



## MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY OF SERVICE

Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** 

# Project: Create or Expand a Community Garden

All of us have heard the admonition "Eat your vegetables!" But what if you lived in a place where it was simply impossible to follow this advice? Some neighborhoods lack access to fresh fruits and vegetables: they either aren't sold at all or for prices that aren't affordable. There are five key steps to cultivating a community garden.

- 1) A community garden is a perfect answer to having healthy, affordable fruits and vegetables in walking distance from your home. The first step is to determine a location and decide what type of garden you wish to create.
  - For vegetables you need a sunny spot with easy access to running water. For large fruit trees, you may want a bigger space to ensure that shade doesn't overtake your crops.
  - School yards, churches, community center, and parks are excellent choices for your garden. Be sure, however, to get permission with the owners or managers of the space and involve members of that organization in your efforts. You'll need to secure the site, either renting it from the owner or establishing a written agreement for its use.
  - Note that there are several ways to operate a garden:
    - a communal space where individuals and families have specific plots
    - a garden planted and harvested for an organization-like a soup kitchen
    - a garden in which anyone who works is entitled to share in the harvest.
  - After investigating, you may choose to join an existing garden instead. Use the [American Community Garden Association \(ACGA\)](#) to find one near you.
  
- 2) Plan, prepare and promote. A successful group effort needs a motivated team that acts with inspiration and purpose, agrees on clearly defined tasks, and sets reachable goals.
  - Start off planning with folks you know and ask them to tell others to join your efforts.
  - Meet regularly, especially as MLK Day approaches, and solicit input from everyone.
  - Assign concrete tasks to keep everyone motivated and on track. There are ways to include all ages in this work. The youngest volunteers can dig, carry light objects, or serve refreshments to the adults hard at work.
  - Talk about the parallels and differences between your effort to nurture plants and community connections and those of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
  - Decide what kind of garden you would like, including overall size, size of individual plots (if there will be any), restrictions (if any) for membership, fees (if any), and rules about sharing tools or only using your own.
  - Research the needs of the crops you intend to plant. How much sunlight and water do they require? What's their growing cycle? How large can they get, and how much room do the roots require? This is an excellent task for your younger volunteers to do and report back to the larger group.
  - Think for the future. A garden requires continuous care and also provides continuous bounty. Who will turn the soil in spring? Clear the weeds? Harvest the vegetables? Deal with vandalism?



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- Determine what kinds of supplies you will need and how you will obtain them. Typical supplies include soil, compost, tools, seeds, irrigation implements, and fencing or other barriers.
- Solicit funds from team members and/or others as well as in-kind donations from business for the supplies you'll need; consider supporting the effort through fees per plot if this is amenable to the team.
- Purchase necessary supplies before the MLK holiday so they're ready to use on the day itself.
- Set goals for yourselves, such as number of crops planted, size of harvest, and number of people fed (especially if you're donating the food).
- Record these goals and make sure you can meet them. If your initial assessment turns out to be too ambitious or not ambitious enough, revise the goals to something the whole team can agree on.
- [Post your project](#) on our site so people in your area can join your efforts.

## ➤ **Design your garden:**

- **Overall shape** - A simple grid is the easiest way to start.
- **Walkways** - People will need enough room to walk and carry gardening tools, both around the edges and between rows of plots.
- **Defined plots** - Finalize the size and number of plots.
- **Children's plots** - If you have decided to include children's plots, make sure to set aside a specific section of the garden.
- **Fencing** - You'll need to design and build a fence around the garden for security and to keep animals out.
- **Storage areas** - You will need a place to keep tools and other equipment. You'll also need a compost area.
- **Flowers and shrub beds** - Planting around the perimeter of the garden will help promote goodwill with non-gardening neighbors and municipal authorities.

## 3) Preparing and implementing your activity:

- Before planting day, you'll need to spend at least one day clearing out the site. While many hands make lighter work, consider also renting a machine like a back-hoe for this task.
- Make sure project leaders or coordinators are at the site early, ready to greet team members as they arrive.
- Provide clear instructions and constructive corrections, if needed, as the service takes place.
- Set up your supplies in an orderly fashion, accessible to all.
- Organize volunteers into different work crews. Have some turn soil, install plot borders or (if needed) raise beds, install a fence, etc.
- After everything is ready, have all the gardeners mark their plots, if you've selected this style of garden.
- Install a rainproof bulletin board for announcing garden events and messages to keep members up to date and recruit new gardeners.
- **PLANT!** Be sure to follow the guidelines for each kind of plant you're putting in the ground in terms of distance apart, sun exposure, and water needs.



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- 4) After the project is completed, take some time to assess and reflect on it. Think about what went well and what could be improved.
  - Host an official debriefing meeting for team members after the service day.
  - Examine the goals you set for yourselves and consider which ones you met, exceeded and didn't quite reach.
  - Who did your work impact? What did you accomplish? How did it feel?
  - Ask everyone for their honest assessment of what went well and how to improve for next time.
  - Consider what doing this work on MLK Day, in particular, meant to you.
  
- 5) We know you may not like to brag, but please do! You may inspire others to create or expand a community garden once they hear what you accomplished. [Share your service story](#). We're listening and want to know what you did and how you feel about it.