

Food Forest Blueprint

A Complete Guide to Community Food Forests

Transform vacant lots into abundant ecosystems that feed bodies, build community, and heal the earth.

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Introduction

The most powerful way to transcend political divides is to work together on something beautiful that benefits everyone. Food forests create common ground—literally and figuratively.

This comprehensive guide helps you create a food forest that brings your community together across political divides, regardless of their political background.

What is a Food Forest?

A food forest is a designed ecosystem that mimics a natural forest while producing food. It creates multiple layers of edible plants working together:

- **Canopy Layer:** Large fruit and nut trees (apples, pears, walnuts, pecans)
- **Understory:** Smaller fruit trees and large shrubs (cherries, plums, elderberries, hazelnuts)
- **Shrub Layer:** Berry bushes and medicinal herbs (blueberries, raspberries, roses)
- **Herbaceous Layer:** Vegetables and herbs (kale, chives, comfrey, mint)
- **Ground Cover:** Edible groundcovers and living mulch (strawberries, thyme, clover)
- **Root Layer:** Root vegetables and tubers (Jerusalem artichokes, garlic, onions)
- **Vine Layer:** Climbing fruits and vegetables (grapes, hops, beans, squash)

Why Food Forests Unite Communities

Food forests naturally bring people together because they:

- Provide immediate, tangible benefits everyone can enjoy
- Create beautiful spaces that increase property values

- Offer educational opportunities for all ages
 - Generate ongoing reasons for neighbors to connect
 - Demonstrate care for future generations
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The Bridge-Builder's Communication Toolkit

How to talk about your project so everyone feels included and excited to participate.

Speaking to Conservatives

Frame: "Food Security & Tradition"

Key Messages:

- Emphasize food security and local resilience
- Connect to traditional farming and heritage varieties
- Highlight self-reliance and community preparedness
- Frame as preserving skills for future generations
- Show economic benefits and property value increases

Sample Conversation: "I've been thinking about food security and how we can make our community more self-reliant. What if we created a space where families could grow traditional foods together? It would teach our kids valuable skills and strengthen our neighborhood bonds..."

Pro Tips:

- Lead with shared values: family, tradition, preparedness
- Emphasize learning from elders and passing on skills
- Mention property value benefits and community safety

Speaking to Progressives

Frame: "Climate Justice You Can Taste"

Key Messages:

- Emphasize environmental restoration and carbon sequestration
- Highlight food justice and community access
- Connect to indigenous land practices and wisdom
- Show biodiversity benefits and ecosystem services
- Frame as climate action with immediate local impact

Sample Conversation: "I've been learning about food justice and how communities can take climate action right in their own neighborhood. There's this amazing approach called food forests that helps restore ecosystems while providing fresh food for everyone. Want to explore creating one together?"

Pro Tips:

- Connect to larger environmental and social justice movements
- Emphasize Indigenous land practices and climate solutions
- Highlight equitable access and community empowerment

Speaking to Local Officials

Frame: "Economic Development & Tourism Asset"

Key Messages:

- Present as innovative economic development
- Highlight educational and tourism potential
- Show reduced maintenance costs compared to grass
- Emphasize community engagement and social cohesion
- Provide liability and insurance considerations

Sample Conversation: "I'd like to propose an innovative community development project that could increase property values, provide educational opportunities, and create a unique attraction for our town. Food forests are becoming popular economic development tools in cities nationwide..."

Pro Tips:

- Come with data on successful projects in similar communities
- Address liability concerns upfront with solutions
- Propose pilot project with clear success metrics

Universal Appeals

Frame: "Shared Benefits Everyone Can Embrace"

Key Messages:



- Fresh, free food for families
- Beautiful spaces that bring neighbors together
- Educational opportunities for children
- Increased property values and community pride
- Practical solutions to food costs and availability

Sample Conversation: "What if we could create a beautiful space where neighbors could get fresh food, kids could learn about nature, and we could all work together on something positive? I've been researching community food forests and think our neighborhood would be perfect..."

Pro Tips:

- Focus on immediate, tangible benefits everyone can enjoy
- Invite people to visit existing food forests if possible
- Start small and let success build momentum

Universal Bridge-Building Principles

 **Listen First:** Understand their concerns before sharing your vision  **Find Common Ground:** Start with what you both care about

 **Start Small:** Propose a pilot or small test project first

Implementation Roadmap

A step-by-step journey from idea to thriving community space.

Phase 1: Community Listening (Months 1-2)

Build relationships and understand local needs

Key Steps:

1. Identify key community stakeholders across political spectrum
2. Host informal coffee chats using Bridge-Builder techniques
3. Map existing community assets and potential sites
4. Form initial core team of 3-5 committed individuals

Tips for Success:

- 🎯 **Goal:** Build trust and understand community needs
- 💡 **Tip:** Use the Bridge-Builder communication strategies for different audiences
- ⚠️ **Avoid:** Leading with your solution - listen first, then adapt
- 📅 **Timeline:** Don't rush - relationship building takes time
- ✅ **Success Metric:** 3-5 committed core team members from diverse backgrounds

Phase 2: Site & Partnerships (Months 2-4)

Secure location and build institutional support

Key Steps:

1. Identify and secure appropriate site (schools, parks, vacant lots)
2. Develop partnerships with local organizations
3. Create simple governance structure and agreements
4. Begin permit process and address any regulatory needs

Tips for Success:

- 🎯 **Goal:** Secure location and institutional support
- 💡 **Tip:** Present to officials with economic development framing
- ⚠️ **Avoid:** Overwhelming partners with too many asks too quickly
- 📄 **Documents:** Simple MOU templates included in this guide
- ✅ **Success Metric:** Site secured with appropriate permissions

Phase 3: Design & Planning (Months 3-6)

Collaborative design that incorporates all voices

Key Steps:

1. Host community design workshops using inclusive facilitation
2. Create plant list appropriate for local climate and culture
3. Develop maintenance schedule and responsibility sharing
4. Plan launch event and ongoing programming

Tips for Success:

- 🎯 **Goal:** Collaborative design that includes all voices
- 💡 **Tip:** Use visual design workshops - everyone can participate
- ⚠️ **Avoid:** Expert-driven design that excludes community input
- 🌱 **Plants:** Choose varieties meaningful to different cultural groups
- ✅ **Success Metric:** Design that reflects community input and needs

Phase 4: Implementation (Months 6-12)

Plant, grow, and celebrate together

Key Steps:

1. Organize community planting days as social events
2. Establish regular maintenance gatherings with food/music
3. Create educational programming and harvest celebrations
4. Document and share success stories

Tips for Success:

- 🎯 **Goal:** Create ongoing community connection through the project
- 💡 **Tip:** Make work days social events with food and music
- ⚠️ **Avoid:** Burnout - distribute responsibilities widely
- 🎉 **Celebrate:** Regular harvest festivals and community meals
- ✅ **Success Metric:** Self-sustaining community participation

Timeline Overview

- **Months 1-2:** Community Listening
- **Months 2-4:** Site & Partnerships
- **Months 3-6:** Design & Planning
- **Months 6-12:** Implementation

Note: Phases can overlap • Adapt timeline to your community's pace • Some projects move faster, others need more time

Plant Selection Guide

Climate Zone Considerations

USDA Zones 3-5 (Cold Climates)

Trees & Large Shrubs:

- Apple varieties: Honeycrisp, Prairie Sensation, Haralson
- Pear: Ure, John varieties
- Plum: Brookgold, Compass Cherry
- Hazelnut: Jefferson, Theta varieties
- Elderberry: American Black Elderberry

Berry Bushes:

- Blueberry: Northland, Patriot, Northcountry
- Raspberry: Red River, Souris, Boyne
- Blackcurrant: Ben Sarek, Consort
- Gooseberry: Pixwell, Hinnomaki Red
- Sea Buckthorn: Male and female varieties

Herbaceous & Ground Cover:

- Rhubarb, asparagus, wild ginger
- Strawberry: Kent, Cavendish varieties
- Wild mint, bergamot, nodding onion
- Comfrey, nettle, wild leek

USDA Zones 6-8 (Temperate Climates)**Trees & Large Shrubs:**

- Apple: Liberty, Enterprise, Pristine
- Pear: Bartlett, Anjou, Asian varieties
- Cherry: Montmorency, Bing, Rainier
- Peach: Redhaven, Elberta, Indian varieties
- Walnut: English, Black, Carpathian strains
- Chestnut: Dunstan, Colossal varieties

Berry Bushes:

- Blueberry: Bluecrop, Duke, Elliott
- Raspberry: Heritage, Caroline, Anne
- Blackberry: Triple Crown, Chester
- Grape: Concord, Niagara, Norton
- Fig: Chicago Hardy, Brown Turkey

Herbaceous & Ground Cover:

- Asparagus, artichoke, perennial vegetables
- Strawberry: Jewel, Allstar varieties
- Herbs: oregano, thyme, sage, rosemary
- Wild ginger, violets, wood sorrel

USDA Zones 9-11 (Warm Climates)**Trees & Large Shrubs:**

- Citrus: Orange, lemon, grapefruit, lime
- Avocado: Hass, Fuerte, Reed varieties
- Mango: Tommy Atkins, Kent, Keitt
- Fig: Celeste, LSU Purple, Brown Turkey
- Pomegranate, persimmon, jujube
- Moringa, breadfruit, jackfruit

Berry Bushes:

- Blueberry: Southern varieties (Rabbiteye)
- Blackberry: Arapaho, Navaho
- Pineapple guava, Surinam cherry
- Loquat, passion fruit, dragon fruit

Herbaceous & Ground Cover:

- Sweet potato, cassava, taro
- Prickly pear cactus, aloe vera
- Tropical herbs: lemongrass, galangal
- Ground cover: beach pea, tropical mint

Cultural Food Preferences

European Heritage Plants

- Apple and pear varieties from ancestral regions
- Herbs: parsley, dill, caraway, fennel
- Vegetables: cabbage, leeks, turnips
- Berries: gooseberries, black currants

Asian Heritage Plants

- Asian pears, persimmons, jujube
- Herbs: shiso, Asian chives, lemongrass
- Vegetables: daikon, Chinese cabbage, mizuna
- Medicinal: goji berries, Asian ginseng

Latin American Heritage Plants

- Chiles, tomatillos, epazote
- Fruit: guava, papaya, passion fruit
- Herbs: cilantro, Mexican mint marigold
- Root vegetables: yacon, oca, mashua

African Heritage Plants

- Okra, black-eyed peas, sweet potato
- Greens: amaranth, African spinach
- Fruits: tamarind, baobab (where climate allows)
- Herbs: African potato, wild garlic

Indigenous North American Plants

- Three Sisters: corn, beans, squash
- Wild rice, wild blueberries, elderberries
- Herbs: wild mint, bergamot, sage
- Nuts: black walnut, hickory, pine nuts

Maintenance Requirements

Low Maintenance Plants (Set and Forget)

- **Trees:** Established fruit trees after 3-5 years
- **Shrubs:** Elderberry, sea buckthorn, serviceberry
- **Perennials:** Asparagus, rhubarb, comfrey
- **Ground Cover:** Wild strawberry, wild mint

- **Characteristics:** Drought tolerant, disease resistant, self-propagating

Medium Maintenance Plants (Seasonal Care)

- **Trees:** Most fruit trees (pruning, occasional pest management)
- **Shrubs:** Blueberries, raspberries, currants
- **Perennials:** Most herbs, established vegetables
- **Care Needed:** Annual pruning, mulching, seasonal harvesting

High Maintenance Plants (Regular Attention)

- **Vegetables:** Annual crops, tender perennials
- **Specialty Fruits:** Grapes (training), dwarf fruit trees
- **Care Needed:** Regular watering, pest monitoring, frequent harvesting

Companion Planting Guide

Nitrogen Fixers (Improve Soil for Neighbors)

- **Trees:** Black locust, alder, mesquite
- **Shrubs:** Autumn olive, Russian olive, sea buckthorn
- **Herbaceous:** Comfrey, clover, vetch, beans

Pest Deterrent Plants

- **Aromatic herbs:** rosemary, lavender, mint, basil
- **Alliums:** chives, garlic, onions
- **Flowers:** marigolds, nasturtiums, calendula

Pollinator Support Plants

- **Spring:** fruit tree blossoms, willow, maple
- **Summer:** herbs, sunflowers, wildflowers
- **Fall:** asters, goldenrod, late-blooming herbs

Legal & Insurance Considerations

Site Permission and Land Use

Public Land Partnerships

Schools:

- **Contact:** Facilities manager and principal
- **Benefits to highlight:** Educational opportunities, reduced maintenance costs
- **Required documents:** MOU, insurance certificate, maintenance plan
- **Common concerns:** Liability, vandalism, maintenance responsibility

Parks Department:

- **Contact:** Parks director and city council liaison

- Benefits to highlight: Community engagement, unique attraction, reduced mowing costs
- Required documents: Use permit, insurance, governance structure
- Common concerns: Public access, maintenance standards, long-term commitment

Municipal Vacant Lots:

- Contact: City planning and economic development
- Benefits to highlight: Increased property values, community beautification, crime reduction
- Required documents: Land use agreement, site plan, community support letters
- Common concerns: Future development plans, soil contamination, zoning compliance

Private Land Arrangements

Individual Property Owners:

- Benefits: Increased property value, reduced maintenance, community goodwill
- Legal structure: Revocable license or lease agreement
- Insurance: Property owner maintains primary coverage
- Exit strategy: Clear terms for project removal if needed

Churches and Nonprofits:

- Benefits: Mission alignment, community outreach, educational programming
- Legal structure: Partnership agreement or fiscal sponsorship
- Tax considerations: Maintain nonprofit status compliance
- Governance: Joint oversight committee

Sample Agreements

Basic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Template

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
Community Food Forest Project

Parties:

- [Community Group Name]
- [Property Owner/Institution Name]

Purpose:

This MOU establishes a partnership to create and maintain a community food forest that provides educational, environmental, and social benefits to the community.

Responsibilities:

Community Group Commits To:

- Organize regular maintenance and care of the food forest
- Provide educational programming for the community
- Maintain appropriate insurance coverage
- Follow all applicable regulations and best practices
- Include diverse community voices in decision-making
- Respect property boundaries and usage guidelines

Property Owner Commits To:

- Provide designated space for the food forest project
- Allow reasonable community access during agreed hours
- Support educational and community programming
- Provide basic utilities access if available and needed
- Communicate any concerns or conflicts promptly

Shared Commitments:

- Regular communication through monthly check-ins
- Annual review of agreement and project success
- Conflict resolution through good-faith dialogue
- Environmental stewardship and sustainable practices

Terms:

- Duration: [Initial term, typically 3-5 years with renewal option]
- Review: Annual assessment of project success and community benefit
- Modification: Changes require written agreement by both parties
- Termination: 90-day notice required, with site restoration plan

Insurance and Liability:

- Community group maintains general liability insurance
- Property owner maintains property insurance
- All participants sign liability waivers for activities
- Clear documentation of safety protocols and emergency procedures

Signatures:

[Community Group Representative] Date: _____

[Property Owner Representative] Date: _____

Liability Waiver Template

COMMUNITY FOOD FOREST PARTICIPATION WAIVER

Participant Information:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Emergency Contact: _____

Activity Description:

I am voluntarily participating in community food forest activities including but not limited to: planting, weeding

Assumption of Risk:

I understand that these activities involve inherent risks including but not limited to:

- Use of gardening tools and equipment
- Exposure to plants, insects, and weather conditions
- Physical exertion and potential for minor injuries
- Allergic reactions to plants or materials

Release of Claims:

I voluntarily assume these risks and release [Organization Name], [Property Owner], and their representatives from

Safety Acknowledgment:

I agree to:

- Follow all safety guidelines and instructions
- Use appropriate protective equipment when provided
- Report unsafe conditions or injuries immediately
- Supervise my minor children at all times

Medical Information:

Allergies/Medical Conditions: _____

Medications that might affect participation: _____

I have read and understood this waiver and sign it voluntarily.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian (if under 18): _____ Date: _____

Insurance Options

General Liability Insurance

What it covers:

- Bodily injury to participants or visitors
- Property damage during activities
- Personal injury claims (defamation, privacy violations)

Typical costs:

- Small community groups: \$200-500 annually
- Larger organizations: \$500-1500 annually
- Event-specific coverage: \$100-300 per event

Where to obtain:

- Nonprofit insurance specialists (Philadelphia Insurance, Nonprofits Insurance Alliance)
- General business insurance providers
- Event insurance companies for specific activities

Property Insurance Considerations

Property owner responsibilities:

- Maintain existing property insurance
- Notify insurer about food forest project
- Ensure community activities are covered under policy
- Consider umbrella policy for additional protection

Alternative Coverage Models

Fiscal Sponsorship:

- Partner with established nonprofit for insurance coverage
- Sponsor organization provides liability protection
- Community group operates under sponsor's insurance umbrella
- Typical cost: 5-15% of donations for administrative fees

Municipal Coverage:

- Some cities extend coverage to approved community projects
- Requires formal approval and compliance with city policies
- Often includes additional safety training requirements
- May require annual reporting and project assessment

Permit Requirements

Common Permits and Approvals

Land Use Permits:

- Special use permit for community gardens/food forests
- Temporary use permit for events and programming
- Variance requests if zoning doesn't explicitly allow food production

Construction Permits:

- Building permits for structures (sheds, compost bins, fencing)
- Electrical permits for water access or lighting
- Plumbing permits for irrigation systems

Health Department Approvals:

- Food safety guidelines for community harvests
- Composting permits for organic waste processing
- Water testing requirements for irrigation sources

Environmental Permits:

- Soil testing and remediation if contamination suspected
- Stormwater management compliance
- Tree removal permits if site preparation needed

Permit Application Tips

Research Phase:

- Contact planning department early in process
- Request pre-application meetings to discuss project
- Identify all applicable regulations and requirements
- Document community support with letters and signatures

Application Strategy:

- Frame project in terms of city goals and comprehensive plans
- Emphasize economic development and community benefits
- Provide detailed site plans and maintenance schedules
- Include letters of support from neighbors and community leaders

Timeline Management:

- Permit processes typically take 2-6 months
- Apply for permits during Phase 2 of implementation
- Have backup sites identified in case permits are denied
- Build permit costs into project budget (\$500-2000 typically)

Success Stories

Medellín, Colombia: From Violence to Innovation

In the 1990s, Medellín was one of the world's most dangerous cities, with violence rates that seemed insurmountable. The city's transformation began with a radical idea: instead of spending more on security, they would invest in public innovation and community spaces.

The Transformation:

- Redirected security budget to build libraries, parks, and science centers
- Created "green corridors" connecting neighborhoods through nature

- Established community gardens and urban farms throughout the city
- Integrated public transportation to connect previously isolated areas

Food Forest Components:

- Over 100 community gardens producing food for local families
- Educational gardens in schools teaching traditional and modern agriculture
- Medicinal plant gardens preserving indigenous knowledge
- Urban orchards providing free fruit in public spaces

Results:

- Homicide rate dropped by 95% between 1991 and 2015
- Property values increased across all neighborhoods
- Youth engagement in education and productive activities increased dramatically
- The city now hosts Latin America's largest science festival
- Medellín became a model for urban transformation worldwide

Key Lessons:

- Community investment is more effective than security spending
- Food production creates immediate, tangible benefits that build trust
- Including all voices in planning ensures project sustainability
- Beauty and abundance naturally reduce community tensions

Detroit, Michigan: Growing Hope in Motor City

Detroit's economic collapse left thousands of vacant lots, but residents saw opportunity where others saw blight. The city now has over 1,400 community gardens and food forests.

Michigan Urban Farming Initiative (MUFI):

- Started on 2 acres of abandoned land in Detroit's North End
- Now includes food forest, community garden, and education center
- Provides free produce to over 2,000 households annually
- Created jobs and training programs for community members

What Makes It Work:

- **Community Ownership:** Residents lead all decision-making
- **Cultural Inclusion:** Plants and programming reflect neighborhood diversity
- **Economic Integration:** Farmer's markets and food processing create income
- **Educational Programming:** Youth programs teach agriculture and entrepreneurship
- **Policy Advocacy:** Influenced city policies to support urban agriculture

Measurable Impacts:

- Increased property values within 500 feet of gardens by 9.3%
- Reduced crime rates in target neighborhoods by 16%
- Provided over 400,000 pounds of fresh produce since 2011
- Created 30+ full-time equivalent jobs in agriculture and food processing

Replication Lessons:

- Start small with one successful site, then expand
- Partner with existing community organizations and leaders
- Document and share successes to build broader support
- Integrate workforce development with food production

Beacon Food Forest, Seattle: Suburban Community Building

Seattle's Beacon Hill neighborhood created the largest community food forest in the United States on 7 acres of public park land.

Development Process:

- **Years 1-2:** Community visioning and design process involving 100+ neighbors
- **Years 3-4:** Phased planting with hundreds of volunteers
- **Years 5-7:** Establishment and ongoing community programming
- **Current:** Self-sustaining community space with regular programming

Community Bridge-Building:

- Design process intentionally included residents across political spectrum
- Plant selection reflected neighborhood's cultural diversity (Asian, Latino, African American, European heritage plants)
- Programming includes both environmental education and traditional food preservation
- Governance structure balances efficiency with inclusive decision-making

Overcoming Challenges:

- **Initial Opposition:** Some neighbors worried about maintenance and safety
- **Solution:** Pilot area demonstrated success before full implementation
- **Maintenance Concerns:** Structured volunteer system with skilled coordination
- **Vandalism Issues:** Community engagement reduced problems over time

Ongoing Success Factors:

- Monthly volunteer work parties that double as social events
- Seasonal festivals celebrating harvests and cultural traditions
- Educational partnerships with local schools and community colleges
- Clear maintenance protocols that distribute responsibility

Incredible Edible Todmorden, England: Town-Wide Food Growing

The small English town of Todmorden (population 15,000) transformed itself into an "incredible edible" community where food grows everywhere.

The Concept:

- Food growing in every available public space
- Three core principles: Community, Learning, Business
- "If you eat, you're in" - no membership requirements or political tests
- Propaganda gardening: planting food in unexpected places

Implementation:

- Started with small guerrilla plantings in town center

- Expanded to railway stations, schools, police stations, cemeteries
- Developed into formal partnerships with local government
- Created educational programs linking local food to global issues

Political Bridge-Building:

- Avoided all political labeling or partisan framing
- Focused on practical benefits everyone could support
- Used humor and joy rather than guilt or pressure
- Created spaces for people to contribute according to their abilities

Economic Development:

- Local food businesses experienced 30% growth
- Tourism increased with "edible tours" and garden visits
- Property values rose as town became known for innovation
- Youth retention improved as young people saw opportunities locally

Scaling Impact:

- Model has been replicated in over 100 communities globally
- Influenced UK national policy on community food growing
- Sparked similar movements across Europe and North America
- Demonstrates how local action can influence systems change

Havana, Cuba: Urban Agriculture at Scale

Economic necessity forced Havana to develop the world's most comprehensive urban agriculture system, providing lessons for voluntary community food projects.

System Overview:

- Over 8,000 urban gardens producing 1.5 million tons of food annually
- Organoponicos: raised bed systems using organic methods
- Intensive suburban agriculture on available land
- Integration with education, healthcare, and community development

Community Organization:

- Neighborhood-based management with city coordination
- Knowledge sharing through farmer-to-farmer networks
- Integration of traditional ecological knowledge with modern techniques
- Strong connection between food production and cultural identity

Lessons for Community Projects:

- Technical training greatly increases productivity and sustainability
- Connecting food production to cultural traditions builds commitment
- Regular knowledge sharing prevents common problems
- Integration with other community needs (education, health) multiplies benefits

Common Success Factors Across All Stories

Community Ownership:

- Local residents lead planning and implementation
- Decision-making processes include diverse voices
- Project goals reflect community-identified needs
- Long-term governance ensures project continuity

Cultural Integration:

- Plant selection reflects neighborhood cultural heritage
- Programming celebrates diverse traditions and knowledge
- Multiple languages and communication styles accommodate all residents
- Traditional ecological knowledge is honored alongside modern techniques

Economic Benefits:

- Projects provide immediate, tangible value to participants
- Cost savings on food and increased property values create buy-in
- Integration with local businesses creates economic multiplier effects
- Workforce development opportunities emerge from project needs

Educational Components:

- Programming serves multiple age groups and skill levels
- Skills transfer ensures project knowledge spreads
- Connection to larger environmental and social issues builds understanding
- Youth engagement creates long-term project sustainability

Political Neutrality:

- Projects avoid partisan framing while serving community needs
- Benefits are accessible to residents regardless of political views
- Governance structures balance efficiency with inclusion
- Success metrics focus on community outcomes rather than ideological goals

Resources & Templates

Funding Strategies

Grant Opportunities

Federal Funding Sources:

- **USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grants:** \$10,000-\$300,000
 - Focus: Community food security and agricultural development
 - Requirements: Nonprofit status, community partnership, matching funds
 - Application cycle: Annual, typically due March-April
- **EPA Environmental Justice Small Grants:** \$30,000-\$75,000
 - Focus: Community-based environmental projects
 - Requirements: Grassroots organization, underserved community
 - Application cycle: Annual, typically due November-December

- **CDC Healthy Communities Program:** \$25,000-\$100,000
 - Focus: Community health improvement through environmental change
 - Requirements: Health department partnership, evidence-based approach
 - Application cycle: Varies by state and local implementation

State and Regional Funding:

- **State Environmental Departments:** Green infrastructure and stormwater management grants
- **Community Development Block Grants:** Economic development and community improvement
- **Agricultural Extension Programs:** Education and demonstration project funding
- **Regional Foundations:** Local foundations often prioritize community development projects

Private Foundation Grants:

- **Kresge Foundation:** \$50,000-\$500,000 for community development
- **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:** Health-focused community projects
- **W.K. Kellogg Foundation:** Rural community and agricultural development
- **Local Community Foundations:** Often best source for smaller, local projects

Crowdfunding Approaches

Platform Selection:

- **Kickstarter:** Best for projects with clear deliverables and timeline
- **GoFundMe:** Flexible platform good for ongoing fundraising
- **Fundrazr:** Nonprofit-focused with built-in donor management
- **ioby:** Specifically designed for neighborhood improvement projects

Successful Campaign Elements:

- **Compelling Story:** Personal narratives about why the project matters
- **Visual Content:** Before/after renderings, videos of similar projects
- **Clear Budget:** Transparent explanation of how funds will be used
- **Community Endorsements:** Letters of support from diverse community members
- **Regular Updates:** Consistent communication throughout campaign

Campaign Timeline:

- **Pre-launch (4-6 weeks):** Build email list, create content, recruit champions
- **Launch Phase (Week 1-2):** Heavy promotion to personal networks
- **Mid-campaign (Week 3-4):** Media outreach, community events, social media push
- **Final Push (Week 5-6):** Urgency messaging, challenge grants, final appeals

Local Business Partnership Models

Sponsorship Opportunities:

- **Tool and Equipment Donations:** Hardware stores, nurseries, equipment rental
- **Materials Sponsorship:** Soil, mulch, plants, irrigation supplies
- **Service Donations:** Site preparation, delivery, technical expertise
- **Event Sponsorship:** Educational programming, harvest festivals, signage

Business Benefit Messaging:

- **Marketing Exposure:** Logo placement, social media recognition, newsletter mentions
- **Employee Engagement:** Volunteer opportunities for team building
- **Community Goodwill:** Visible demonstration of local investment and care
- **Tax Benefits:** Charitable deductions for donations and sponsorships

Partnership Structures:

- **Adopt-a-Section:** Businesses sponsor specific areas of the food forest
- **Annual Sponsorship:** Ongoing financial support in exchange for recognition
- **In-Kind Partnerships:** Services or materials rather than cash contributions
- **Event Partnerships:** Sponsor specific educational programs or festivals

Plant Databases

Climate-Appropriate Species Lists

Cold Climate Plants (USDA Zones 3-5):

Fruit Trees:

- Apple: Prairie Sensation, Honeycrisp, Haralson, Prairie Magic
- Pear: Ure, John, Bartlett (hardy strains)
- Plum: Brookgold, Compass Cherry, Evans Cherry
- Cherry: Romance series, Evans Bali
- Small trees: Serviceberry, Chums, Haskaps

Nut Trees:

- Hazelnut: Jefferson, Theta, Epsilon varieties
- Walnut: Carpathian English, Black Walnut, Heartnut
- Chestnut: Dunstan varieties (disease-resistant)

Berry Bushes:

- Blueberry: Northland, Patriot, Northcountry, Northsky
- Raspberry: Red River, Souris, Boyne, Arctic Red
- Black Currant: Ben Sarek, Consort, Titania
- Gooseberry: Pixwell, Hinnomaki Red, Invicta
- Sea Buckthorn: Sunny Boy (male), Leikora (female)

Herbaceous Plants:

- Asparagus: Mary Washington, Jersey varieties
- Rhubarb: Canada Red, Victoria, MacDonald
- Wild Ginger, Wild Leek, Nodding Onion
- Comfrey, Nettle, Wild Mint

Temperate Climate Plants (USDA Zones 6-8):

Fruit Trees:

- Apple: Liberty, Enterprise, Pristine, Arkansas Black
- Pear: Bartlett, Anjou, Bosc, Asian varieties
- Cherry: Montmorency, Bing, Rainier, North Star

- Peach: Redhaven, Elberta, Indian varieties, Saturn (donut)
- Plum: Stanley, Greengage, Damson, Japanese varieties

Nut Trees:

- Walnut: English, Carpathian, Black varieties
- Chestnut: Colossal, Nevada, Dunstan hybrids
- Pecan: Pawnee, Desirable, Elliott varieties
- Hazelnut: Jefferson, Theta, Barcelona varieties

Berry Bushes:

- Blueberry: Bluecrop, Duke, Elliott, Legacy
- Raspberry: Heritage, Caroline, Anne, Fall Gold
- Blackberry: Triple Crown, Chester, Arapaho
- Grape: Concord, Niagara, Norton, Chambourcin
- Fig: Chicago Hardy, Brown Turkey, Celeste

Herbaceous Plants:

- Asparagus: Jersey Knight, Purple Passion
- Artichoke: Green Globe, Purple varieties
- Walking Onion, Egyptian Onion, Multiplier Onions
- Herbs: Oregano, Thyme, Sage, Rosemary
- Ground Covers: Wild Strawberry, Wintergreen, Violets

Warm Climate Plants (USDA Zones 9-11):

Fruit Trees:

- Citrus: Orange (Valencia, Navel), Lemon (Meyer, Eureka), Lime (Key, Persian)
- Avocado: Hass, Fuerte, Reed, Pinkerton
- Mango: Tommy Atkins, Kent, Keitt, Palmer
- Fig: Celeste, LSU Purple, Brown Turkey, Chicago Hardy
- Pomegranate: Wonderful, Red Silk, Sweet varieties
- Persimmon: Fuyu, Hachiya, American varieties

Tropical/Subtropical Trees:

- Moringa: Fast-growing, highly nutritious leaves
- Breadfruit: Ulu varieties where climate permits
- Jackfruit: Smaller varieties suitable for community spaces
- Loquat: Gold Nugget, Big Jim varieties
- Jujube: Li, Shanxi Li, Honey Jar varieties

Berry and Vine Plants:

- Blueberry: Southern Highbush, Rabbiteye varieties
- Passion Fruit: Purple and yellow varieties
- Dragon Fruit: White and red flesh varieties
- Prickly Pear: Spineless varieties for fruit production
- Surinam Cherry, Pineapple Guava

Herbaceous and Ground Cover:

- Sweet Potato: Beauregard, Centennial varieties
- Cassava: Sweet varieties for temperate cultivation
- Lemongrass, Galangal, Turmeric, Ginger
- Tropical Mint, Mexican Mint Marigold
- Edible Hibiscus, Chaya (Mayan Spinach)

Seasonal Planting Calendars

Spring Planting (March-May):

- Bare root trees and shrubs while dormant
- Cool season vegetables: lettuce, peas, radishes
- Herb transplants: oregano, thyme, sage
- Direct seed: beans, squash, sunflowers
- Divide perennials: rhubarb, asparagus, herbs

Summer Planting (June-August):

- Container trees and shrubs with consistent watering
- Warm season vegetables: tomatoes, peppers, eggplant
- Heat-tolerant herbs: basil, cilantro, dill
- Cover crops for fall soil improvement
- Late summer vegetables: fall lettuce, spinach

Fall Planting (September-November):

- Ideal time for tree and shrub establishment
- Garlic, shallots, and multiplier onions
- Cool season vegetables for winter harvest
- Cover crops: clover, vetch, winter rye
- Bulbs for spring flowers and pollinator support

Winter Planning (December-February):

- Order plants and seeds for upcoming season
- Plan garden layout changes and improvements
- Maintain tools and equipment
- Indoor seed starting for warm season crops
- Pruning of dormant trees and shrubs

Companion Planting Guides

The Three Sisters (Traditional Indigenous Polyculture):

- **Corn:** Provides structure for beans to climb
- **Beans:** Fix nitrogen in soil for corn and squash
- **Squash:** Large leaves shade soil, retain moisture, deter pests
- **Modern Adaptations:** Add sunflowers, amaranth, or Jerusalem artichokes

Fruit Tree Guilds:

- **Apple Tree Guild:** Comfrey (deep nutrients), chives (pest deterrent), nasturtiums (ground cover), white clover (nitrogen fixing)
- **Citrus Tree Guild:** Rosemary (pest deterrent), lavender (pollinator support), Mediterranean herbs, pomegranate understory
- **Stone Fruit Guild:** Tansy (pest control), yarrow (soil improvement), strawberries (ground cover), nitrogen-fixing shrubs

Pest Management Combinations:

- **Brassica Protection:** Plant with herbs (dill, oregano), flowers (marigolds, nasturtiums), alliums (garlic, chives)
 - **Aphid Management:** Encourage beneficial insects with yarrow, fennel, and native wildflowers
 - **Soil Health:** Integrate deep-rooted plants (comfrey, dandelion) with shallow-rooted crops
-

Legal & Insurance Considerations (Continued)

Community Management Structures

Governance Models

Cooperative Model:

- **Structure:** Member-owned and democratically controlled
- **Decision Making:** One member, one vote on major decisions
- **Benefits:** Strong community ownership, equitable participation
- **Legal Requirements:** Articles of incorporation, bylaws, membership agreements
- **Best For:** Established communities with high trust and participation

Nonprofit Organization:

- **Structure:** Board of directors with community advisory committee
- **Decision Making:** Board votes with community input process
- **Benefits:** Eligible for grants, tax-exempt status, professional management
- **Legal Requirements:** 501(c)(3) application, board governance, annual reporting
- **Best For:** Projects needing significant funding or professional coordination

Informal Association:

- **Structure:** Loose network of volunteers with rotating coordination
- **Decision Making:** Consensus-based with designated facilitators
- **Benefits:** Low barriers to participation, flexible operations
- **Legal Requirements:** Minimal, but consider liability and financial management
- **Best For:** Small projects with high community trust and low financial needs

Fiscal Sponsorship:

- **Structure:** Existing nonprofit sponsors the project
- **Decision Making:** Sponsor organization provides legal oversight, community manages operations
- **Benefits:** Access to grants, professional administration, reduced startup costs
- **Legal Requirements:** Sponsorship agreement, compliance with sponsor policies

- **Best For:** New projects wanting nonprofit benefits without forming new organization

Conflict Resolution Procedures

Prevention Strategies:

- Clear communication protocols and decision-making processes
- Regular community meetings with structured agendas
- Written agreements about responsibilities and expectations
- Rotating leadership to prevent power concentration
- Multiple ways for community members to provide input

Conflict Resolution Steps:

1. **Direct Communication:** Encourage parties to discuss issues directly
2. **Facilitated Dialogue:** Neutral community member helps mediate discussion
3. **Community Circle:** Bring issue to larger group for input and problem-solving
4. **Outside Mediation:** Professional mediator if community process unsuccessful
5. **Governance Decision:** Board or steering committee makes binding decision

Common Conflict Areas and Solutions:

- **Maintenance Responsibilities:** Create clear task lists and rotation schedules
- **Harvest Protocols:** Establish rules about when, how much, and who can harvest
- **Design Changes:** Require community input process for major modifications
- **Resource Allocation:** Transparent budgeting and spending approval processes
- **Inclusion Issues:** Regular assessment of participation barriers and solutions

Maintenance Scheduling Systems

Seasonal Task Calendar:

Spring Tasks (March-May):

- Week 1-2: Tool maintenance, site cleanup, pruning completion
- Week 3-4: Soil preparation, compost application, mulch renewal
- Week 5-6: Tree and shrub planting, irrigation system startup
- Week 7-8: Vegetable planting, herb transplanting, pathway maintenance

Summer Tasks (June-August):

- Weekly: Watering, weeding, pest monitoring, harvesting
- Monthly: Pruning suckers, deadheading flowers, compost turning
- Seasonal: Summer mulching, support structure maintenance, preserving harvests

Fall Tasks (September-November):

- Week 1-4: Fall planting, seed collection, harvest preservation
- Week 5-8: Leaf collection for compost, tool cleaning, winter preparation
- Month 3: Planning for next year, budget review, governance assessment

Winter Tasks (December-February):

- Monthly: Planning meetings, seed ordering, education events
- Seasonal: Tool maintenance, greenhouse activities, pruning dormant plants

- **Annual:** Insurance renewal, permit updates, financial reporting

Volunteer Coordination:

- **Work Party Schedule:** Regular monthly gatherings for major tasks
 - **Individual Adoptions:** Community members take responsibility for specific areas
 - **Skill-Based Volunteering:** Match tasks to individual expertise and interests
 - **Time Banking:** Track contributions to ensure equitable participation
 - **Recognition Systems:** Celebrate volunteer contributions and achievements
-

Get Started Today

Every community can create projects that bring people together. Start with one small step:

Immediate Action Steps

1. Download and Share This Guide

- Email to potential collaborators
- Post excerpts on community social media
- Leave copies at community centers, libraries, coffee shops
- Adapt communication strategies for your specific community

2. Start Bridge-Building Conversations

- Use conversation starters from the Communication Toolkit
- Host informal coffee chats with diverse neighbors
- Attend existing community meetings to share the vision
- Listen more than you speak in early conversations

3. Identify Potential Sites

- Walk your neighborhood looking for underutilized spaces
- Research property ownership and current zoning
- Take photos and notes about soil, sunlight, and access
- Consider multiple backup options in case first choice doesn't work

4. Build Your Core Team

- Recruit 3-5 committed individuals representing different perspectives
- Include people with different skills: communication, organization, technical knowledge
- Ensure team reflects your community's diversity
- Meet regularly to maintain momentum and shared vision

5. Connect with the Broader Movement

- Join online communities of food forest creators
- Visit existing food forests in nearby communities
- Attend permaculture and community gardening workshops
- Share your progress and learn from others' experiences

Resources for Getting Started

Educational Opportunities:

- Permaculture Design Certificate courses
- Community gardening workshops through extension services
- Food forest tours and volunteer opportunities
- Online courses and webinars on sustainable agriculture

Technical Support:

- Local master gardener programs
- Permaculture practitioners and consultants
- Agricultural extension agents
- Experienced community garden coordinators

Networking Opportunities:

- Community gardening associations
- Local food policy councils
- Neighborhood associations and community groups
- Environmental and sustainability organizations

Long-term Vision and Impact

As your food forest establishes and grows, it becomes more than just a garden—it becomes a living demonstration of what's possible when communities work together. Consider these broader impacts:

Community Resilience:

- Local food security reduces dependence on distant supply chains
- Skill sharing builds collective knowledge and capability
- Social connections create support networks for other challenges
- Economic benefits keep resources circulating locally

Environmental Healing:

- Carbon sequestration in trees and soil
- Biodiversity habitat in urban and suburban areas
- Stormwater management and soil health improvement
- Reduced chemical inputs compared to conventional landscaping

Cultural Bridge-Building:

- Shared work creates relationships across political and cultural divides
- Food traditions from different cultures find common ground
- Intergenerational knowledge sharing preserves wisdom
- Beautiful spaces inspire hope and possibility

Model for Transformation:

- Successful projects inspire replication in other neighborhoods
- Demonstrates that local action can address global challenges
- Shows alternative to consumption-based approaches to community building

- Creates template for redirecting resources from conflict to cooperation

Connecting to the Larger Movement

Your local food forest is part of a growing global movement toward community resilience, environmental restoration, and cooperative abundance. As you build your project, consider how it connects to:

Local Food Systems:

- Partnerships with restaurants, farmers markets, food hubs
- Integration with school meal programs and nutrition education
- Support for local food businesses and value-added processing
- Policy advocacy for supportive local food regulations

Climate Action:

- Carbon sequestration measurement and reporting
- Climate adaptation through diverse, resilient food systems
- Education about food's role in climate change
- Demonstration of regenerative alternatives to industrial agriculture

Social Justice:

- Ensuring equitable access to fresh, healthy food
- Creating economic opportunities in underinvested communities
- Honoring indigenous knowledge and land practices
- Building inclusive spaces that welcome all community members

Economic Democracy:

- Cooperative ownership and decision-making models
- Local economic development that keeps wealth in community
- Alternative economic relationships based on sharing and reciprocity
- Demonstration of post-consumer economic possibilities

Conclusion

Food forests represent more than just innovative agriculture—they're living laboratories for the kind of world we want to create. When communities come together to grow food, they're also growing trust, resilience, and hope.

Every tree planted is a vote for the future. Every shared harvest is a demonstration that abundance is possible when we work together. Every neighbor who discovers they can collaborate across differences is a step toward the peaceful, thriving world we all want for our children.

The blueprint you hold in your hands is an invitation to plant seeds of transformation in your own community. The tools, strategies, and examples provided here have been tested in communities around the world. Now it's your turn to adapt them to your unique place and circumstances.

Remember: you don't need to be an expert to start. You don't need perfect conditions or unanimous support. You just need to begin, one conversation and one seed at a time.

The earth is ready. Your community is ready. The only question is: are you ready to begin?

For the complete interactive version, updates, and connection with other communities building food forests, visit: [Unity Beyond the Known - Community Projects](#)

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Cover image: Community members of all ages working together in a thriving food forest, with fruit trees, berry bushes, and vegetable gardens creating a beautiful, abundant landscape that brings neighbors together across all differences.