

How to Set Up a Community Garden

By Holly Tsur

The following procedure outlines steps that Forest Grove Community Gardens (FGCG) volunteers took to set up their community garden in Forest Grove, Oregon during the 2009 growing season. General steps recommended for setting up most community gardens appear in **bold** font. Specific steps that FGCG volunteers took in setting up their community garden appear in *italics*.

1. Commit to starting a community garden.

2. Solicit for volunteers by posting flyers around town and start holding weekly meetings with committee members.

A private individual posted flyers around town, asking for people interested in starting a community garden to contact him. He then set up weekly meetings at his home, where volunteers met to organize themselves into a committee for the Forest Grove Community Gardens (FGCG).

3. Contact the appropriate city government department to determine if city land is available for a community garden.

In most Oregon cities, contact your Parks and Recreation Department. In discussions with the crew chief of the city's Parks and Recreation Department, FGCG volunteers learned that the City of Forest Grove was in favor of a community garden, and owned several vacant lots that might provide a site. The main criteria in selecting a community garden site included:

- a. *Access to the public water system*
- b. *Level ground, fertile soil and good sun exposure*
- c. *Easy driving access to the garden and available parking space*

A site meeting all these criteria was chosen. A vacant field adjacent to the city's utility company's transformer station, the site had previously been used as a jail garden by the local county sheriff's department.

4. Determine city requirements for setting up a community garden.

The City of Forest Grove required FGCG Committee members to provide a plan for expenses related to:

- a. *Liability insurance*
- b. *Irrigation water*
- c. *Sanitation facilities (i.e., portable toilet)*

5. Conduct weekly meetings with committee members to organize the effort. Accomplish the following as a result of those meetings:

a. Determine initial set-up costs as well as ongoing maintenance/operational costs for the garden.

FGCG Committee members learned from the city's utility that the cost of a previous year's irrigation water usage had amounted to \$600 for a garden formerly grown on the site by jail inmates. The city agreed to charge a flat rate of \$600 for the garden's first year of operation to ensure that water bills would not exceed FGCG's budget. Portable toilet rental for the six-month growing season would cost approximately \$450. Liability insurance would cost approximately \$500 per year; however, the committee learned that this expense could be significantly reduced if a non-profit organization served as FGCG's sponsor and allowed FGCG to fall under their liability insurance policy. Committee members then contacted Adelante Mujeres, a local organization dedicated to teaching organic gardening techniques and small-business development to low-income, Hispanic immigrants. Adelante Mujeres agreed to allow FGCG to become subsidiary to their organization, thereby falling under Adelante Mujeres' non-profit insurance umbrella. In exchange, FGCG agreed to provide a half-acre garden plot to Adelante Mujeres for cultivation by their students.

b. Elect committee officers and assign jobs.

The FGCG Committee named two co-chairmen to oversee the setup of the garden, one of them a local Community Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) farmer who already had experience in setting up a community garden in another state. The committee also selected a Registrar/Treasurer to set up a bank account and manage finances related to garden setup and operating expenses, to record applications for rental plots and to assign plot numbers to plot renters. Another committee member volunteered to arrange publicity opportunities with newspapers, radio and television; while other volunteers solicited for donations from sponsors. One committee member volunteered to become FGCG's Webmaster and set up FGCG's [Website](#). A new FGCG Webmaster, appointed for the 2010 growing season, has since created the [Forest Grove](#)

[Community Gardens Victory Garden Blog](#). Other members volunteered to speak to local service organizations, such as the local Lions Club. Such service organizations are usually in search of dinner speakers and appropriate projects to sponsor or assist.

c. Determine size of plots to be rented and cost per season for each garden participant.

FGCG Committee members determined that individual plot size would be 10'x25', or 250 square feet. This allowed 147 plots to be rented, in addition to six, 4'x6'x22" raised beds for use by handicapped gardeners. Plots rented for \$30 for the season, with discounts provided for gardeners who could prove eligibility for food stamps. Fees were based on garden setup costs and anticipated expenses, and were kept as low as possible because salaries are generally lower in Forest Grove than in nearby Portland, Oregon, where community garden plots frequently cost \$50 per growing season.

d. Submit a proposal to the city describing the committee's plan to set up the garden, and request city approval to use the suggested site for the garden.

Committee members submitted an initial proposal at a City Council meeting and then, during two subsequent Council meetings, submitted revisions requested by City Council members. The entire process took approximately five weeks between initial proposal and final approval. The City Council then appointed the manager of the Parks and Recreation Department to coordinate FGCG's requests for assistance with other city departments, resolve open questions and facilitate the process.

e. Set up a bank account.

The FGCG Committee Treasurer/Registrar set up a bank account for Forest Grove Community Gardens at a local bank.

f. Draw a schematic grid to help track rented and available garden plots.

The FGCG's Treasurer/Registrar used this [Garden Plot Grid](#) to assign available plots.

g. Set up a system for plot rental.

FGCG Committee members created a [Plot Rental Agreement and Release of Liability form](#) and a list of [Guidelines](#), and these documents were made available for online access. FGCG's Treasurer/Registrar set up a post office box to which online applicants could mail their completed forms and checks. The Treasurer/Registrar sends applicants a Plot Assignment form, indicating the plot number(s) assigned to them. Alternately, applicants can rent plots at a booth operated by FGCG volunteers at Forest Grove's weekly Farmer's Market.

h. Explore grant funding possibilities and apply for funding.

FGCG Committee members learned that the City of Forest Grove Community Enhancement Program was offering up to \$2000 for projects that would improve city infrastructure. So, they applied for and were awarded a grant for funding for fencing and plumbing materials, drip irrigation, signage and other essentials for preparing the site.

i. Ensure that the garden meets Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requirements for making portions of all community gardens accessible for handicapped gardeners.

A FGCG Committee member contacted [Naturalyards](#) and requested donation of six, 4'x6'x22" cedar raised beds for use by handicapped and elderly gardeners. Naturalyards generously donated and shipped these beds in time for the garden's ribbon-cutting ceremony in the spring of 2009. FGCG volunteers also contacted a nearby gardening/landscaping business, which provided high-quality garden soil at half price for filling the raised beds.

6. Organize work parties to accomplish the following:

a. Determine if city resources are available to assist with planning and construction of garden fencing.

Forest Grove's Parks and Recreation Department assisted with this effort.

b. Arrange for portable toilet to be delivered in time for use by garden work parties.

A rental toilet was delivered as work began on preparing the garden site.

c. Ensure that a working irrigation system provides water to all garden plots. Then, cultivate the garden and spread wood chips between the rows.

To rebuild a damaged water main and assemble an underground irrigation system, plumbing materials were purchased from a local plumbing supply company, which sold the materials at their own cost. A gas-powered trencher was rented from a local rental company. About 30 FGCG volunteers dug the trenches, built the new water main and installed it in the trenches. A local Boy Scout, working toward his Eagle rank, volunteered to help plan the project and to supervise his Scout troop and members of his church to help install the new irrigation system and build the fence on one side of the garden. Another volunteer brought

in his farm tractor and cultivated the entire 1.25-acre lot. Volunteers and county jail inmates performing community service then spread wood chips on paths between garden rows.

d. Measure, locate and mark individual plots with stakes and string.

This process began the week before the garden's official opening:

e. Obtain materials for and erect a gated fence around the gardens.

The local utility company donated a retired power pole that FGCG volunteers cut and split to make fence posts for installation around the garden. Various donors also contributed used steel "T-posts" and volunteers erected the fence.

f. Assemble and install donated raised beds for use by handicapped gardeners.

Volunteers assembled the cedar raised beds donated by [Naturalyards](#), and filled them with donated garden soil and compost. County jail inmates performing community service assisted.

g. Advertise the garden's ribbon-cutting ceremony and availability of plots.

The week before the garden's official opening, an FGCG Committee member created posters and hung them on bulletin boards around town to advertise the event. Another committee member arranged for local newspaper coverage of the event, and contacted several radio stations for coverage on their Website blogs and radio programming. Committee members also invited Forest Grove officials to the ceremony.

h. Hold ribbon-cutting ceremony.

An opening ceremony provided an opportunity to express thanks to all volunteers, donors, agencies and businesses assisting in the project, and to generate goodwill and publicity.

7. Finalize liability insurance.

8. Continue renting plots to garden participants.

9. Obtain signage for the garden that includes information about who to contact for plot rental.

A local sign maker agreed to create a large sign identifying the garden for their cost of \$75. The sign was hung at the entrance to the garden.

10. Collect purchased or donated hand tools and garden equipment (such as wheelbarrows, hoses, water wands and sprinklers) and then mark them with paint to identify them as belonging to the garden.

11. Volunteers assist garden participants with locating and cultivating their plots.

12. Arrange for knowledgeable people to present workshops educating garden participants about various aspects of gardening.

During the growing season, FGCG presented free educational workshops on Winter Gardening, Water-Efficient Irrigation and Building Compost Piles.

13. Hold community celebrations to build cohesion and fellowship among garden participants.

During the 2009 growing season, a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, a Seeding Festival and a Harvest Festival allowed gardeners and the public to visit the garden and get to know each other.

14. Publish a garden newsletter to convey useful information and keep gardeners informed of developments.

*An FGCG Committee member created *The Maple Street Rag*, an e-magazine available through the FGCG blog's [Newsletter Archives](#) containing articles on gardening topics, news and items of concern.*

15. Perform ongoing garden maintenance throughout the growing season, and support garden participants so that everyone has a positive community gardening experience.

FGCG Committee members cultivate their own plots in the garden, tending them often and assisting other gardeners with their questions and concerns. They keep the garden and its surroundings clean, and create and maintain decorative plantings that adjoin public areas to keep the gardens visually pleasing for garden participants and visitors.