

Welcome to Community Gardening

Adapted from Growing a Stronger Community with Community Gardens: An Action Plan for Madison (1999)
www.wisc.edu/urpl/mfsp/pubs/tskfrpt.htm

You've probably heard the term *community gardening*, but what exactly is it? Many people come into community gardening thinking that it's simply a way to grow food... the same as backyard gardening, only not in their back yard. It's actually a whole lot more; there are more responsibilities, but there are also more benefits and rewards.

Responsibilities

A community garden takes a lot of work to run well, and everyone is expected to participate (many hands make light work). Some examples of group responsibilities are maintaining paths, fixing hoses, handling registration, managing the budget, organizing educational workshops, enforcing garden rules, communicating to all gardeners, and organizing social events. Gardens are run by committees of gardeners, and most gardens have at least six committees. From the work of many volunteers, each according to their ability, Madison's community gardens survive and thrive.

Other responsibilities are related to your plot, for example, most community gardens require that you keep your plot fairly well weeded.

Despite these extra responsibilities, community gardening is immensely popular in Madison! The demand for plots generally exceeds the supply, and every time a new garden is started somewhere, it fills quickly.

Benefits and rewards

If you've never gardened in a community garden before, you can look forward to more than fresh fruits and veggies. Cultural exchanges sprout and new friendships grow among diverse groups of people.

Community gardens are common ground for growing plants that feed, heal and give aesthetic pleasure. They are civic spaces where people work and recreate to nourish themselves, their families and friends; the gardeners' shared labor also builds a stronger sense of belonging to their physical environment and connection to other gardeners. Community gardens are the collective effort of people with the patience and determination to make things grow.

The gardeners in Madison are a remarkable mix of people from many backgrounds, so the gardens function as some of the most multicultural places in the city. Community gardens not only nurture green spaces but foster the development of a community identity and spirit. Community gardens often set aside space for community get-togethers, serving as the modern-day equivalent of the ancient plazas in urban areas where people would gather to meet and spend time together. Community garden spaces also allow for interaction with nature and the productive use of land. Because community gardens are beautiful and visually unique in an urban setting, they function as traffic calming devices.

Community gardening brings together people and encourages interaction. Interest in urban gardening has often led to community-based efforts to deal with other social concerns. Many people have developed leadership skills as a result of being involved with their community garden.

Community gardens should be inclusive and welcoming to all people. Regardless of age, education, language barrier, or disability, all gardeners should participate both in the upkeep of the garden -- with tasks like caring for the water system and common areas -- and in garden

decision-making including setting policies and choosing leaders. CAC Community Gardens provides translation so that all can share the work.

By choosing to be in a community garden, you'll be gardening in close proximity to others. You can learn from these folks either actively (by asking questions) or passively (by observation). People of different cultural backgrounds garden differently; if your community garden is culturally diverse, you may be surprised at what you'll learn even if you've been gardening many years.

Welcome to your community garden; we hope you enjoy this new way of gardening! Please call your garden's leaders or CAC Community Gardens if you have questions or suggestions.