



HOW TO SET UP A GARDEN (AND KEEP IT GOING)?

Challenge

In European cities many vacant sites are used for community gardens. If you plan to start a community garden project you may face some challenges that include:

Challenge 1: Once a suitable place is identified, you may need:

- Permission to use the place from the local authority or the owner;
- Neighbours' consent; and
- Access to funding

Challenge 2: Managing a community garden project successfully can be difficult, time consuming and clash with other activities. You may need:

- Additional skills you do not have;
- A team to share responsibilities with; and
- Local volunteers helping with manual and organisational work

This factsheet addresses those who want to start a community garden and keep it going. It also addresses policy makers, providing them with valid arguments for a strong support and advice to this type of projects.



Image 2 - Kipos3 community garden, Thessaloniki, Greece. Photo: Runrid Fox-Kämper



Image 3 - Allmende-Kontor community garden¹, Berlin, Germany. Photo: Silvio Caputo

Advice to Gardeners

Finding a place: Ask your local council, local associations and institutions such as schools; they may have spaces that are not used. You can also look around and ask people and, once you have identified a place, find the owner with the help of the planning department

Permissions: Be aware that land always belongs to someone who you have to ask for permission. A good relationship with the landowner facilitates everything and will pay you back.

Your garden also needs to be accepted by local communities. Establish contacts and build good relationship with local groups by suggesting that the community garden will contribute to improve the quality of the neighbourhood

Funds: You may need some funds to cover some basic expenses. There are funding bodies with a focus on social research and innovation, scientific research or business startups. Community gardens can tick all of these boxes. Another possibility would be to propose to local businesses (shops and supermarkets) to donate some money in return for good publicity.

The group: Search and find likeminded people who want to do urban gardening within a group. Use social media and other forms to communicate within the group.

Managing a community garden: Strengthen your management and leadership skills. Agree a set of rules/guidelines within your group. Consider institutionalising the project as an association which will give you a stronger position for negotiating with authorities and land-owners.

Skills: You will need skills to manage human resources and teamwork and to write funding applications. A group of people is more likely to have all the necessary skills and can divide the workload. Moreover, if a member of the team leaves, the project will continue and the other members can find a replacement.

Volunteers: You are likely to need a number of volunteers to be able to undertake all activities. Consider that the garden is probably close to where many volunteers live. Relationships within a group of volunteers might not be always smooth and a moderator can help.

Communication: Volunteers will come and go. Seek contacts with local organisations and use social media to recruit more volunteers. Attracting the interest of local media can facilitate recruitment, promote the objectives that the community project has set and help the project survive generally. Organise events that celebrate local produce and to present the achievements of the community garden to the general public to attract media.

Learn More

Case study

NeuLand community garden (below, photo by Valerie Viehoff) in Cologne, Germany, is located on an area that has been earmarked for development for over a decade. Surprisingly, the land owner allowed, following a request by a group of individuals who subsequently founded NeuLand, to lease the land for a community project. This was done on condition that no financial investment was required by the land owner, the project was temporary and would leave upon request, and a deposit as guarantee was needed. Now, NeuLand is a registered charity with a management board and registered members.

For more information visit: <http://www.neuland-koeln.de/>



Literature

Pudup, M. B. (2008). It takes a garden: Cultivating citizen subjects in organized garden projects. *Geoforum* 39(3), pp. 1228–1240.

Reynolds, R. (2008). *On Guerilla Gardening: a handbook for gardening without boundaries*, Bloomsbury, London.

¹located at former Tempelhof Airport



Image 4 - Prinzessinnen community garden, Berlin, Germany. Photo: Silvio Caputo



Image 5 - Huttenplatz community garden, Kassel, Germany. Photo: Runrid Fox-Kämper

Advice to Gardeners

Identify clear objectives: Discuss within your group and carefully plan the objectives of your project and its structure. The long-term success of the project may also rely on the clarity of objectives and how these are communicated to the local and, if relevant, wider public.

- Are gardening activities aimed at involving minority groups in local initiatives?
- Is it a way to allow the elderly to socialise and undertake physical activities?
- Do you want to work collectively in the garden and share the produce or do you prefer individual plots?
- Is it about raising awareness or about healthy food?

Each one of these objectives implies different paths of action. But more importantly, if clearly communicated, they will attract more consent from the local communities than a gardening project with no specific objectives.

Message to Policy Makers

Consider the role that community garden projects can play within the local context. The benefits they can accrue are manifold:

- Urban community gardens offer access to local healthy food with short supply chains.
- They promote healthy lifestyles and offer learning space for the young.
- They support social activities and community building.
- They turn abandoned sites in the city into safer and well-kept spaces.
- They add green space to the city.

Consequently, as member of the local authority you can support community garden projects as follows:

- Set up supportive initiatives such as a helpdesk which advises and helps groups interested in starting a project on a vacant site.
- Funding streams can be vital for community projects: provide information on funding bodies.
- Provide training for management and organisational skills.
- Establish contacts with other local authorities, which in turn can connect community groups that can share best practice
Make available lists of local organisations with contact persons.
- Facilitate connections and promote volunteering.

Learn More

Case study

Skip Garden, London (below, photo by Silvio Caputo), run by Global Generation, an organisation connecting land and communities, negotiated the temporary use of a site to be redeveloped with the developer of one of the largest regeneration projects in London, Kings Cross. Skips were used as containers for gardening as a way to guarantee temporariness. Today, the Skip Garden is a very well-known place in the area and beyond, with a rich programme of activities, a kitchen and a restaurant, many volunteers and involves local communities in the activities.

For more information visit:
<http://www.globalgeneration.org.uk/skip-garden-and-kitchen-1/>



Useful links

<http://www.urbanallotments.eu/>

<http://www.capitalgrowth.org/>

The Dublin City Guide to Community Gardening: <http://dublincommunitygrowers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/FINAL-City-Guide-to-Community-Gardening.pdf>

GrowTo. An urban agriculture Action Plan for Toronto: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/pe/bgrd/backgroundfile-51558.pdf>

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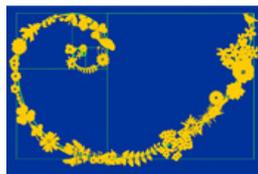


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