

Workplace Garden Physical Features

The following document outlines important considerations for designing and setting up your garden site. Careful thought about site selection and garden infrastructure early in the planning process will ensure a site that best suits the goals of your project and the meets the needs of your employee gardeners.

Site Selection

When picking your garden site, there are several site conditions you should take into account early in your planning process. Even if your site does not have all of the following optimal site conditions it is important to consider the site's potential for meeting plant, participant, and site-use needs.

Optimal Site Conditions

- Light:** At least 6 hours of direct sun daily
- Drainage:** Little to no standing water after heavy rains
- Accessibility:** Close proximity to facilities; land as level as possible
- Exposure:** Some protection from high winds; avoid low lying frost pockets
- Water:** Close available water source
- Soil:** Good soil quality & safety (if doing in-ground plantings)
- Wildlife:** Pay attention to wildlife patterns at the site; consider crop damage potential for various animals; if deer or other large animals are present, fencing may be necessary
- Safety:** Site promotes personal safety (i.e. away from traffic); If digging, make sure not digging on any utility line (Call Before You Dig—dial “811”)
- Size:** Space large enough for the number of participants and garden tools, and a diversity of activities
- Availability & Sustainability:** Site available for garden construction by April & will remain available into the foreseeable future

Communication/Education

While communication is more of a systematic element to garden operations, there are several physical features you can add to your site to promote communication & garden learning.

- ❖ **Bulletin board:** Best placed in an easily viewed & accessed area of garden. Protect with a weather-proof viewing case or under shelter.
 - Garden Leadership use for posting garden education tips, garden guidelines, announcements, etc.
- ❖ **Dry Erase board:** Best placed in an easily viewed & accessed area of garden. Protect under shelter.
 - Gardener-to-gardener communication board for posting announcements, requesting assistance, & general communication; Garden Leadership to Employee Gardener communication for same purposes
- ❖ **Garden Sign:** Place at the front/entrance to the garden with good visibility. Sign itself should be colorful, attractive & depict the nature of the garden project. Sign content should include the garden name & its mission in large lettering, readable from a distance. Sign material should be as weather-proof as possible. Sign should be mounted on a sturdy post that stands at average eye-level.
 - Provides information on C&S Workplace Organic Gardens project & mission for other C&S employees and/or visitors
- ❖ **Educational signs:** Depending on how you garden is set-up it may be useful to put up other educational signage around the gardens. Some possible signage might include:
 - Signs beside the compost system to instruct what should be done with garden waste and how piles should be maintained;
 - Signs in the Community Giving plot(s) that instruct volunteers on the maintenance, harvest, and donation systems
 - Signs in the Community Giving plot(s) or other communal plots that identify plants
 - Signs at the garden gate with instructions/warnings for using electric fencing, if present

Growing space

Before offering growing space to employees, measure out your garden area to see how much space is available for beds, how much space needs to be kept in paths, and how much space should be left for other features (such as compost, shed, benches, fencing, etc.). Once the amount of space available is determined, survey employees to get a sense of how many people are interested. Leave space for expansion in future years, if possible.

Garden Beds

- ❖ For beginner gardeners a good space is a 4x8 raised bed.
- ❖ For gardeners who are more experienced you may want to offer either multiple beds or larger beds, depending on the amount of space available.
- ❖ If you are choosing to donate a portion of produce from the garden to local hunger relief agencies, you will need to think about whether you want the produce to come from individual beds (each gardener donates 10% of produce) or whether you want produce to come from plots dedicated for donation and maintained communally (further details found in the Volunteer Plan). If using communal beds, to determine the correct size, you may want to ask:
 - How many people are able and willing to tend communal beds?
 - How much time will gardeners be able to dedicate to volunteering?
 - Is there someone in a coordinator role to manage the volunteer system?
 - What volume of donations can your local hunger relief agencies accept?

Pathways

- ❖ **Material:**
 - Grass—must be mowed/maintained regularly; low cost (maintenance only)
 - Mulch (cardboard & woodchips, plastic & woodchips)—keeps down weeds; must replenish each year; relatively low cost (sometimes found for free)
 - Semi-permanent materials (paving stones, bricks, gravel)—should only need to be maintained every few years; uneven surface; can be expensive
 - Permanent materials (http://www.cacscw.org/special_needs_resources.php)—even surface for navigating garden area; impermeability will change natural storm water patterns of your site; expensive
- ❖ **Width:**
 - If grass, will be maintained by riding mower, push mower, or weed whacker. Speak with Facilities about what they would prefer to use and the size of their equipment (particularly width).
 - Ideal space for foot traffic: 3-4 ft. wide; for 1 wheelchair: 4-5 ft. wide

Water

Especially in communal gardening settings, it is important to have an easy-to-use & maintain watering system. Some features to consider:

- ❖ **Easy access:** The water source is a reasonable distance from the gardens and is accessible to employees 24/7.
- ❖ **Quality hose:** It is well worth it to purchase a high quality hose that will be less likely to burst or kink.
- ❖ **Short hose:** If possible, avoid 100+ of feet of hose that will be difficult to drag to the watering area and re-coil after each use. If your water source is longer than about 100 feet, it may be wise to bury a water line that pops back up right in your garden area through a pump or spigot. See your local hardware/garden store to learn more about what is necessary to make this happen. Take into consideration that the line will need to be buried underground below the frost line, depending on where you are located in the country. Check with your state's local USDA service center for more information: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>. Also to avoid pipes bursting in the winter, it is a good idea to blow out your water lines at the end of each season with compressed air.
- ❖ **Multiple sources:** If possible, provide hose splitters or multiple spigots that reach all far ends of the garden, so that the far-end gardeners aren't left with the task of dragging the hose across the entire garden and more than one gardener can water at a time.
- ❖ **Gentle hose attachments:** When purchasing your hose attachments consider a shower wand, drip irrigation, or a sprinkler system.
- ❖ **Alternative watering systems:** You may want to consider an alternative watering system if you do not have an accessible water source. Large water storage tanks can be placed in the garden area and re-filled when necessary. If a reasonable-sized roof is located nearby, rain barrels can be attached to the gutters, making use of rain water rather than increasing the company's water bill. Both the water tubs and rain barrels can be raised on pedestals so that there is pressure to run a hose from them; otherwise gardens would need to be watered with watering cans.

Crop damage control

As noted under Site Selection, it is a good idea to assess the wildlife present or potentially present in your garden area. There are wildlife controls such as organic sprays, planting deterrent plants around your crops, or other physical deterrents; however, often gardeners find that to really keep the critters out it is wise to fence-in the entire garden area. Things to consider when putting in fencing:

- ❖ Make sure the material and location of your fence does not shade-out your garden.
- ❖ To keep out deer (the high-jumpers), at least 8 ft. high fence is recommended, or a multi-strand electric fence.
- ❖ To keep out smaller rodents, it is helpful to have fencing close to the ground. This can be achieved with either electric net fence or strategic placement of electric lines close to the ground.
- ❖ If you are building raised garden beds you can keep out rabbits, gophers, moles, and groundhogs (the diggers) by putting a barrier in below your beds. If your beds are 12-18 inches or higher, attach 1/4-1/2-inch steel wire mesh (“hardware cloth” works well) to the bottoms of your bed frames before filling them.
- ❖ If using electric fence, pay attention to where you want the opening to be. There should be at least one major access point where the fence can be removed safely and easily. Gate handles are recommended for safe removal of the fence when it is electrified, and clear warning and instructional signs are imperative for safety purposes.

Garden Structures

Most garden sites will require outdoor storage space for garden tools and a place for gardeners to dispose of their garden waste. Before purchasing anything you may want to ask yourself a few questions:

Shed

- ❖ What tools will you need to store? How much space will they take-up?
- ❖ Do you need a shed or will another storage system work?
- ❖ Will your shed be locked? Who will have access to it?
- ❖ Are there any other purposes for your shed (i.e. shelter for bulletin board &/or dry erase board)? If so what is needed to meet those purposes (i.e. easy-to-drill-into, wide overhang, etc.)?
- ❖ How will the shed fit into the aesthetics of the garden (i.e. color, material, ability to paint surface)?

Compost

- ❖ How much garden waste will you be dealing with? *Tip:* A 36 cubic foot compost space is typical for a home gardener, but this space can easily fill up in a day with multiple gardeners. Consider starting with a 3-chamber compost system that accommodates a volume of over 100 cubic feet for a group. Multiple chambers provide the option to move the compost as it begins to break down, helping aerate and hasten decomposition.
- ❖ Are there any regulations (town, neighborhood, company) for plant waste disposal? *Tip:* Some areas will not allow open compost piles, but have no regulations for closed bins.
- ❖ What is the purpose of the compost—to generate compost for use, or primarily as a way to dispose of garden waste? *Tip:* If just interested in disposal check with your local town facilities to see if they can handle vegetative waste.
- ❖ Is this compost pile for garden waste only or would you also like to allow food waste from the cafeteria or landscape clippings (if not treated)? *Tip:* If you are adding any non-garden food waste or lawn waste, you will need to plan for a much larger system.
- ❖ Who will maintain the compost pile (volunteers, garden coordinators, facilities personnel)? *Tip:* Consider how useable your system is for those maintaining it. It could be useful to have general guidelines posted and consistent over-sight.

Relaxation/Leisure

Don't forget to include space in your garden site plans and in your budget for other features in the garden area that provide gardener and non-gardener employees with places to relax and enjoy the garden. Some features to consider:

- ❖ Benches
- ❖ Picnic tables
- ❖ Shade areas
- ❖ Gathering &/or teaching areas
- ❖ Fruit trees & berry bushes
- ❖ Outdoor cooking