

Fall is Ripe for Starting a Community Garden

By Brenda Jarboe
Shawnee County Community Garden Network Coordinator

If you have ever thought about community gardening, fall is an excellent time to start. Fall offers not only a blank canvas for you to start planning your garden, but also is the perfect time to prepare your garden plot for next year. Here are some tips from Shawnee County Extension for starting a community garden.

Find a handy location for your garden:

- Not so close to the house or building that it hinders the enjoyment of your yard, but not so far away that it is difficult run out to weed a bit or transport produce when harvested.
- Make sure you have clean, potable water available.
 - Using water from sources other than drinking water can spread disease.
 - Rain barrels are great for ornamentals and lawns, but use only potable water on your produce garden so bacteria like e coli are not drawn up through the roots and spread systemically through your fruits and vegetables.
 - It is best to water your garden with hoses approved for drinking water.

When planning your garden be sure to consider:

- Starting small and increasing your garden size over time.
- How many families will be involved in your garden?
 - Successful community gardens are usually comprised of 10 or more actively involved families.
- Who will act as the garden manager?
 - Someone needs to be in charge and act as the organizer and overall manager.
 - The manager does not need to be the same person continually, but can change on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis.
- What is your budget for your garden?
- There needs to be a set of rule governing your garden.
- Will there be a fee to belong to your community garden?
- What will be done with the produce from the garden?
- Registering your garden with City of Topeka Planning Department.
- Contacting Topeka Common Ground: <http://www.topekacommonground.org> and Shawnee County Extension: <http://www.shawnee.ksu.edu> for help.

How will you construct your garden?

- Use raised beds for easier access.
- Beds four feet wide with access on both sides are easier to maintain because you can reach across for planting, weeding and harvesting.

- If using raised beds, making the length correspond to lengths of lumber aids in construction so you don't have to cut the lumber.
- If using multiple four foot beds, it is best to space the beds according to how you plan to maintain the area between beds.
 - If you plan to have grass and mow between beds, make sure your mower will fit down the aisle.
 - Consider planting buffalo grass so you don't have to mow or water as often.
 - For more information on buffalo grass, visit <http://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/mf658.pdf>
 - If you plan to use weed barrier under mulch, like straw, bark or gravel, between beds, consider the width of the barrier when spacing your garden beds.
- Drip irrigation allows you to best control appropriate moisture for individual plants.
- Do you want your garden inside a fence?
- Does your soil need amended to grow the produce you want?
 - Have you had a soil test done?
 - Shawnee County Extension provides one free soil test per year to Shawnee County residents, as long as grant monies are available. Soil tests are \$10, otherwise.
 - Using raised beds allows you to fill the beds with soil appropriate for your produce.
- Tilling in the fall allows you to break up the sod, amend the soil and prepare the bed for spring planting.
 - Once you have your garden plot tilled, it is best not to till or disturb the soil for weed eradication as that brings deeply buried seeds to the surface where they can germinate.
 - Use a hoe to scrape, cut or break weeds off at the surface without turning the soil.

Community gardening is such a great way to give back while exercising, encouraging a healthy diet, getting to know other gar-

Hi-Crest Community Garden, just south of 37th on Colfax.



deners, relieving stress and improving your health.

For more information on community gardening contact Brenda Jarboe, Shawnee County Community Garden Network Coordinator at 785-232-0062 ext. 113 or brendajarboe@ksu.edu.



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