

Role Of CAC In Your Community Garden

In 2008, the Community Action Coalition (CAC) Community Garden Program worked on 17 of the 32 gardens in the Madison area. CAC's work is supported by grants, mostly from Federal block grants, to serve low- to moderate-income Madison residents. At each garden, we help out in slightly different ways, depending on what the garden needs and what our grants cover.

We have only 3 staff members and often other assignments besides gardens. So we need help from the gardeners to keep everything running smoothly. We want gardeners to organize to be as self-sufficient as possible. To support you in this, we offer a set of incentives to gardens that are self-run.

Priority services from us. We do your plowing early and set early registration days so that you can open your garden early in the spring.

You keep your plot fees. The money that gardeners pay each season is kept by your group so that gardeners can spend it on things that the garden needs.

Help from us with special projects. Depending on your ideas, for instance many gardens have set up no-till sections where they can plant perennials, and organic areas where chemicals aren't used (mandatory in City Park gardens).

Help from us with major improvements. If your garden needs water pipes or a fence, we help buy them and put them in.

You control your own garden management. Gardeners adapt their own rules to keep the garden working well, plan events for the garden, and choose gardeners to take on leadership.

We bring you supplies at wholesale cost. Gardeners can order straw for mulching, compost to be delivered, and organic insect control supplies.

Thirteen of the community gardens we work with in Madison are self-run and the rest are learning to be.

Gardeners at each place volunteer to do these things:

- Hold meetings & workdays several times a year to get all gardeners involved in tasks & decision-making
- Take care of mowing & caring for water systems
- Measure plots in the spring and mark them with stakes
- Sign up gardeners and assign them plots at a garden registration day
- Monitor plots to make sure gardeners are keeping up with weeds
- Sponsor picnics, potlucks, or other social events
- Keep track of tools, hoses, and storage areas
- Be in touch with us at CAC during the gardening season to keep us informed
- Turn in application forms from all gardeners to CAC

CAC staff still takes care of these tasks for gardens that are self-run:

- Help out with the work listed above
- Provide interpretation for Hmong, Spanish, and English speakers so that all can participate in garden events, work, and decision-making
- Till the gardens if desired by gardeners (extra fee)
- Insure the gardens
- Arrange for water service & compost delivery (& help pay water bills where grants allow)
- Hold leases on the garden land
- Provide tools, bulletin boards, picnic tables and hoses
- Provide free seeds and sometimes plants
- Refer new gardeners citywide
- Help build raised beds, fences, tool sheds, etc
- Send Community Garden News citywide newsletter and seasonal reminder postcards to gardeners