

# Community Gardens

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My name is Emily Jubenvill, and I am the Community Gardens Coordinator for the Vancouver Public Space Network. We help community groups start gardens across the city by providing organizational tools and facilitating the process.

When I was studying at university, I took an environmental studies class that deconstructed the current state of environmental and social issues of North America's food system. This sparked my interest in sustainable agriculture and food security. Since then, I've taught myself how to grow vegetables on my windowsill and community garden plot; started a community garden in my hometown, Bowen Island; participated in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program on one of Bowen's historic farms – all to learn and share as much as I can about the food we eat.

Cities are anonymous landscapes, with little opportunity for intergenerational and intercultural learning and sharing to occur. Community gardens provide a unique space to explore and develop these relationships regardless of language or cultural barriers; empowering people to come together to grow food and build resilient communities. We'll explore how to create these spaces and facilitate building these relationships.

Community gardens are an important piece of a sustainable food system, decreasing our personal footprint, and building resilient communities.

Community Gardens:

1. Provide fresh, healthy, and affordable produce, while reducing the carbon footprint of the transportation and processing required for store-bought food.
2. Provide inter-cultural and inter-generational experience – learning and sharing.
3. Provide community building experience to start a garden – leadership, problem solving, celebration.
4. Provide habitat for birds and insects, and needed greenspace.

There is a large demand for community gardens in the City of Vancouver, but there has been little movement in the last few years to meet this demand. We have an incredible opportunity to provide people with the garden space they need to make a profound difference in their own lives and their communities'.

If you are interested in starting a community garden, think about the following questions:

1. How much of your food do you grow? / How much of your food do you think it would be possible to grow if you had a community garden plot?
2. How do you think growing some of your own food would change your overall eating habits and choices?

Here are the basic steps to get there:

1. Visit a community garden and ask questions
2. Find three to five other people in your community that are just as passionate about the idea of a community garden as you are, and hold a town hall meeting. Bring people in your community together to talk about what a garden could do for you and if it is something that your community wants to pursue.
3. Make a proposal to the City of Vancouver for a community garden
4. Grow something! Start small and work your way up.

In the City of Vancouver it is difficult to start Community Gardens because we have limited available space, and a proposal/creation process that is difficult for community groups with no experience to navigate. The following websites are invaluable tools making a community garden viable, and for providing alternate ways of participating in community gardens (eg. Buying a garden share, urban farming workshops, etc.):

The City of Vancouver's Food Policy Community Garden Resources:

<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/foodpolicy/projects/gardenresource.htm>

City Farmer News - <http://www.cityfarmer.info/> or <http://www.cityfarmer.org/>