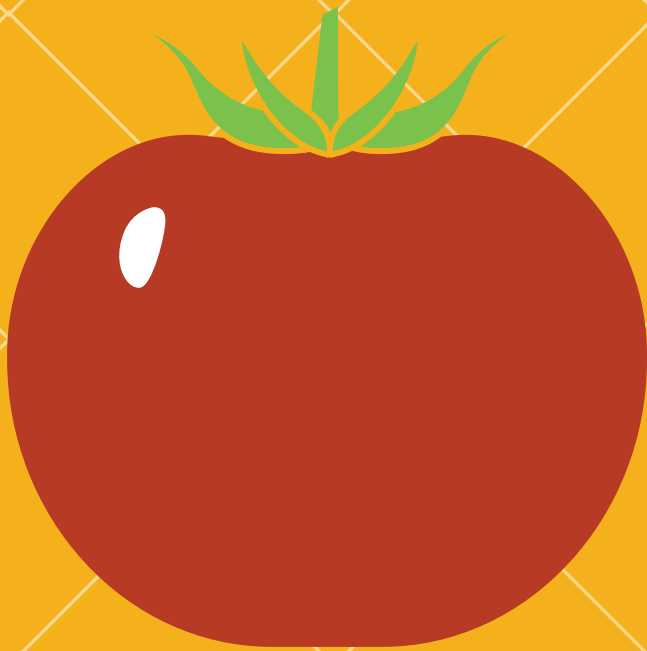


DIG in AURORA

Community Garden Handbook



Worth Discovering
auroragov.org

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INTRODUCTION: WHY DIG IN?



The city of Aurora is committed to making the city a socially, environmentally and economically sustainable community. Community gardens are a critical component of this sustainability vision.

A community garden is a shared green space created and cultivated by volunteers to grow produce and flowers. It can be incorporated into neighborhoods, select parks and open space areas, or alongside educational, medical and parochial facilities.

- **Neighborhood community gardens** provide citizens with access to healthy, affordable and locally grown food choices.
- **School gardens** offer a chance to teach nutrition, biology, math and environmental science in a thriving outdoor environment.
- **Gardens at hospitals** can be therapeutic, potentially reducing patient stress and promoting recovery.



Community gardens bring neighbors together for a common cause, breaking down demographic and cultural barriers. They improve the quality of life for those involved by encouraging self-reliance and responsibility, building skills, reducing food insecurity, creating income opportunities, providing exercise, promoting relaxation and offering a chance to connect with nature.

With the addition of every new community garden, the health of the city itself is bolstered. Community gardens can stimulate neighborhood and community development, enhance neighborhood appearances, preserve urban open space, reduce urban heat effect and raise ecological awareness among residents.

This handbook offers guidance and resources on how to develop manage a community garden in Aurora, Colorado.



GETTING READY

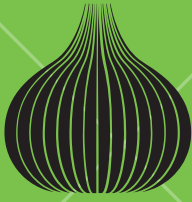
Starting and Managing a Garden

You're itching to start your very own community garden and can't wait to begin. However, planning a community garden that will remain viable long into the future takes time—as many as three years between inception and the first harvest.

Building It On Your Own

First, you will need to assemble a core group of volunteers to manage the responsibilities that come with creating a community garden. At least two people should be assigned to work with a landscape architect, coordinate plot assignments, communicate with gardeners, coordinate with agencies involved in the development process, make basic irrigation repairs and oversee garden maintenance.





Building Help

If you need help with your garden, Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) is available to provide substantial support to neighborhoods and residents in developing and maintaining community gardens that are open to the public. This non-profit 501(c)3 organization can serve as a:

- Land manager
- Liaison to municipalities
- Fiscal agent
- Design and construction coordinator
- Organizer of volunteer construction labor
- Facilitator of construction and garden improvements
- Provider of long-term garden support to ensure sustainability
- Holder of liability insurance
- Long-term lease agreement holder
- Fund solicitor and identifier of funding partners

Building Consensus

Informing the nearby neighbors and businesses of your desire to turn the land into a community garden is critical before a garden can be established. Building consensus among neighbors—who will serve both as participants and guardians of the garden as it grows and prospers—will ensure the future success of your garden.

Attending neighborhood meetings, talking with your city council member, going door to door, circulating petitions and developing a plot reservation list are all ways to assess interest in the neighborhood and determine the size and scope of your garden. The city **Neighborhood Liaisons** are available at neighborhood@auroragov.org or 303.739.7280 to help you get in touch with your neighbors.

GETTING READY

Choosing a Site

To identify the ideal spot for a community garden, select a site that has:

- Good visibility
- A central location
- Close proximity to the garden's users, which ensures its sustainability and discourages vandalism and theft
- At least six hours of direct sunlight
- Contaminant-free soil and
- Accessible water

Community gardens can be developed on residential property, Home Owners Association (HOA) common property, vacant property, commercial property (businesses, schools, hospitals, churches, etc.) and public property. Establishing a community garden on vacant property can pose the most challenges and the least assurance for long-term viability, but can be done under the right circumstances. Contact the County Assessor's Office to determine ownership of a vacant parcel, for the county in which the property is located.

Adams County Assessor's Office: 303.523.6038 • Arapahoe County Assessor's Office: 303.795.4600 • Douglas County Assessor's Office: 303.660.7450

Developing the Site

Once you have identified a potential piece of land, gathered your core group of volunteers and determined whether you are going to work with DUG or self-manage, the **Water Conservation Division** (720.859.4407 or communitygardens@auroragov.org) can walk you through the start up process.

If you are working with DUG, your representative will serve as the liaison to the city and other agencies and oversee the garden's development. If you move forward independently, the city's Water Conservation Division will help you with the city's regulatory process. They will register your community garden with the city, which provides an opportunity to advertise your garden to the community and affords networking opportunities with other community gardeners.

WHAT'S REQUIRED

Residential

To develop a community garden on a residential property, decide whether the garden will go in the back or the front yard, what size it will be and whether it has access to water. If a front-yard garden is desired, zoning code requires that 50 percent of the front yard be long-lived (perennial) plant material.

The city's Water Conservation staff can point you in the right direction if you need to consult with various city departments on any zoning issues or supplement your water supply. They also can discuss various ways to irrigate, how to conserve water and any potential rebates that may exist.

Home Owner's Association Common Property

In addition to determining the location, size and water source for this type of garden, here's what else you might need to accomplish before you can move forward:

- Work with a certified landscape architect
- Amend the existing site plan with the Planning & Development Services department
- Determine whether the property is part of the park and open space requirement for the neighborhood
- Install a new tap (if needed)

WHAT'S REQUIRED

Park Property

Use of public park land for community farming sites is a notion that has become increasingly popular in recent years. Although not a standard park element, inclusion of community gardens as a use in suitable park sites is an idea supported by the city's Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Department. In fact, Aurora's first community gardens were developed in 1995 and have grown to become an integral part of the park sites and the surrounding neighborhoods.

Development of a parcel within a city park or open space would automatically become a project in which DUG or a similar oversight organization participates. Not all sites are appropriate for a community garden, and PROS staff will help determine suitable sites.

Park sites must have:

- Ample community interest
- Sufficient acreage
- Healthy soil
- Adequate funding
- An existing water source
- Sufficient parking

As requests for gardens are received, they are tracked by PROS staff and reviewed as park renovations occur. Per city code, the addition of a community garden to an existing park site requires a master plan amendment. These amendments would need to be approved by the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board at a public hearing.





Vacant Property

While adding a community garden to an undeveloped piece of vacant property might seem like the perfect way to spruce up the neighborhood and make good use of wasted space, there are many considerations to be made before pursuing this option. Consult with the city's Water Conservation staff or DUG if you are considering a garden on vacant property.

Commercial and Other Types

Developing a commercial property, school, church, hospital or other type of similar site into a community garden might require a site plan amendment, a review of the site's landscaping plan, an additional water source and a review of whether the site falls under the tree protection ordinance. Water Conservation staff would serve as the liaison to help determine what must be accomplished for the project to move forward.

Planning and Design

If you are working with DUG or a similar entity, they will help you conduct neighborhood design workshops; prepare layout, grading and utilities, and planting plans; develop a cost estimate, work plan and schedule; suggest garden management structures; and more.

If you're working on your own, you may develop the garden design yourself, taking into consideration the kind of layout you desire, number of plots, whether any beds will be raised and more. However, if your garden falls on commercial or common property or on a multi-family property with more than four attached units, you are required by law to hire a professional landscape architect. Water Conservation staff can help with a conceptual plan and possibly look at the property with you in advance of the design stage to identify potential issues.

THE COST

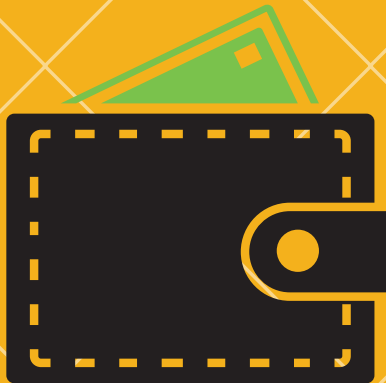
Depending on the site size and design complexity, the cost of building a community garden can range anywhere from \$500 to \$50,000, plus yearly maintenance costs.

DUG works jointly with its community partners to solicit funds for construction materials and identifies garden funding partners. If you are developing your garden independently, you may want to consider obtaining 501(c)3 tax-exempt status to become eligible to receive tax deductible charitable donations.

"Pub 4220: Applying for 501(c)3 Tax-Exempt Status" is a helpful document available through the Internal Revenue Service by calling 1.800.829.3676 or visiting irs.gov.

In addition to pursuing grant opportunities, establishing relationships with the business community—local hardware stores, wholesalers, plant nurseries and the like—can often result in items being donating to your garden or sold at a reduced cost.

Check in with Water Conservation staff to find out about current grant resources.



TIME TO DIG IN

Establish Garden Leadership

Make sure you have designated a core leadership group who will make decisions about how responsibilities will be shared before the garden is operational, including how general maintenance issues will be handled, how bills will be paid, who might coordinate special events and who will conduct community relations. In addition, you should establish garden fees to help maintain common areas, pay water bills and make repairs. Garden rules to regulate access and behavior should also be put into place.

Building the Garden

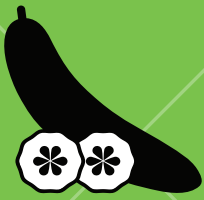
A great deal of preparation must occur at a community garden site before those first seeds can be planted. A good garden design will consider:

- Clearing debris and grading the site
- Testing soil and adding amendments, if needed, to optimize growing conditions
- Starting to establish the layout of paths, beds, entry points and fencing
- Installation of permanent irrigation (permit required)
- Installation of a tool storage bin or shed, composting bin and raised beds, if desired

Over time, you may want to add garden enhancements such as entry gates, benches and shade arbors. If you are working with DUG, they will provide support until the garden is well established, usually in its fourth year. Also, consider purchasing liability insurance in case someone is hurt while tending the garden. If DUG is providing you with support, they carry liability insurance for the sites.

Organizing the Gardeners

If you have room to accommodate more gardeners than those in your core group of volunteers, then it's time to start recruiting. Pass out flyers, attend neighborhood meetings and visit churches to spread the word about your garden. Once your plots are assigned, establish a procedure to determine which gardeners get priority each season and guidelines for a waiting list.



Sustaining the Site

Ensuring the long-term viability of the site requires garden leaders to identify goals and a vision for the garden. Clearly setting expectations for members and volunteers will guarantee participating gardeners remain actively involved, while ongoing recruitment of volunteers will provide a constant base of support as gardeners rotate out.

Garden leaders may continually pursue potential partnerships and fundraising opportunities to guarantee the garden's continued production. Connecting with fellow community gardeners in the area can foster an exchange of ideas and serve as a resource when issues arise.

Overcoming Challenges

As your garden flourishes, it is important to be mindful of potential challenges that might arise down the road. Maintaining a positive presence in the community with a network of supporters will serve you well. Talking regularly with neighbors and nearby businesses about your garden, building a relationship with your Police Area Representative (PAR officer), and sharing success stories with your contacts at the city of Aurora and your city council member will enhance awareness about the garden and establish allies. This will encourage participation among prospective gardeners, create a built-in neighborhood watch to deter theft and vandalism, and bolster future fundraising efforts.

Conveying the rules of the garden regularly to participants, including posting the rules in a prominent location, and communicating often with your gardeners will create a friendly atmosphere and dissuade conflict. Host garden gatherings and celebrate your successes.

RESOURCES

Primary City Contact

City of Aurora Water Conservation Division

15151 E. Alameda Parkway, Suite 3200

720.859.4407

communitygardens@auroragov.org

Other Local Resources

Adams County (land title records) • co.adams.co.us

Arapahoe County (land title records) • co.arapahoe.co.us

Colorado Local Sustainability • localsustainability.net

Colorado State University Extension • ext.colostate.edu

Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) • dug.org or 303.292.9900

Douglas County (land title records) • co.douglas.co.us

Growing Gardens of Boulder County • growinggardens.org

Home Grown Food • homegrownfoodcolorado.org

Pikes Peak Urban Gardens • ppugardens.org

City of Aurora Free Mulch: Available 24 hours a day outside of
14201 E. Hampden Ave., 303.739.7177

Original Aurora Renewal Tool Lending Program
(North Aurora gardens only): 303.739.7929





Existing Aurora Community Gardens

Aurora Mental Health Center
14301 E. Hampden Ave.

Beeler Street Community Garden
1675 Beeler St.

Blue Chair Community Garden
Colfax Avenue and Dayton Street

Chadash Sanctuary Garden
9840 E. 17th Ave.

DeLaney Community Garden & Farm 170 S. Chambers Road

Gathering Garden at New Hope Church 17699 E. Hampden Ave.

Fletcher Community Garden
9898 E. Colfax Ave.

Hinkley High School Garden
1250 Chambers Road

Montview Park Garden
1907 N. Chester St.

Mountain View United Church Garden 10700 E. Evans Ave.

New Freedom Garden
13th Avenue and Yosemite Street

Nome Park Garden
1200 Nome St.

North Middle School Garden
12095 Montview Boulevard

Strawberry HOA Garden
910 16th St.

Parkview United Church Garden
12444 E. Parkview Drive

Spencer Garrett Garden
11008 E. 17th Ave.

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
111 Del Mar Circle

Wood Adventist Church Garden
1159 S. Moline St.

Opening in 2016

Montview Park Garden
Nome Park Garden

National Resources

American Community Garden Association:
communitygarden.org

National Gardening Association
garden.org:
kidsgardening.org

RESOURCES GRANT FUNDING RESOURCES

Captain Planet Foundation:
captainplanetfoundation.org

**Environmental Grantmakers
Association:** ega.org

Environmental Protection Agency:
epa.gov/ogd

Fiskars® Project Orange Thumb:
fiskars.com

Teacher Vision Funding Programs:
teachervision.fen.com

**Kitchen Gardeners International
Sow it Forward Grants:** kgi.org/grants

Lindbergh Grants Program:
lindberghfoundation.org

**Lowe's Toolbox for Education Grant
Program:** toolboxforeducation.com

Mott Foundation: mott.org

National Education Association:
nea.org/grants

**National Fish and Wildlife
Foundation Conservation Education
Grants:** nfwf.org

National 4-H Council: 4-h.org

National Gardening Association:
kidsgardening.com/grants

NOAA Office of Education:
oesd.noaa.gov/grants

Philanthropy News Digest:
foundationcenter.org/pnd

Profits for the Planet Program:
stonyfield.com

The Rodale Institute's Kidsregen.org:
rodaleinstitute.org

**SeaWorld Environmental
Excellence Award:** seaworldparks.com/teachers/environmental-excellence-awards/

Seeds of Change: seedsofchange.com

**Sustainable Agriculture Research
and Education:** sare.org/grants

Target: target.com

Toshiba America Foundation:
toshiba.com/taf

Toyota TAPESTRY: nsta.org/tapestry

U.S. Department of Education:
ed.gov/fund/landing

WildOnes Seeds for Education Fund:
wildones.org/seeds-for-education/sfe

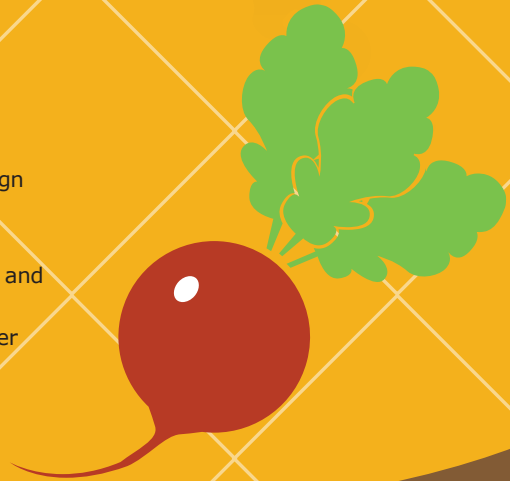
Young Explorers Grant:
nationalgeographic.com/explorers/grants-programs





Getting Ready to Dig In: A Checklist

- Decide to self-manage your garden or partner with an organization like DUG
- Contact the city of Aurora Water Conservation Division for guidance
- Conduct neighborhood outreach
- Enlist at least two garden coordinators
- Enlist a group of volunteers and/or gardeners
- Choose a site (see "What's Required" section for details)
- Develop a long-term lease agreement
- Secure liability insurance
- Identify a water source
- Test the soil and determine amendment needs
- Develop a garden plan and design
- Determine how the garden is accessed
- Determine how tools are stored and maintained
- Identify need for storage or other structures
- Determine how plots are allocated and set fees
- Register your garden with the city of Aurora Water Conservation Division
- Establish garden rules, e.g. children must be accompanied by an adult at all times, application of herbicides is strictly forbidden, tools are the responsibility of the owner.
- Seek grants and donations (optional)
- Obtain 501(c)3 status (optional)



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AURORA**

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