

Guide to Step-by-Step Urban Community Gardening



Women working in a vegetable garden in Khayelitsha



A man with carrots from his garden in Joe Slovo Park

About this Resource

The purpose of this guide is to give introductory information about how to start an urban community garden in the city.

While these gardens vary in their purpose, scope and impacts, a number of initial steps in the planning and implementing stages remain the same.

Above all, starting an urban garden has payoffs for its beneficiaries, but also requires hard work, dedication and patience.

This document was prepared by the Urban Agriculture Unit of the City of Cape Town's Directorate for Economic Development.

For more information, visit the City's website at www.capetown.gov.za

Step One: What do you want to do?

There are many reasons that people choose to start an urban garden. Benefits include improvements to:

- **Household food security** – Growing your own food can mitigate household food insecurity and improve the nutritional status of those living in your household. It also encourages savings and reallocation of income in the household budget.
- **Economic opportunity** - Selling the food you produce in the garden helps generate income and facilitates entrepreneurial and business development.
- **Community Development** – urban gardens contribute to the greening of the city and facilitate cooperation and linkages between people in the community.

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Step Two: Form a Community Group

- Share your ideas with other people in your community. Find others with like-minded interests and recruit them to be part of the project.
- Many donors (government, aid agencies, NGOs, credit organisations) prefer giving resources, inputs, loans and grants to community groups rather than individuals.
- Take an inventory of the skills that everyone brings to the group and assign tasks to each member.
- Hold regular meetings to discuss how to move forward with the project. Continual discussions ensure that you are all in agreement about your motivations and a common vision for the garden. It is useful to ask questions like:
 - Will you harvest crops for your own household food basket or to sell?
 - Will you share the produce equally?
 - Do you plan on donating a portion of your harvest back to the community?
- When you meet with potential donors and aid agencies, prepare a written list of every member in your group, along with a vision plan for your garden. This can be a simple one-page document on what your group is planning to do and why it is important for yourselves and your community.
- Assign one or two people to be the group representatives. They will give their contact information to outside agencies, and be responsible for relaying information between the group and external stakeholders.
- With your community group, write a business plan that you can all agree upon, which you can then present to potential sponsors and outside parties.



Community Garden in Mamre

Step Three: Acquire a Piece of Land

- This is often the most difficult and time-consuming step of the whole process. Vacant plots of land are usually all owned by someone. You will find that the property you are interested in is:
 - City-owned land
 - Privately owned land
- Find out who holds the title to the plot that you wish to work on. You must acquire the right to use it. NGOs, aid agencies and government institutions usually require proof of land ownership through a signed lease or land title before they can offer any type of assistance.
- Visit the site and determine whether the plot will be suitable for a garden. It should be close to a water source.
- Choose a plot of land that is close to where you live.
- There are external sources that can help you with land procurement, such as the Urban Agriculture Unit and the Department of Agriculture.

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Step Four: Learn about the Policies and By-Laws Affecting Urban Agriculture

It is important to familiarise yourself with the laws surrounding urban agriculture in the city. There are two important documents to this effect, available online in Afrikaans, English and Xhosa.

1. City of Cape Town: Environmental Health By-Law
 - This is important to read if you plan on keeping animals and livestock.
 - You will need to apply for a permit from the City Council.
 - Structures designed to accommodate animals must be built to specifications outlined by the policy, and be an appropriate distance from residential erfs, roads and public open spaces and dwellings.
 - Manure should be properly disposed of
 - Cats and dogs must be kept in separate enclosures
 - A supply of potable water should be provided in or adjacent to every enclosure
 - For further details, visit:
<http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/CityHealth/Documentation/Pages/Legislation.aspx>
2. City of Cape Town Urban Agriculture Policy
 - This policy lists the purpose and value of urban agriculture from the City's perspective. It also outlines the type and scope of support available to urban farmers in Cape Town.
 - For more information, visit:
<http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/ehd/Pages/Strategies,PoliciesandBy-Laws.aspx>



Cows grazing in Khayelitsha

Step Five: What Type of Farming Best Suits You?

- Crops, vegetables or livestock
- Mixed farming
- Agricultural product processing and food manufacturing (e.g. cheesemaking)

Factors to consider:

- Do I have the expertise? There are a variety of print materials available from the Department of Agriculture on crop and vegetable production, livestock farming, beekeeping, animal health, resource conservation, farm transport, soil and fertilisation and management and finance. These resources are available at the Atlantis Library and Elsenburg.
- Ask yourself the following questions:
 - Which crops best suit the land that I am working on?
 - Which crops are easiest to grow?
 - Which crops are most cost-efficient with the best market potential? Which crops will be easy to sell?
 - Does the type of farming I want to do suit the land that I have to work on?

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Step Six: Acquire NGO and Institutional Partnerships

- Starting a garden is a beneficial and rewarding endeavour, but it can also be costly and require considerable investment and inputs. Even if you don't have these resources yourself, there are a wide variety of NGOs, agencies and government bodies that can help you along the way.
- Some organisations give loans and grants to help entrepreneurs start and maintain their businesses.
- A number of support programs offer mentorship and training programs to teach you how to farm your crops and start a business.
- Some agencies will also help with non-financial production inputs and infrastructure.
- It is important to recognize that there are many costs associated with starting a garden. On an ongoing basis, there are bills, seeds and seedlings to pay for. If you do not have the resources to cover these costs yourself, find long-term partnerships that can assist you in your dreams.

Tips for dealing with potential partners and sponsors:

1. Agencies are often dealing with many requests at once. It is important to get a timeline from them to know when to expect to hear back. Delays and long waiting periods are normal. Be persistent and contact them if you do not get a response within a reasonable time frame.
2. It is useful to create a business plan to present to donors, which will help them to understand what it is your group wants to do and how you plan to do it. Research what the support program offers and their criteria for assistance. Figure out how you fit into those criteria. List things like your vision, goals and needs. If you need help, there are also a number of organisations that provide business training.

For more information and a complete listing of NGOs, agencies and government branches, refer to the Urban Agriculture Unit's Micro-Financing Support Directory

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