



Let's Move! Faith and Communities: Community Garden Guide

As part of *Let's Move! Faith and Communities*, First Lady Michelle Obama has challenged congregations and neighborhood organizations to plant gardens in their communities. There are many positive benefits to starting a community garden: increasing access to healthy, fresh food; improving soil and water quality; providing exercise for people within a wide range of physical ability; and creating the opportunity to teach about nutrition, agriculture, and ecology. In short, starting a garden can help make real and lasting change in communities.

Whether you are new to gardening or have had many seasons in the soil, there are a wide variety of resources available to help you start a community garden at your organization or congregation.

How do I get started?

To learn more about the “how-to” for starting a new garden, the University of California Cooperative Extension’s ***Community Garden Start-Up Guide*** provides guidance on how to organize a sustainable garden site in your neighborhood. This is a great starting resource for your community garden:

http://celosangeles.ucdavis.edu/garden/articles/startup_guide.html.

What should I plant?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has published ***Vegetable Garden Planning and Development*** and ***Seed Starting*** guides that are very helpful for learning the basics on how to prepare and improve your soil, and what vegetables to consider planting:

<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/news/features/communitygardens.html>.

Where can I find technical assistance?

Master Gardeners are strong resources for gardening advice. Trained by USDA’s Cooperative Extension System, Master Gardeners are community members who volunteer their time to help Americans plant, grow, and harvest fresh produce from gardens. Master Gardeners are available in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. To find a Master Gardener in your community, please visit: http://www.ahs.org/master_gardeners/.

USDA Cooperative Extension: Every state and territory has a Cooperative Extension state office at its land-grant university, as well as a network of local or regional offices. These offices are staffed by experts who can provide useful, practical information on gardening and nutrition. Please consult this map to find the office closest to your community: <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/Extension/>.

The People’s Garden: This initiative challenges USDA employees to establish People’s Gardens at USDA facilities worldwide or help communities create gardens. People’s Gardens vary in size and type, but all have a common purpose – to help the local community they’re within and the environment. Visit the People’s Garden website to find the garden closest to you. You can register your community garden on their garden map:

www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden.



American Community Gardening Association: The mission of the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA) is to build community by increasing and enhancing community gardening and greening across the United States and Canada. Staff, board members, and volunteers answer thousands of requests for information each year about community gardening and greening. Their website also has resource guides to help you get started. For more information, visit www.communitygarden.org.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Nearly every county in the United States has an NRCS office to help private landowners steward their land. NRCS helps landowners and land managers with conservation planning designed to benefit soil, water, air, plants, and animals, ultimately building more productive land and healthier ecosystems. NRCS staff can help incorporate sustainability into your garden design: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

USDA National Agricultural Library: Before you start gardening, remember to test your soil for safety! The National Agricultural Library provides listings of labs nationwide: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/>. You can also call your local Cooperative Extension office or State Department of Agriculture to find out where to get soil tested.

What resources are available for teaching kids about gardening?

Junior Master Gardener: This program provides an educational curriculum to help kids learn how to garden. You can organize youth in your community to register as a Junior Master Gardener group. Junior Master Gardener is a 4-H youth development program of the USDA Cooperative Extension system: www.jmgkids.us/.

Grow It, Try It, Like It! USDA has created a garden-themed nutrition education kit to introduce young children to several fruits and vegetables. The kit is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/growit.html>.

Do you have any resources on urban agriculture?

The **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** offers information on urban agriculture, including start-up advice, educational materials, and links to other resources: <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/urbanag/index.html>.

Where can I find funding for my garden?

Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food: This is a USDA-wide effort to better connect consumers to their local producers. The website provides a list of the major loan and grant programs available through the Department to support the development of local agriculture. Some of these programs, such as the Community Food Projects grant program, can be used for community gardening projects: www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer.

Let's Move! Faith and Communities Toolkit: The appendix of the *Let's Move! Faith and Communities Toolkit* lists many national foundations and nonprofit organizations working to reverse childhood obesity. Some of these organizations have funding and/or technical assistance available for projects that increase access to healthy, affordable food: <http://www.hhs.gov/partnerships>.

Be creative and resourceful! Depending on the scale of your project, a community garden is not an expensive undertaking. Funding for community gardens can come from private grants from foundations, nonprofit organizations, and businesses. Check with your local and state government as well. You can also raise funds locally in your community or congregation, which is a great way to get more people invested in your garden.