

8 considerations for sustaining a community garden

1. **Hold space for together time**, whether the project is organized as allotment plots or is a true community garden –
 - a. Be present at a regular time every week so people know there'll be someone there to share advice and encouragement.
 - b. Allocate a role to each person (consistent with ability and skills) so everyone has a part in making the project thrive.
 - c. Send weekly updates on garden needs and successes, with photos and garden tips.
 - d. Hold a monthly potluck (if a few of the gardeners are also cooks) or light meal. Eating together is acknowledged to be one of the strongest bonding experiences, and the conversations that happen when people aren't working are beyond price.
2. **Go light on rules**. Start with just one, "Be nice to each other," with loads of examples. That covers a lot, everything from No loud music to Lock the gate when you leave. There may be something else that needs a rule, but I haven't found it yet. Mostly I just need to explain *why* to do or not do something. It is astonishing how thoughtful people will be when the responsibility lies with them.
3. **Encourage learning ...**
 - a. ... from each other, and not only about gardening. Perhaps someone makes lavender baskets, dandelion honey, cold frames, ollas, cordage, sun ovens – encourage people to bring their whole selves to the garden.
 - b. ... about the world of plants – plant families, pollinators and native plants, soil science, perennial vegetables, dye plants and fibre plants, permaculture, succession planting, edible flowers, cordage, teas, cuisine-specific veg, ...
 - c. ... from the network of small producers and environmentally-conscious cohorts – open-pollinated seed sources, native plant nurseries, local naturalists' groups and master-gardener groups, bird watchers, entomologists, a college or university culinary program, ...
4. **Support success**. Gardeners tend plants; the coordinator tends gardeners. Make sure they have the essentials for success – it could be soil amendments, fencing, a watering system, seeds, bush pruning to remove shade, and especially knowledge and delight. For the person who's never grown anything before, suggest beans and marigolds; for the person who doesn't bend well, provide a waist-high raised bed.

5. **Create good signage.** A garden needs a sign showing its name and purpose, and you may want signs for special plants or for individual allotments. Signage helps your gardeners feel a sense of belonging – and by showing the site is warmly cared for it somewhat discourages vandalism.
6. **Connect the garden to the neighbourhood.**
 - a. Reach out to local business for
 - i. in-kind donations – pots, potting soil, hand tools, edging, seedlings, small quantities of lumber, ...
 - ii. things you can recycle – organic waste from a juicing bar, coffee grounds from a coffee shop, wood chips from a firewood supplier, ...
 - iii. cash donations for special projects – composter, backyard greenhouse, drip-irrigation system, Linking donations to a specific project gives the donor pride when they see what they supported.
 - iv. volunteer work groups. Many corporations give their staff a few community-volunteer hours; six people for 4 hours can deal with weeding, put up fencing, plant, paint, sort the shed, or do some other thing that moves the garden project ahead a notch.
 - b. Host an annual or even monthly open house – tour neighbors and like-minded people around your garden, large or small. In modern urban life we so rarely get to see the work of people’s hands.
 - c. Invite groups – classes, a camera club, an environmental group – to visit.
 - d. Whether ornamentals or food plants, encourage and support growing plants “from home.” It might be callaloo, mehti, Basque peppers, “Vietnamese coriander,” or – my knowledge fails on ornamentals – ask your gardeners!
7. **Do weekly social media or a blog post.** Weekly is only 26-40 items. There’s always something to photograph and something brief to say about it: you can do this. When the garden needs something – bed edging, a hose, whatever – ask for it. The posts will attract support and make your gardeners proud of themselves.
8. **Thank your supporters.** These are the people who provide the land, the money, the tools – mention them in documentation, on website, in social media. Hold a thank-you picnic in mid-season. Give them a present from the garden at end of season – it might be produce, or a bouquet, or a framed photo.