

Community Gardens: What are they?

BY: Gina Pederson, President's Project Coordinator

Nancy Stark, MGC President comments: Gina Pederson is a member of Great Lakes Gardeners in Midland. In Midland she is involved with a committee establishing another community garden to provide food to a local group. Gina's knowledge of the process is extensive and she knows just where to retrieve information from a variety of sources. She is volunteering to provide information and guidance to Michigan garden clubs who want to take on the project with local residents to establish a vegetable garden for a specific group of residents.

As this president's project evolves around the State, Gina is the guiding light when you have questions and concerns. This information is provided so clubs can begin, or continue their gardens, and enter their nomination for the new MGC "Share the Harvest" Awards being offered in 2012-2013 for growing vegetables/herbs to educate and feed the hungry.

GUIDELINES TO A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY GARDEN

Successful community gardens are created and maintained by the community or neighborhood they serve. They can provide food, flowers, trees and a stronger feeling of community for the participants. The purpose of the garden may be education, training, community involvement, food production, or neighborhood beautification.

The community served can be many things, for example: a local school, a family or community center, a church group, a group of neighbors, residents of an apartment complex or senior center. Any group can start a community garden. The keys for success include commitment to the community and garden and easy access to a suitable location.

Many garden clubs and other organizations already create and maintain Civic gardens—for the beautification of a community or area of a community. The difference between Civic gardens and Community gardens is the active participation and ownership of the community itself (neighborhood, church or member group) in the creation and care of the garden.

The *American Community Gardening Association* has a website devoted to helping you create a successful community garden: (<http://www.communitygarden.org/learn/starting-a-community-garden.php>)

To start and maintain a garden, the community needs access to a suitable location:

- Adequate sun
- A reliable water source
- Good soil, or resources for creating raised beds
- Permission to garden in the location

In addition, access to appropriate tools and fencing materials may be required. Plants and seeds may be sourced through grants or local groups depending on the needs of the community.

Once the garden site is acquired and prepared, members of the community set the gardening purpose and requirements and agree to abide by them. They create, maintain and harvest the garden according to the established rules. They may also have to sign agreements with the owner of the property. Fees may be involved.

Sustainable gardens provide education, activity, and community pride in addition to the food or flowers they produce. Local food banks can also benefit from any excess production.

Community gardens are the cornerstone of urban agriculture in Detroit, Flint, Lansing, and other metropolitan areas and many groups are starting gardens to provide food to local food banks and shelters. Many have a central sponsor for organizing the support needed to create and maintain successful gardens. This might be a Food Bank, Community Foundation, City or County sponsored group, Civic volunteer group or other coordinating body.

For more information on starting a community garden:

- American Community Gardening Association
- <http://www.communitygarden.org/>
- MSU Community based food & farming
<http://www.safs.msu.edu/culturaldiv/buildingcommunity.htm>

Information about successful gardens already in Michigan can help you find a style and purpose for your garden:

- Genesee County beautification
<http://www.keepgeneseecountybeautiful.org/>
- Lansing Garden Project
<http://www.greaterlansingfoodbank.org/the-garden-project.html>
- Ann Arbor Project Grow
<http://projectgrowgardens.org/>
- Grand Rapids Area Community Gardens
<http://www.foodshed.net/projprogcg.html>
- Kalamazoo community Gardens
<http://www.fairfoodmatters.org/communityGardens.php>

Michigan Garden Clubs that have community gardens include:

River Valley Garden Club, District III, Sawyer, Berrien County, Michigan has partnered with the Chikaming Township Park Board to establish “The Planting Fields” in Barrien County. Their web site is: www.Rivervalleygardenclub.org

This club provides the following information for your use in establishing a garden in your home town.

Garden Plot Guidelines

The following guidelines are to assist a garden club and the garden plot participants.

1. Garden plots will be assigned to each participant during the registration period.
2. Gardeners are strongly encouraged to plant “A Row for the Hungry” to help neighbors in need through food pantries, churches, and other social service organizations.
3. Each gardener is responsible for maintaining his/her plot and keeping the area surrounding the plot free of trash and litter.
4. Gardeners agree to garden organically.
5. Gardeners are encouraged to be conservative in the use of water. Use of sprinklers for watering is not allowed.
6. Volunteer participation is expected for the community gardening effort at fall cleanup time and for other garden activities.
7. The city/township is not liable for any damage, loss or claim that occurs in connections with the use of the garden plots.

General Information

Plot Side: 20 ft. x 20 ft.

Location: _____

Dates: Open from _____ to _____

Gardeners can make a suggested donation of \$30. per season to cover garden expenses or they can apply for a development grant. This is a community effort to bring healthy produce to every table in the area, so we will try to make seeds, seedlings, tools and helpful guidance available.

We want to provide:

- an accessible water source
- an organic compost pile
- a mulch pile
- well maintained unused plots
- non-biodegradable refuse pickup

Note: Thank you to the River Valley Garden Club for providing this information for all Michigan Garden Clubs, Inc. clubs around the State in support of the 2011-2013 President’s Project of Nancy D. Stark, State President.

APPLICATION FORM

NAME(S) _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Telephone # _____ E-mail address _____

Check the appropriate items:

_____ This is my first year at this garden.

_____ I would like a garden next to a friend. (name) _____

_____ I would like _____ 20'x20' plot(s). Please enter the number of plots you want. A blank will assume one (1) plot.

_____ I have gardened here before and would like the same plot I had last season.

_____ I wish to apply for a development grant to cover the donation.

The suggested donation per plot per growing season to cover water and other garden expenses is \$30.00.

I have read and agree to follow the guidelines and rules of this community garden project located at _____ and sponsored by _____.

Printed name

Signature

Date: _____

Return this form to: _____

Questions? Please contact: _____

GUIDELINES AND RULES

A COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT

LOCATED AT:

- I will contribute a donation of \$30. per 20' x 20' plot per season to help cover garden expenses. A garden grant is available in lieu of a donation.
- I understand that this community garden has as a goal, to plant "A Row for the Hungry" to help the local food pantries, churches and neighbors in need.
- If I must abandon my plot for any reason, I will notify the garden leadership.
- I will keep weeds at a minimum and maintain the areas surrounding my plot free of trash and litter.
- If my plot becomes unkempt, I understand I will be given notice and then have one week to respond to the garden leadership. After that, it may be reassigned or tilled in.
- If I plant tall crops, I will place them where they will not shade neighboring plots.
- I will not use a sprinkler for watering and will be conservative in my use of water.
- I will garden organically and consult with the garden leadership about fertilizers and pest management if the latter proves necessary.
- I will pick only m own crops unless given permission of another plot user.
- I agree to volunteer time toward the gardening effort.
- I will participate in the fall cleanup of the garden.
- I will not bring pets to the community garden.

I understand that neither the garden group nor the owners of the land are responsible for my actions. I therefore, agree to hold harmless the community garden group and/or the (city or township)_____ for any liability, damage loss or claim that occurs in connection with use of the garden by me or any of my guests.

Printed Name _____

Date _____

Signed _____

For further information contact: _____