

Forest Grove Volunteers Initiate Community Garden

By Holly Tsur
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Just in time for the 2009 growing season, a group of volunteers has initiated the Forest Grove Community Gardens project. During these times of unprecedented economic hardship, the garden is being established so that Forest Grove residents can rent plots for a nominal fee and grow produce for their own consumption and/or for donation to charitable causes.



Organizer and committee co-chair, Walt Wentz, first became inspired to create the community garden after he read an article in the Forest Grove News Times. [The article](#) described a presentation made at the Forest Grove City Council by OSU Extension Service horticulturist, Weston Miller, about the growing popularity and benefits of community gardens across the nation. After learning that no one in Forest Grove had plans to establish such a garden, Walt decided to take on the task. So, he posted notices around town asking for volunteers to come forward to assist with his efforts. Right off the bat, he heard back from six eager volunteers. Since then, the committee has continued to grow. Committee members range from local organic farmer, Greg Shipp (owner of [Wildberry Organics](#) and past organizer of a highly successful community garden in the Bay Area) to Tony Matiaco (a 13-year-old Forest Grove Boy Scout, trying for his Eagle Scout ranking, who has volunteered to organize members of his church and scout troop to build fencing around the garden, help prepare the irrigation system, and cultivate the soil).

On April 13, the [Forest Grove City Council approved](#) the community garden project and the city donated use of a 1.25-acre lot for the garden's cultivation. This level lot, located at the northern end of town near 22nd and Maple Streets, gets plenty of sun exposure and has access to city water. The land was previously cultivated by inmates from the Washington County Jail.



The lot contains a tool shed, a small greenhouse, and two garden areas totaling about 67,000 square feet of growing space. The committee plans to divide this space into individual garden plots-each measuring 10'x25'-offering over 200 family plots for gardeners. Plots will rent for a nominal fee of \$30 per growing season, but residents who can prove eligibility for food stamps will be offered plots at a reduced fee.

Two special plots will be located near the garden's entrance for easy access by elderly or handicapped gardeners. These will each contain three 4'x6'x22" cedar raised beds (donated by [Naturalyards](#)), and room will be provided around these beds for wheelchair access.

Gardeners will be required to observe organic gardening principles by agreeing to keep their plots free from chemical pesticides and herbicides. One idea under consideration for the future is to provide drip irrigation to all garden plots to conserve water and thereby keep expenses down.

The committee has applied for grant funding from the City of Forest Grove's Community Enhancement Project. If awarded, grant funding will be used to pay for expenses related to:

- Perimeter fencing materials
- Plumbing materials for repairing the water main and branch lines
- Drip irrigation system
- Signage to identify the garden, contact information, and sponsors

The committee recently formed an alliance with [Adelante Mujeres](#), a Forest Grove non-profit organization dedicated to teaching low-income Spanish speaking immigrants organic gardening and small business development. Since one of Adelante Mujeres' goals is "to improve ecological awareness and action for a sustainable economy and healthy communities," an alliance between the Forest Grove Community Gardens and this organization seemed logical. Adelante Mujeres is acting as the non-profit sponsor for the Forest Grove Community Gardens, which will help the community garden qualify for grants and other funding opportunities. It will also allow the garden to fall under the umbrella of Adelante Mujeres' liability insurance policy, allowing the community garden to pay a much lower insurance premium than required if they applied for liability insurance on their own. In return, Adelante Mujeres members will be provided garden plots at a discounted rate, providing a win-win proposition for both organizations.

Plans are for garden plots to be ready for planting by the end of April. To rent a plot, volunteer to join the community garden committee, or make a charitable donation to the Forest Grove Community Gardens effort, click <http://www.fggardens.org/> for contact information.

Interested in setting up a community garden in your city or town? To learn more about how Forest Grove Community Garden volunteers set up their community garden, see their [Procedure for Setting Up Forest Grove Community Gardens](#).