

Starting a community garden

a ten step process



1. MAKING A START

There are two ways to start a community garden, from the bottom up or the top down.

Both approaches work and which one is used depends upon where the proposal for a community garden comes from.

BOTTOM-UP

Working from the bottom-up is the most common:

- a group of people get together
- they approach the local council or some other institution for help in finding land and, perhaps, for other assistance
- alternatively, they might have found a site where they would like to make their community garden; they then find who the landowner is and approach them
- they work out a governance structure (see Plan of Management template)—how they will make

decisions, resolve disagreement and communicate

- next, the group conducts a needs analysis to identify what their needs are—how they want to use the community garden, what should be included in it and what they want from the experience of community gardening
- when they have gained access to land, they then design the garden, build and start to cultivate it.

This approach builds a sense of ownership of the community garden because the people who work the garden put in all the effort.

Council, government or professional role

For community workers and local government staff, the most constructive role is to assist the community group and guide without controlling it.

Help the gardeners to help themselves.

TOP DOWN

The top-down approach is taken by professionals such as community workers and local government staff:

- the professional workers become interested in the potential of community gardens to build a sense of community, to improve the nutrition of the people they work with or its potential to help achieve some other social goal
- through their existing contacts with government, schools or religious institution they obtain land and funding
- they then have to popularise the idea of the community garden among the target group they believe will use it
- if successful—and it might take some time—they then make use of a council landscape architect or a contracted designer to design the garden; alternatively—and this might be the better solution because it



builds ownership of the garden—they might find someone in the community who can lead a design workshop with the would-be gardeners, turning what could have been a professional-led solution into a participatory process.

The good news is that the top-down approach can succeed if the community or local government worker or consultant has the patience and persistence to build support for the garden within the community. It works best where any potential participants in the proposed community garden are assisted to form a team and participate in the design and construction of the garden.

Once the idea has been discussed with the local community, it is a good idea to organise a tour of three or four

existing gardens (see Checklist for New Community Gardens for things to look for). Some councils may help with this.

Be sure to visit gardens that are different so as to expose community members to a range of approaches to community gardening. Look at the design of the garden and discuss with the gardeners visited how they manage the garden and make decisions.

Employ a coordinator

To increase the chance of the top-down approach working after land has been found, community workers or council staff and consultants might think about raising funds—perhaps through a grant—to employ a coordinator.

The coordinator would:

- stimulate interest in the garden within the community
- provide basic horticultural training
- guide the garden's initial development

- if necessary, design the garden as a participatory process with gardeners.

Qualifications for a community garden coordinator include:

- importantly, the possession of people skills such as the ability to communicate effectively, to make decisions, solve problems, resolve conflict, coordinate participatory planning and decision making and to work participatively with community garden teams in doing these things; facilitation skills are indispensable
- basic landscape design knowledge including site analysis, water management and drainage, soil improvement, basic horticultural skills, knowledge of relevant local and state government land use regulation, plans and strategies affecting the site.



Gardeners learning how to transplant seedlings at Charles Garden

2. CHALLENGES

It might sound glib to say that starting community gardens can be easy or difficult, but that's the truth. Sometimes they start rapidly and without opposition; others have taken years to get started.

Community garden organisers face a number of challenges:

- finding land
- convincing the landholder that you will manage the land in a responsible manner
- overcoming local opposition to the garden
- finding public liability insurance
- managing the site
- accessing training for the gardeners
- raising startup and ongoing funds
- maintaining the interest of gardeners.

Finding land

If you are a community worker, then you might consider the grounds of health or community centres or other community support facilities. The grounds of social housing estates have been made available for community gardens for people living on the estates. This is accomplished through state government social housing agencies.

If you are a member of a community group, you can either:

- ask your local council about land they might be willing to make available
- look around for unused land, then find out who owns it and contact the owner about access.

Building credibility

An increasing number of councils are adopting policies or strategies to support community gardens which will usually include a process for starting a garden.

Where councils do not have a policy, a well researched and written submission will go a long way to convincing the landholder and your local council staff or elected councillors that your group is responsible and credible.

In your submission, include information such as:

- the purpose of your proposed community garden (eg. building a sense of community; improving family nutrition; environmental improvement, urban food security, working with particular social groups etc)
- the objectives of your garden group—what you plan to do to achieve your purpose
- the beneficiaries of your community garden—who they are (socioeconomic or demographic description); why they deserve to benefit—would the community garden fulfill some health or social need?
- potential benefit of the garden to the local area—environmental improvement, greening the suburb, safe place for families with children, community education, creative recreation etc
- how the garden links with local government city plans, strategies, social and other plans
- how the garden will benefit your local government—such as the implementation of council policies on waste minimisation (through composting and use of recycled materials), waste education (waste minimisation and composting classes), community health programs (access to fresh, nutritious food), access to the space for non-gardeners for passive uses, positive public perception of council support for community self-help initiatives such as the garden etc

- an estimated budget for garden development and maintenance and potential sources of funding you have identified (grants, membership fees, fundraising events etc)
- an estimated timeline covering the planning, design and construction phases of your garden's development; allow plenty of time if the garden is to be constructed by voluntary labour
- risk assessment—what the risks involved in gardening and caring for the site might be and how you will design the site/ educate the gardeners to minimise risk; any potential environmental risks and how you would address these in garden design and management
- management plan outline—how you will care for the land once the garden is complete
- training and induction of new gardeners
- proposed legal structure for access to land—licence, peppercorn lease etc
- structures for the gardeners to make decisions and solve problems
- community garden liaison person—contact details for a person who will act as a point of contact between council and the gardeners.

Public liability insurance

Public liability insurance covers legal liability in the case of a person injuring themselves in the garden and seeking a damages or injury payout in court.

Public liability insurance is paid annually. It is expensive. Obtaining funding for insurance can present gardeners with a real challenge. Some gardens may choose not to take out public liability, however they then carry the legal risk. Some organisations may offer cheaper rates for insurance.

If your garden is on council land you might ask council if they will extend their public liability insurance to cover it. Councils will often require that a community garden group obtain insurance as a condition of making land available.

Managing the site

How you will manage the garden should be outlined in a brief management plan. It should cover activities that need to be done regularly, such as:

- monitoring the site for safety of gardeners and visitors
- ensuring there are no environmental impacts on adjacent waterways, bushland etc
- maintaining any shared gardening areas
- keeping structures such as tool sheds and pergolas in good repair
- maintaining the aesthetics and tidiness of the site.

Training for gardeners

New gardeners without skills will need training in organic gardening techniques. This can be provided by experienced community gardeners.

A basic set of gardening skills includes:

- soil testing – (pH-acidity/ alkalinity, texture, structure)
- methods of soil improvement
- producing compost
- using mulch
- garden construction
- path construction
- plant propagation (starting plants from seeds or cuttings)
- planting patterns (close planting, clustering etc)
- integrated pest management
- irrigation.

Maintaining interest

A characteristic on many community gardens is fluctuation in participation.

Sometimes, there will be a waiting list of people who want to join the garden. Other times there might be so few gardeners that maintaining the site is a challenge.

What you do to maintain a steady participation rate will depend on the circumstances of the gardeners themselves. One approach is to build into the operation of the garden some non-gardening activities such as cooking classes (using produce from the garden), workshops, social, arts and performance (music, poetry and book readings) events.

Assessing requests in councils

When presented with a request for assistance with a community garden, council staff might assess it by asking whether the proposal:

- could be linked to council policy, strategies or plans such as waste education, open space provision, recreational, health and community development policy
- has addressed risk such as site safety
- identifies how the gardeners will maintain aesthetic qualities

appropriate to the use of the site as a garden; council and government landscape designers should remember that, visually, a community garden is an agricultural rather than an urban park landscape

- will not conflict with adjacent landuses
- will make use of environmentally safe gardening techniques that carry little health and environmental risk, such as organic gardening
- will retain public access to the garden grounds for activity compatible with community gardening and relative to the need for opening times and site security, especially if the garden is fenced
- will improve the local natural and social environment through regreening and provision of safe public space
- will reflect positively on council; if council provides substantial support, perhaps the gardeners would agree to council providing a sign bearing the garden's name, membership information and a statement of support by council.



Carrying out a soil test, part of the site analysis process at Carss Park Community Garden

3. BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

Just where you start planning for a community garden depends upon the circumstances you are faced with, such as whether you have found a parcel of land and whether you have a group of people willing to put in the work of getting a garden going. The starting point will be different for all of us.

The bottom-up approach, however, calls for persistence, patience and planning.

One thing is for sure—you will find that a little thinking and planning now, rather than rushing in, pays off in the longer run. When the time comes to put your submission for land access to council or another landholder, they will be more impressed and ready to cooperate with a group that has thought through how they would go about designing and managing a community garden.

Get the numbers

Many community gardens start as a good idea among friends. Otherwise, your first task is to get together a group of interested people.

Stimulate interest in your idea:

- use social media sites (search CGA's Facebook page—<https://www.facebook.com/CommunityGardensAustralia>—to let people know of your intention, to ask for volunteers or for help)
- contact the local newspaper and community radio station; issue a press release and contact the editor or, if a radio station, the producer of a suitable program to offer an interview; ask your council if they can help publicise your intentions
- put up a poster about your plans in the local library, shopping centre, community centre or health food shop
- do a letterbox drop in your area
- organise a public meeting to form a community garden planning team.

When the planning team has come together, do a skills audit to discover what talents and abilities are available within the membership.

Decide who will be:

- treasurer (to manage the funds you will seek)

- spokesperson (who liaises with the media, landholder and other agencies you will deal with)
- secretary (who acts as a point of contact, handles correspondence and keeps records of meetings and other activities).

Collect information

Now that you have stimulated interest in a community garden, it is time to take a look at what other gardeners have done.

Organise a car convoy or, if you already have local government support ask about use of a council minibus to tour three or four other community gardens. Be sure that the gardens you plan to visit are different from each other so you get to see different designs and different ways of organising community gardens.

On this fact-finding mission you collect information on:

- how the gardens started
- what type of organisational structure they have
- what they do about public liability insurance
- where they obtain resources (mulch, compost, seeds etc)
- their links to local government
- how they are funded
- how they make decisions, solve problems and resolve conflict
- how they pass on skills to new gardeners.

Discuss what you have learned and use it to make decisions about how you want to organise and manage your community garden.



Beginner gardeners taking a tour of Randwick Community Organic Garden



4. LET'S START PLANNING

Now that we have seen how other community gardens are run, it's time for our group to make a start on planning.

The following information should appear in your submission to council or whatever organisation you hope will support your community garden.

What is our purpose?

The first thing to do is to get your group together and work out just why you want a community garden and what you hope to achieve. This is your purpose.

After defining your purpose, work out what will have to be done to achieve it. These points become your objectives, the actual things you will achieve over time.

Purpose statements are always general statements of intent. For instance:

- to establish and manage a community food garden for the supply of fresh, organically grown food to members
- to increase the security of member's food supply
- to enhance opportunities for social interaction among members
- to provide new recreational opportunities
- to provide a low-cost, safe venue where people can cooperate and learn new skills.

Your objectives might look something like:

- design a community garden to take best advantage of the characteristics of the site
- construct a community garden to provide individual allotments/shared garden (whatever you choose)
- to manage the garden in an environmentally and socially responsible manner using organic

gardening methods

- to manage the garden through processes which involve the full participation of members.

As you can see, your objectives are activities, things you will do over time. They are achievable, things that your group can do with the resources you have at hand. You should be able to demonstrate that they have been done.

Adding completion times

If you're a really focused, determined bunch or people, you may want to put approximate times to accomplishing these objectives. Your objectives may then read something like:

- design a community garden to take best advantage of the characteristics of the site by (insert a realistic date).

Be careful that you don't underestimate the time it will take your group to reach an objective. Progress can sometimes be surprisingly slow. Failing to meet inappropriate time targets can be discouraging to a group. Make completion dates realistic and be prepared to change them because of delays caused by wet weather, declining participation (fewer people may garden in winter, for instance) and the need to attend to other things of life.

Budget

Work out what you will need to start the garden and the approximate cost of these things

- a couple spades
- a couple garden forks
- a garden rake
- a hoe
- a mattock
- a number of trowels
- a wheelbarrow
- one or two long garden hoses with adjustable trigger spray fittings.

Buy high quality tools as they will last longer.

You might also need to budget for:

- water supply and taps
- storage shed
- seeds
- perennial plants such as trees and shrubs
- organic matter such as compost
- path and garden edging materials.

Water rates

Payment of water rates is best taken care of through an annual fee paid by gardeners.

Where gardens are to be built at community centres, the cost of water may be covered by the centre or council.

Add these figures to obtain your start-up budget.

The items on your list, with the possible addition of training, make up our resource or inputs list, the things you need to get your garden going.

Make a timeline

Be generous in estimating how long it will take to get things done. Better to be pleasantly surprised at how quickly you do things than unpleasantly discouraged at how long things are taking.

Break the work of establishing the community garden into chunks:

- planning—getting together a group of interested peoples and identify your purpose, objectives, budget, timeline, resources needed
- finding land
- finding funding
- design
- construction.

Make a generous estimate of the time you think it would take to do all these things.



5. WHERE WILL WE GARDEN?

For community workers and council staff stimulating interest in community gardening, land and funding may already be available.

After the planning and construction phase the garden moves into a less-intensive maintenance stage in which the main activity is gardening rather than construction.

Decisions

There are a couple important decisions to be made during the planning stage. These are whether the garden will be a shared or allotment garden and whether organic gardening will be the approach used.

Shared gardening or allotments?

Now is the time to decide whether your garden is to be:

- a shared garden in which people do whatever work is necessary at the time and then share the produce, or
- an allotment garden, with plots held individually by gardeners who have rights to what they grow as well as full responsibility for their plot.

Plot holders are usually required to put time into maintaining the rest of the garden.

Having formed a group and planned your garden project, it's time to find a site if you do not have one already.

Community gardens are most commonly located on local government land, however you will find them on land owned by schools and universities, religious institutions, state governments and hospitals.

Approach council

If your council has a policy to support community gardens with a guide on how to approach council, you are well ahead of people whose council lacks such an approach.

Otherwise, to approach council effectively, it really helps to prepare a well written, well presented submission.

This should contain:

- a description of your group
- your aims and objectives
- the skills and competencies of your members
- the characteristics and size of land needed
- whether you have public liability insurance or plan to obtain it
- your actual or proposed legal structure (eg. incorporated association)
- case studies of other community gardens, especially those in the same city
- potential sources of funding or other avenues for fundraising
- what legal arrangement you would prefer—licence, lease? (council may stipulate which)
- what you would require from council such as request for council assistance in funding or in kind to cover the start-up and recurrent costs of the garden such as public liability insurance, shed, tools, water supply and water rates
- how you would manage risk
- a description of the benefits of

community gardens to communities and councils

- how the community garden would implement provisions in city plans, policy and strategies.

Meet with council staff

Organise a meeting and present your submission to council.

Take council staff through the main points, explaining them clearly and answering their questions to the best of your ability.

Try to anticipate their probable concerns such as:

- traffic and parking
- noise
- alienation of public open space
- odour
- vandalism
- aesthetics
- safety.

These are frequently encountered concerns of both councils and local residents. Be prepared to deal with them through the information you have collected and presented in your submission and describe the experience of other community gardeners who have dealt with them. While they are all valid concerns, most turn out not to be real problems at all.

If you know a councillor or supportive bureaucrat who can advise you on how best to make your approach, take advantage of the opportunity and ask them to accompany you when you meet with other council staff. It may be best to meet with them informally at first so as to get their advice on taking your submission to other staff.

Remember that you might be presenting council with proposal they have never encountered before. Try to allay their concerns by adopting a courteous and competent manner and by addressing their concerns honestly.

6. DESIGNING THE GARDEN

Finding land may take time

Don't expect to find land immediately. It may take time.

Keep in mind that you might be knocked back a number of times, especially if council insists on a community consultation with the neighbours of your preferred site. Often, neighbours will react negatively to the proposal out of fear of the unknown and make assumptions about the possible impact of the garden on the area, citing some of the concerns already listed. Most of these are dealt with through competent garden design and gardener education.

When finding gardening space takes too long, members of your group may grow tired of knockbacks, become dispirited and drop out. Maintain enthusiasm with an active program of searching for land, with social activities where you get to know each other and workshops to develop your skills.

Security of tenure through leasing

Security of tenure for your group is important. A written licence or lease is a guarantee of tenure and provides a sense of security.

An initial one or two year lease will do two things:

- it will give the landholder the option of discontinuing the arrangement if the community garden group does not have the motivation to persist with the project or fails to maintain mutually agreed standards
- it gives the community garden group time to assess whether the project can be sustained.

The arrangement should provide for the option, providing both parties are happy with site management after one year, of future minimum five year leases.

Now that you have brought your gardening group together and found land, it's time to start the design process.

First, go to council and obtain a copy of the site survey plan. If this is not available, measure up the site and draw it to scale.

Community garden design is not a conventional landscape architecture exercise, nor is it a designer-led process.

The design process is best led by someone with a deep knowledge of and experience in designing community gardens. They will need to understand the importance of incorporating opportunities to achieve any social needs the gardeners identify and know how to do participatory needs and site analyses. They will also need to know how to access local and state government planning regulations and any other regulatory conditions affecting the site, such as flood plans.

Design works best when everyone 'owns' it. This happens when the design process involves the full participation of the community gardeners.

Professional designers can work with the gardeners and present to them a range of design options.

A people-led process

Community gardens are about people, so it makes sense to use a people-led process to set up the garden. A design adviser working with a community garden team might better think of themselves as assisting the team design the garden themselves.

We can call this people-led design process 'social design' because it is about people and the arrangements they work out together to design and manage their community garden.

Social design is important

Not all community garden members will want to participate in social design. The importance of social design, however, sets the starting conditions for community garden participation and development that influence what comes after. By thinking through and discussing social design, community garden teams are prepared, to some degree, to deal with the contingencies that may come up later.

It's much as the co-ordinator of the permaculture design system, Bill Mollison, said—you should apply protracted and thoughtful observation rather than protracted and thoughtless action. Observation, in our social design process, is observation of the needs of the group and the site.

Participation in garden planning, specially when the designer or consultant educates gardeners in useful skills, builds social capital, the capacity of individuals and groups to make effective decisions, to plan cooperatively and work successfully with others.

Social capital is a product of successful community gardening. It has potential to increase group self-reliance. It is an outcome less likely to be achieved when councils or other institutions or when consultants and designers working with community garden teams take the managerial approach of designing and doing things for the gardeners, rather than with them by educating garden teams in the skills of self-management.

First things first—what do the gardeners want?

Social design process starts with a needs analysis:

- how do the gardeners want to use the site? Is it just for gardening or do they want to offer community workshops, horticultural therapy, activities for school children, production of specialised crops, passive recreation etc?
- what types of experiences do the gardeners want from the process of community gardening? Learning? Social etc?

Answers to these and other questions about what gardeners want from the garden are incorporated as opportunities into the design of the garden.

Second—organisational design

Organisational design defines:

- how the group will make decisions in an open, participatory and democratic manner; we are talking about direct democracy here
- how the group will resolve serious disagreement and conflict and what they will do when they can't
- how the group will communicate with each other, with their activity teams, with council or landholder, with the media and the public
- how the group will responsibly manage the land the community garden occupies.

You can use Community Gardens Australia's Plan of Management template to develop your organisational design. For community gardens developing a submission for assistance to present to council, the template can be used as a component in their submission.

Next—the placemaking process

Community gardens are best developed through a process known as 'placemaking'. It turns spaces into places where people want to spend time and it is a core component, with needs analysis, of the people-led rather than the designer-led approach to community garden development.

As part of the design process, the placemaking approach might include the community garden team, perhaps working with their design adviser, going on site and working through a participatory site analysis (see Mapping Site Conditions next) and marking out in the soil where garden beds, compost systems, storage shed, water tank, social space and shelter and other elements of design could go. This develops a concept design and forms the basis for drawing up a landscape design for the site that will guide construction.

To assist design, the group can go through a number of placemaking questions:

- what is our garden's point of difference to others?
- how do we make the community gardening experience memorable?
- what is the story of the site the community garden will occupy and should we somehow express this in the design?
- how will the garden reflect the needs, ideas and culture of the gardeners?
- how do we make people feel at home in the garden?
- how do we expand the experience envelope? (provide sense-based experience; blur the boundaries between elements on site; increase micro-diversity on site rather than any overall theme)
- how do we create an positive

welcome-mat for new gardeners and visitors?

- how do we encourage exchange of ideas and produce, both planned and spontaneous exchange?
- how do we slow people down and encourage them to linger? (what are our linger nodes?)
- how do we focus on the micro, not the grand design?

Mapping site conditions

This is the participatory site analysis phase that feeds important information into the site design. Gardeners might conduct the activity themselves or seek the assistance of their design adviser.

Look at the existing features and analyse the effects of influences coming in from outside such as:

- wind characteristics – the direction from which prevailing winds blow throughout the year and their characteristics (cold/ hot/ dry, blustery/ sea breeze etc); when you make your garden beds, you will want to protect them from potentially damaging winds by carefully placing them and through planting windbreaks; the department of meteorology may provide year-round weather information
- look at how the sun moves across your site; think about how much access to sunlight your site has year-round (vegetables need a minimum of about six hours sunlight a day); will there be enough sunlight when the sun is lower in the sky in winter?
- shade patterns will affect your site; shadows are longer in winter than in summer; work out whether any nearby trees or buildings will overshadow the site in winter; this information is used to locate your garden beds

- does your site slope? Which way?; work out how rainfall runoff flows across the site—does it flow through in a torrent? does it pool in areas of poor drainage? is it likely to wash in pollutants from busy roads?
- identify microclimates such as:
 - exposed places that will receive the full blast of the hot summer sun
 - areas which are permanently shaded and cooler
 - boggy, moist areas
 - pleasant and unpleasant places (how do they feel?)
- existing paths, fences, structures and buildings on site; are they in good condition? do you want to keep them?
- identify existing wildlife using the site and whether there are any rare plants worth keeping.

Draw up a base plan

This information goes on to your base plan which has been drawn up from your site measurements or traced from the plan obtained from council.

The base plan is a scale drawing of your site showing boundaries and

fixtures (existing paths, buildings, water supply, services, significant existing vegetation and so on).

Develop a concept plan

Base plan drawn up, identify design opportunities for the needs worked out during the social design process.

- vegetable beds
- potting and propagating shed
- play and garden areas for children
- seating areas
- orchard
- shelter
- passive and active recreational areas etc.

Now, where will you locate these things?

Using the information you compiled during the development of your site analysis, on a sheet of tracing paper overlaid over your base plan or on your design software, mark in the areas where you would place the items.

Remember that it is important that things are placed so that it is easy to move around the site and so that parents can keep an eye on their children.

You might do several versions of your

concept plan before you are happy that it has taken into account your site conditions and everyone's needs.

If the design adviser is to draw up the plans they will do the concept plan then bring it back to the gardeners to discuss changes before proceeding to final plan production.

Draw up a final plan

Finally, draw up a final design. This guides you in constructing the garden.

A final plan shows more detail than a concept plan, such as:

- types of plantings—the location and size of annual vegetable beds, fruit orchard areas, windbreaks, herb gardens and so on
- types of structures—such as storage shed, sitting areas, nursery
- location of taps and water supply
- paths.

If you have obtained assistance from a landscape designer, then they will produce these plans for your approval. If the process of finding this information has been done by the gardeners themselves, under the guidance of the designer, then they will have a better understanding of their site.



Developing a concept plan at Carss Park Community Garden

7. LET'S START BUILDING!

You might think that it has taken a lot of effort to get this far and you are right, but time spent in planning is seldom wasted. You don't then have to spend additional time correcting the mistakes of bad or non-existent planning.

Now your group has identified its needs, obtained land and designed the community garden. At last, it's time to start building.

Aesthetics are important

Most community gardeners quickly become expert scroungers. Building materials, old garden seats, discarded enamel bathtubs repurposed as water gardens and other things are easily recycled in community gardens.

Remember when you're collecting recyclables that you will get on best with council and neighbours if you store materials tidily and maintain a high level of visual aesthetics. It's best to collect only those materials you have immediate use for. The place should not look like a junkyard.

Aesthetics might not affect the productivity of your garden, but the perceptions of neighbours are an important consideration in the management of community gardens. Materials stored tidily are more accessible.

List materials needed

In planning the construction phase of your community garden, identify the materials, equipment and resources you will need.

Look for local businesses that might donate them. For those you have to buy, consider grants and fundraising events.

Construction tasks

In the construction phase, we carry out a number of tasks:



Lockridge Community Garden under construction showing layout of irrigation system.

- garden bed construction
- soil fertility improvement
- pathway construction
- nursery building for plant propagation
- compost making
- propagation of plants for our first planting (this can start as soon as you secure access to land; the young plants can be looked after by gardeners until they are ready to plant)
- building a storage shed and a shelter for the gardeners to sit under out of the rain or hot sun.

Garden construction starts with building the garden infrastructure of paths, structures such as a shelter, installing water tanks and other basic components. Then, garden beds can be built and soil improvement begin in them to ready the plots and shared garden areas for planting.

Shelter

You will quickly find that community gardens are more than spaces where people grow food. They become social gathering places.

This makes the construction of some kind of shelter a task of equal importance to that of building garden beds and planting them out. You will need somewhere to escape the weather, to relax, to brew coffee or tea. There may be no space for a shelter in some tiny, inner urban community gardens.

Paths

Pathways are important. They enable you to move around your garden easily, to get a wheelbarrow where you need to take it and to harvest plants without trampling the garden.

If you succeed in getting a large enough grant, consider paved pathways. These require less maintenance.

Too often, you visit community gardens and see the gardeners getting frustrated with pulling out kikuyu and other invasive grasses from their poorly made paths and their garden beds because of the poorly made garden edges.

Well constructed gardens are low maintenance, low-frustration gardens.

Paths for educational gardens

If your garden is to fulfil an educational role or is part of an educational institution and you expect frequent visits by large numbers of people:

- plan your main access paths wider than usual to accommodate larger numbers
- design gathering places where people can gather around a guide to listen to them
- design sitting circles—circles of bench seats—where visitors can sit to listen to their guide or to participate in workshop activities
- plan a covered workshop/sitting area protected from sun and rain by a roof, and from cold winds by a wall or barrier of some type; ensure that there is a bench or table where people can sit and eat.

8. THE MANAGEMENT PHASE

With your garden designed, constructed and planted out, your project now moves into a maintenance phase in which gardening, rather than construction, is the main activity. There will still be garden beds to build for people who join the garden, of course, compost to make and plants to propagate.

Draw up management plan

With the garden established, it is time to develop a management plan if you have not already done so during your earlier planning phase.

The management plan need not be a formal, detailed document. It's purpose is to remind you of ongoing tasks. Keep it simple and brief.

The management plan identifies all those ongoing tasks and how they will be done, such as:

- organisational meetings to plan your activities
- weed control
- compost making and turning
- tool and equipment maintenance
- risk management
- social activities
- inducting new members to the garden
- liaising with landholders
- starting plants from seeds in your nursery.

Figure out a general schedule for these activities and plot this on a one-year timeline. Then decide how and by whom the tasks will be tackled.

9. USEFUL SKILLS

...for community garden organisers

You might find these skills among your community garden group or in community college course.

Technical skills:

- garden soil preparation and garden construction
- propagating plants from seed and planting out
- compost making
- using mulch
- organic pest management
- water harvesting and conserving water in the garden
- how to draw up a planting calendar for gardening through the seasons.

Interpersonal skills:

- participatory design processes, decision making and problem solving
- conflict resolution
- facilitating meetings
- negotiating
- helpfulness, tolerance, patience and a sense of humour
- the ability to think laterally, develop innovative solutions, make do with what is at hand.

10. MEMBER AGREEMENT

The level of formal organisation in a community garden depends on the number of participants and how well they know and get on with each other.

For larger gardens, having new members sign an agreement covering their gardening activity is a way to:

- make known gardener's rights and responsibilities
- ensure the garden is managed in accordance with the wishes of the group.

The aim is for an informal, hassle-free garden.

A gardener's agreement might make clear:

- the purpose and objectives of the garden
- what is allowable/not allowable if the garden is to be cultivated by organic techniques
- the dispute resolution structure
- how decisions are made
- membership fees, how and when they are paid and the consequences of non-payment in gardens with private plots, how long an allotment can be left unused before it is passed on to someone else
- the contribution of time to the maintenance of shared garden space, the grounds, structures, equipment and shared composting facilities.

