

How to Create a Bee-Friendly Community Garden

Aaron Michael, Founder & CEO of Earth Love Gardens

Community gardens provide so much goodness for the ecosystem and your community. Starting a community garden can be a rewarding endeavor from the very first step, leading to the gift of a garden that keeps on giving in countless ways. The mission of my company, Earth Love Gardens, is to create community and connection through gardens. Since 2018, we have been helping communities of all sorts realize their visions of community gardens. These include school gardens, pollinator-friendly landscapes for nonprofit organizations, and much more. Through my expertise, I will share with you how to start a community garden, step-by-step.



Aaron Michael with volunteers at the Boulder Public Library's Native Plant Demonstration Garden

Creating a Vision with Your Community

With your defined community, whether it is a nonprofit organization you are a part of or with like-minded neighbors, this first step allows your imaginations to flow and run wild. Consider all parts and questions to first dream up your garden. What does your community envision the garden will look like and who will it serve? In planning for the ongoing maintenance of the garden, who do you envision will enjoy helping to maintain it? What other questions are there to consider to ensure the best garden experience possible? When beginning to plan the project, it is also helpful to recognize each person's talents and allow them to be responsible for parts of the project they will work well with and enjoy.

Budget and Fundraising

A community garden can be small or large and funding is available for essentially any size. Grants are available from many sources, both public and private. Fundraisers can also be held via online donation platforms. Engaging your community in raising funds the old-fashioned way, such as through car washes or other creative endeavors, can create connection in your community and awareness for the project.

Research the pricing of plants and materials in your project. Visit your local nurseries for the best native plants that are preferably holistically raised with minimal use of chemical pesticides. Contact local landscaping materials yards for their pricing on mulch, rocks, et cetera. Watering of the plants is also to be considered. Will hired contractors work on specialized parts of the project, such as setting up irrigation? Perhaps responsible volunteers taking care of the garden can hand-water the plants instead.

To help save money in the budget, many materials can be acquired for free. Inquire whether a member of your community has a pickup truck and trailer to transport mulch from your municipality's free mulch pile. The website Chipdrop.com or local tree removal companies can be other great resources for free mulch. Perhaps community members can help raise plant seedlings at their homes for eventual transplant to the community garden. There is no

limit on community input for enriching a community garden.

Design

Based on the community vision of the project and the available budget, it is time to create a garden design. A garden design can be created by hand or on a computer. When designing, consider features such as paths (widths of at least 3' allow for wheelchairs to travel through), materials utilized such as mulch and rocks, and possibly metal edging strips. For native plants planned within the design, consider all the plants' varying bloom times and colors, mature sizes, water and soil requirements, and wildlife value. This will allow the plants to be optimally placed with other plants in the garden. Are there other features you would like to include such as benches, tables, birdbaths, and more?

Note: especially if a project is non-residential, many municipalities outline in their bylaws that they would like the design to be reviewed and stamped by a Landscape Architect for approval. Do your research so that you don't overlook these critical additional steps.

Pre-Project Planning

With the garden design complete and funds acquired, it is time to start planning the implementation of the project. Consider the best dates for everyone to install the project; between the last and first frosts of the seasons and preferably not during the height of the heat of the summer work best for planting. Consider as well how many days you anticipate the project will take to install. It is always better to overestimate than underestimate this time, as it is always better when a project is finished ahead of schedule than behind schedule. With the dates of the project planned, it is soon time to start ordering for the delivery of the project's materials.

Who will the volunteers be for installing the garden? If you do not have enough volunteers, perhaps another local organization would like to partner on your project and provide additional volunteers. It's always a good idea to have a liability form printed and ready for volunteers to sign, ensuring coverage in case of any injuries during project installation.

Project Management

During the installation, who will be leading the different facets of the project, such as receiving the materials and leading the volunteers? It is important to continue to follow the garden design throughout the implementation of the project and to help guide volunteers if they deviate from the plan. Make sure the volunteers are working at a good pace and direct them to areas where their natural talents may really shine. Although it takes effort, this meaningful work can also be fun! You can enjoy the process of creating your community garden and experience the magic your garden provides for the ecosystem and the community every step of the way.

Connect With Me

I am happy to be of support to your community or home garden project. You can connect with Earth Love Gardens through our website, www.EarthLoveGardens.com and me directly by email at Aaron@EarthLoveGardens.com.