

KEYS TO SUCCESS: How to develop a sustainable garden project

ASPIRE:

Know your **A**udience, start **S**mall, make **P**lans, create an **I**dentify, establish **R**oles, celebrate with **E**vents

- Get to know your audience by soliciting ideas and feedback. Keep people in the loop as plans develop.
- Consider developmental needs, ability levels, and cultural backgrounds.
- Start small so that you can balance garden programming (educational and fun activities) with garden maintenance (work projects and upkeep – which can also be fun!).
- Develop a maintenance plan that covers the entire growing season and includes annual soil amendments.
- Plan to stay involved in the project; don't assume that another group will jump in to take care of the garden during school vacations.
- Create an identity and engaging name for your project. Be inclusive and provide opportunities for participants and community members to have input on themes, activities, and designs.
- Define roles and ground rules for participants; plan ahead as much as you can before breaking ground, then adapt and be flexible as new situations arise.
- Organize an annual Planting Celebration to begin your garden year and a Harvest Festival to celebrate the end of the growing season. Include hands-on activities, garden foods, music, and the arts.
- Turn work into fun with Bucket Brigades and Mulching Parties. Treat volunteers like “gold” and show your appreciation before, during, and after the project. Take time for snack breaks and potluck lunches.

TOOLS:

Promote **T**eamwork, define **O**bjectives, instill **O**wnership, cultivate **L**eadership, **S**hare your success

- Posting a calendar of meeting dates and group work projects is helpful for attracting new participants.
- Successful gardens are based on clear goals and objectives and a group consensus to achieve them.
- Establish favorite traditions that are repeated from year to year; add new activities as your program grows.
- Consider who “owns” your project. Provide stakeholders with progress reports so that there is a shared sense of ownership. Use signage to create an atmosphere that is welcoming, demonstrates ownership and community pride, and serves as a vehicle for thanking sponsors and contributors.
- All community-based projects need effective facilitative leadership to become sustainable. Facilitative leaders help to draw out and cultivate leadership from within participants and volunteers.
- Sustainable organizations recognize the need to rotate, acknowledge, and transition leadership from year to year to keep the garden program strong and to avoid “volunteer burnout.”
- Successful garden projects share their success by thanking sponsors, cultivating new partnerships, giving garden tours, generating media publicity, and sharing gifts from the garden with the community.