

COURSE INTRODUCTION

This curriculum is designed to give you a framework for planning, building, and sustaining a community garden. It is intended to help a motivated group who wants a community garden in their neighborhood to build the coalition, processes, and physical space for a successful community garden. The course can also support experienced community garden organizers in improving their garden programs. Following the steps and suggestions provided will enhance the success of your garden now and in the future. This manual promotes community gardens as a tool for growing community, growing fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs, and interacting with nature. Community gardens require collaboration and inclusiveness in their development and maintenance, so strong community connections are created in the process. Much of the course teaches you how to build and nurture these relationships. The community connections that are built through a garden can influence the dynamics of an entire neighborhood and contribute to a thriving environment for local residents.

Community Garden Benefits

Communities have started their gardens to achieve a wide variety of benefits to the community, and we will touch on all of these again at various points during the course. Community gardens can:

- Allow people without their own gardening space to grow healthy food. A community garden can produce more food than you might think. An 85-plot garden produces up to thousands of pounds of food in a good season. A family with a plot could save \$600 a year in food costs!
- Educate children about fruits and vegetables and create positive associations with healthy foods. Early positive exposure to healthy foods can support a lifetime of healthier food choices.
- Provide a form of exercise. Gardening is a form of moderate physical activity, and one that can be done by people of all ages and capabilities.
- Create friendships and camaraderie between neighbors. Neighbors have a new reason to meet and interact and work together.
- Beautify a neighborhood and provide safe, recreational green space. A New York University study found that property values of New York City homes surrounding a community garden increased property values by 9.4% over a five year period. Convenient community open space makes the neighborhood a more desirable place to live.
- Help reduce neighborhood crime by turning prior vacant spaces into bustling, community spaces. A University of Pennsylvania study, found the greening of lots in Philadelphia was associated with significant reductions in gun assaults across all four sections of the city and significant reductions in vandalism in one section of the city. In addition, greening was also tied to residents reporting less stress and more physical activity in some sections of the city. More activity and a purpose can turn a crime safe-haven into a place criminals would avoid.
- Community gardens are most successful when they are developed by and for the community that will use them. It is important to support diversity in the garden planning and operation in order to take advantage of the talents and skills of the group, promote personal development and education, and increase personal investment in the garden. We will go into more detail on how to involve the community and use local assets throughout this curriculum.





ACTIVITY 1

As a group or in small groups, go visit at least one community garden to note how it's organized and how it looks. Speak with gardeners to learn what they appreciate about the garden. This visit could be done during class time or as a homework assignment between sessions. Visit victorygardenssandiego.com/comm_garden_list.html for a list of community gardens in San Diego County. For a map of San Diego County Community Gardens go here: www.mastergardenerssandiego.org/community/showmap.php

Course Overview

This course primarily covers the community building, organization, design, planning, and funds management necessary to create a successful community garden, but it also builds on basic home-scale gardening knowledge. This class will be participatory—we invite you to ask questions and share your previous gardening and organizing experiences that would be helpful to the group. The class will be more enjoyable and valuable if everyone is engaged. Feedback on the course is also welcomed.

In this course you will learn about:

- building community
- organizing garden planning participants and tasks
- logistical details of finding and securing land
- budgeting and fundraising
- designing and structuring the garden and necessary supplies
- creating rules and policies for garden maintenance

Note: While there is chronological order to the lessons in this course, when you are creating your own community garden many of the steps will overlap and happen simultaneously, especially land acquisition, group organizing, and fundraising.



ACTIVITY 2

To begin introducing the idea of Asset-Based Community Development (discussed in Lesson 1), each participant takes a turn listing for the group his or her interests and goals for a community garden, and the leader transcribes these on the board. The result will be a diverse list of goals, which allows for the group to see the project from all possible perspectives.

"Gardens, scholars say, are the first sign of commitment to a community. When people plant corn they are saying, let's stay here. And by their connection to the land, they are connected to one another."

— Anne Raver

A Brief History

Community gardens have many rewards. They allow people to grow fresh organic produce that they may not otherwise be able to afford, give urban dwellers an opportunity to work the earth as exercise and recreation, and offer thriving social centers for local communities. They also increase property values, decrease crime (by encouraging more eyes on the street), add to the sense of community, and reduce urban warming and stormwater runoff. Given these benefits, it's not surprising that community-centered gardening has a long history in the United States.

With a little imagination, it can be said that community gardens or at least communal farming in the U.S. can be traced back to the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving celebration. This annual way of giving thanks for a successful harvest connected residents across racial and ethnic lines and laid the foundation for future efforts that would again tie residents together in planting and harvesting their own food. Intense interest in urban community gardens, however, did not appear until the rapid industrialization of the late nineteenth-century pulled many people off farms and into crowded tenements.

The first community garden program on record was established during the Panic of 1893. Such a traumatic economic depression idled factories and closed many businesses. The mayor of Detroit hit upon the idea of letting unemployed residents use vacant city plots for the production of food. This idea soon spread to other U.S. cities and became known as the Potato Patch Movement[1]. This movement set the pattern for three-quarters of a century: while community gardens remained active throughout the twentieth century they grew in number and became an essential food source during economic downturns and the two World Wars.

During World War I, the government first began encouraging residents to grow Victory Gardens. These gardens were an essential tool in relieving production demands on professional farmers trying to produce for troops abroad and residents at home.

By the end of World War I, the U.S. had over five million gardens. Relief Gardens during the Great Depression helped improve people's spirits and provided food to families when work was scarce. During World War II, the government promoted gardens similarly to the efforts of World War I. The Victory Gardens of World War II produced an estimated 40 percent of the country's fruits and vegetables and fruit and vegetable consumption was at its highest rate in U.S. history. Few of these Victory Gardens survived for long after World War II ended, as the country recovered and many Americans moved out to the new suburbs where they had their own yards to garden. Today's modern community garden movement began in the 1960s and 1970s. Community gardens still ebb and flow in popularity according to economic tides and social trends, but gardeners today have a wider range of motivations than sheer financial necessity. Many people have become increasingly aware of their impacts on the planet and uncomfortable with the rise of processed foods. The TV dinners and hamburger joints of the 1950s completely altered how America viewed and consumed food. These changes have since accelerated. Radical shifts in federal agriculture policy led to the disappearance of many small farms, severing the connection between people and their sources of food; fast food restaurants continued to expand; children increasingly became the targets of advertisements for junk food; and people's lifestyles became more sedentary — all of which have contributed to widespread health problems, including overweight and obesity which impacts approximately 1 in 4 children in San Diego County.





Locally, modern community gardens started appearing in the 1970s. The Front and Juniper Garden, which began in 1981, is the City of San Diego's oldest continually-operating community garden and is located on Port Authority (state) land. A school-based community garden (i.e., joint use garden) started at the Magnolia School Garden in El Cajon around the same time. Other gardens, which focused primarily on immigrant populations, were also started in the late 1970s and early 1980s as part of the CETA job training program with help from the 4H program. The Cambodian Garden, which closed in 2010, dates back to the same time period.

Modern community gardens face advantages and obstacles different from earlier gardens. The rise of environmentalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s not only led to a renewed interest in community gardens, but stricter development regulations and zoning. When they created their new rules, cities rarely considered the impacts of regulations on community gardens and gardeners also didn't realize they would be affected. As a result, the new zoning codes often didn't mention community gardens and there is no clear direction on where gardens should or should not be placed within the existing city zoning framework, which unintentionally created red tape and costs for gardeners. In a few cases, cities overestimated the potential impacts of community gardens and required expensive permits or banned them from places where they could naturally be situated.

Despite some cities' impediments, home gardening has become the number one hobby in the United States. Americans have a renewed interest in knowing where their food comes from and how it was grown. Nationwide, there's been a movement of citizens and governments to replace such regulations with more supportive policies that encourage and sometimes even fund new community gardens. The country now has approximately 18,000 community gardens [2]. The City of San Diego was initially slow to join the movement, but has recently revised its regulations to eliminate regulatory barriers in the establishment and operation of community gardens. It also adopted new land use languages to support urban agriculture production and retail, including small-scale animal husbandry. In addition, many of the eighteen city governments in the region are working with citizens to create rules that support instead of discourage new gardens. Currently, the County has relatively few community gardens compared to elsewhere but with the many new regulatory changes it is poised to contribute greatly in the near future to the country's community garden movement.

In Lesson 2 on finding land, we will speak more about rules in the various cities of San Diego County, and how you can promote better community gardening policy if it doesn't already exist in your city. Resources for information on policies, connections to other advocates, garden networks, and general information about gardens in San Diego County will also be discussed.

1. www.davidjhess.org/DetroitCG.pdf
2. American Community Garden Network