

What is a Garden Wheel?

A “**Garden Wheel**” is a group of neighbors and friends that comes together to create and nurture food gardens and community, and to share locally-grown food, labor, information and resources. Typically, members take turns working on garden projects that rotate (like a wheel) from household to household. Eventually all members benefit from hands-on support in their own food garden and the sharing of information, resources and fun.

Why Create a Garden Wheel in your Neighborhood?

You already know that growing your own food offers many benefits to you, your family, and our environment. Connecting with neighbors through a **Garden Wheel** offers additional benefits, such as:

- Neighborhood work parties and potlucks are a great way to get to know your neighbors and improve neighborhood safety and beauty.
- Creating food gardens throughout the neighborhood improves access to healthy food for you and your neighbors.
- Affordable way to get the help you need on garden projects that might seem too big for your family.
- Helps create a support network to share garden information and resources (such as extra seeds, plants, and fresh garden produce).
- Easy way to share information and skills about all aspects of food growing and preservation.

How to Create and Sustain a Garden Wheel

All you need to get started is a few people that are interested in working together to organize and make a plan. The following 4 steps will help you get your neighborhood Garden Wheel spinning. Good luck!



Photo: Daily Acts

Step 1: Throw a party! Create a Steering Committee.

- Initial meeting. To begin with you will have a group of people who have expressed interest in creating a Garden Wheel. Gather together around a potluck and explore your common interests, visions, and inspirations.
- Creating your “board”. At this gathering, identify a group of people that are willing to work with you to organize your Garden Wheel.

Step 2: Agree on the purpose of your Garden Wheel.

Different neighbor groups may have different ideas and reasons for creating a garden wheel. Being clear on your purpose will help assure that you have the same goals and expectations. Spend some time agreeing on the purpose of your group. It could include some or all of the following:

- To create back yard gardens in your neighborhood
- To support your neighborhood in the distribution and sharing of food grown locally
- To enjoy neighborhood work parties and potlucks

- To donate excess to local charities or food bank
- To educate your community in all aspects of food growing and preservation
- Other reasons

Step 3: Decide who you will you include.

You may want to start your **Garden Wheel** with people you already know or may decide that it is a good opportunity to reach out to neighbors that you have not yet met. Ideas might include:

- The people on your block
- Your mother's club or another group that is already organized
- Your apartment complex
- The parents in your child's classroom
- Your local neighborhood, which can include several blocks

Step 4: Develop guidelines.

The success of your Garden Wheel will be determined by the clarity of your guidelines.

Guidelines should include the following:

- How often will you meet? Will you create an annual or monthly calendar?
- How will group members communicate with each other (e.g. phone, email)
- How will you track member participation? Will level of participation be used to determine when and whether a member can have a work party at their house?
- Who will direct the gatherings? Is there someone who has the skills to plan the overall picture and can designate tasks?
- Have a clear outline of the project and the expected outcome.
- Provide the necessary tools and materials.
- Allow enough time for the project to guarantee positive results.

Garden Wheel Work Party Example

A neighbor wants to pull out some of her perennial beds and replace them with edibles.

- Outline the project and tools and materials needed. The neighbor should supply:
 - A design
 - Soil and amendments, mulch
 - Irrigation equipment, tools

- Plants like lettuce, kale, artichokes, etc.
- The neighbor calls interested people beforehand- a phone call with encouragement to attend increases participation.
- Gather together to introduce each other and talk about the day. Determine the skill level of the attendees and their interests.
- Don't forget logistics and safety factors (e.g., water, sunscreen, tool safety, hats, gloves, etc.)
- Introduce planting techniques, mulching, irrigation for the inexperienced.
- Enjoy the fruit of your labor with a potluck. Share the day's experiences.
- Call attendees afterwards and thank them. Gratitude is important to nurture the Garden Wheel.

Keys to success

- Create a predetermined schedule that is distributed annually or monthly so your membership can make plans to attend.
- Be sure that each work party is well organized. Don't bite off too much and know what you want to accomplish.
- Emphasize the importance of reciprocity, integrity and commitment. A successful Garden Wheel needs all members to contribute.
- Encourage members to attend with personal phone calls or visits.
- Create easy ways for members to be in contact. Create a contact list, list serve, or phone tree.
- Look at these gatherings as educational sharing and community building opportunities.
- Express gratitude after an event with a personal phone calls or visits.
- Tap into local knowledge.
- Have regular meetings and keep the ball rolling.
- Identify your resources for recruitment, grants, supplies, and tools (e.g. local neighborhood association, city funds, tool library, etc.)
- Take pictures and have fun!!