Insurance – is additional insurance necessary? Who's responsible?
- Neighbors – developing and maintaining good relationships is critical. Conduct outreach to those nearby and involve them. Consider local business and community groups as well – they often have resources and ideas to contribute.



3. DESIGN PHASE

DESIGN OBJECTIVE

The goal of the design is to communicate on paper the vision for how the project will look and inform the plan for creating it. It's a good idea for community members to take a tour of the county to see other gardens/food spaces and get an idea for what they want.



AS A GROUP DISCUSS

- Discuss site – any challenges?
- Goals for site (go back to vision/purpose)
- Make a list of elements that the group would like to see (i.e. herb garden/orchard/children's area/individual garden beds/etc.)
- Get a sense of how strongly people feel about the various elements (do this exercise with a continuum for each element, and people rate where they are)
- Go over the pros/cons of designing in individual vs. communal spaces
- Get a sense of who in the group is interested in individual vs. communal activities
- Select designer or design team
- Community votes on design proposals to decide the garden design

COMMUNAL SPACE IDEAS

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| • Herb garden | • Gathering place |
| • Flower garden | • Children's garden/play area |
| • Orchard | • Demonstration garden |
| • Native plants | • Whatever else you like |



AS A DESIGNER CONSIDER

- Boundary – fence or other boundary (what size, what type?)
- Trees, shrubs, existing vegetation that will be kept
- Fruit trees (orchard) or berry bushes
- Pathways
- Open spaces for gathering places or other purpose
- Compost bins (or how else will we deal with the organic matter we generate?)
- Location of water (hose bibs – how many and where?)
- Communal areas such as perennial or herb beds, food bank garden, kid's area
- Garden sign



SHOULD WE BUILD RAISED BEDS?

Whether or not to build raised garden beds is a fundamental question in the design of a garden.

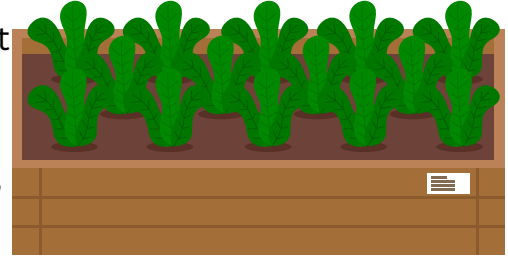
- 1) **Appearance** – If the appearance of the garden is important, consider building raised beds. Even if they are full of weeds, they have a 'tidier' look than in-ground gardens.
- 2) **Ease of gardening/accessibility** – Often in beds the soil is easier to work, there are fewer weeds, and you can construct them to be of a height that is easier to work for gardeners with limited mobility.
- 3) **Cost** – The cost of raised beds makes a garden much more expensive to build. If cost is a limiting factor, you may consider amending the existing soil.
- 4) **Reduce risk** – In some areas of urban cities, soil contamination can be a factor. If you suspect high levels of heavy metals in your soil, building raised beds reduces your risk.
- 5) **Existing soil quality** – Sometimes soil in urban areas has been neglected and it can take several growing seasons to rehabilitate. Importing soil from elsewhere can sometimes be a way to speed up the time to a productive vegetable garden.
- 6) **Requires skilled labor to construct** – While raised beds are not complicated, even simple ones require some construction skills. If your garden does not have volunteers with these skills, either reach out to the community for assistance, or consider building your garden in the ground.



RAISED BED MATERIAL OPTIONS

Once you decide whether or not to construct raised beds, the next question is to figure out what material you will construct them with.

Treated lumber – Today's treated lumber is not made with arsenic and is usually safe for vegetable gardens. It will last much longer than regular lumber but it does cost more. Extra care should be taken when cutting the wood as the sawdust can be toxic, but once assembled, it is safe for the garden.

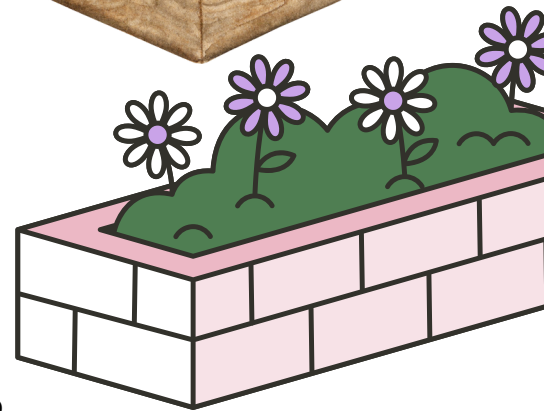


Cedar – Cedar has natural anti-rot properties that make it a long-lasting, beautiful addition to the garden. It is also very expensive and cost-prohibitive for many garden groups.

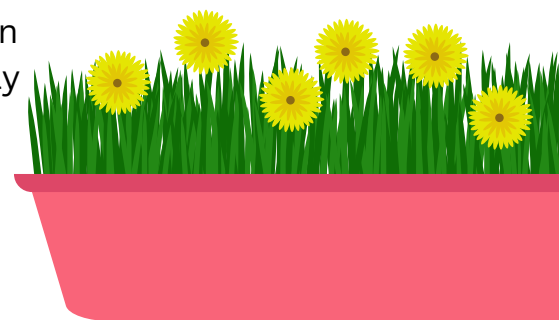


Trex – Trex is the brand name of the recycled plastic lumber available from hardware stores. It will last a very long time, but is also very expensive.

Fir/hemlock – Untreated fir/hemlock lumber will not last as long as the other alternatives, but if the size purchased is at least 2 inches thick, it can last 10 years or longer. It is one of the least expensive options.



Stone – Stone will last forever and is beautiful. It is also very expensive. If you have an affordable source or can re-purpose some existing stone, this can be a great way to go.

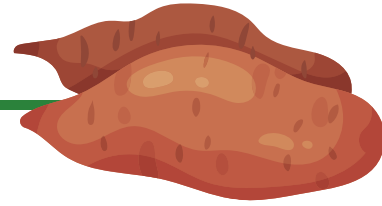


Salvaged materials – Anything that holds soil up in a mound and can handle the weather can work as a raised bed – wine bottles, concrete blocks, etc.

Factors to consider

- **Aesthetics** – How important is the appearance?
- **Cost** – Material costs can range from nothing for scavenged materials to several hundred or thousand dollars for stone, cedar, or trex lumber.
- **Durability** – Some of the less expensive options are less durable – if the labor to replace the garden will be harder for you than the cost of materials, then it makes sense to invest up front.

4. BUILDING



RESOURCE ACQUISITION

Now that you have your design, it's time to develop a plan for resource acquisition! Harvest Pierce County has worked to arrange resources to be made accessible for your project.

Check out our [Community Garden Resource List](#) for a detailed look at what we offer.

HOSTING A WORK PARTY

PREPERATION

SELECT TASKS AS A GROUP BEFOREHAND

Plan a kick-off meeting at the beginning of the season to make a rough calendar of tasks for the whole garden season with all the gardeners.

MAKE A CLEAR PLAN FOR THE DAY

Email that agenda out to all gardeners beforehand. Assign leaders to manage each key task beforehand. Order all materials in advance to arrive in time.

COMMUNICATE

Inform all gardeners, but also to neighbors and community members as well, about the agenda and tasks of the work party. We recommend at least two weeks of warning, a 5 day reminder, and a day before reminder. Keep work party days consistent as much as possible (1st Saturday of the month, March through October) and post signage at garden.

KEEP YOUR EXPECTATIONS REASONABLE

Remember that an important goal is get gardeners to meet, come together, and enjoy the garden and each other's company. It is easy to set lofty expectation's for a work-party and become disappointed.



HOSTING A WORK PARTY**DAY OF****SET THE TONE**

Gathering everyone together at the beginning of the day. Have everyone introduce themselves and let folks know the tasks. Encourage folks to do tasks they may be new at to build a culture of learning and adventure.

KEEP IT CELEBRATORY

Have a culture of fun, laughter, and friendship. You will have a much better turn out for future work parties if you can include celebratory aspects to the day: music, snacks, fun cheers, team names, mini-workshops.

DO NOT ASSIGN YOURSELF TOO MUCH TO DO

Since your primary job is to answer questions and keep things running smoothly. That is going to be hard to do if you are too busy.

KEEP IT SAFE

Include a safety talk at the beginning of the day. Make sure only trained gardeners are using power tools, and keep all hoes and shovels facing down or in a "circle of safety."

SNAP PHOTOS

Post on facebook or in your monthly communication. Smiling faces will surely show those who couldn't attend the fun day.

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY COORDINATOR

This will be appreciated by those who need to get work done but have little ones in their midst. Little hands are great at harvesting and there are fun activities to do with kids in the garden.

Don't forget to send out thank you emails/calls to gardeners who helped out.

