

# **A Community Garden Toolkit for Military Installations**



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**Note:** The views expressed in the toolkit article do not necessarily represent the views of the agencies represented.

## Excellence in Government Fellows Program

### Class of 2022





# **Introduction**

**We begin by stating that we are a team of six civil servants from six federal agencies who are participating in a year-long leadership program. While we come from different backgrounds, we all share a deep commitment to public service and giving back to the free society in which we live.**

**We introduce ourselves with the humble intention that this community garden toolkit be a practical resource for all of you living on United States military installations at home and abroad.**

**This toolkit exists because of and for all of the brave service men and women of the United States military and their families who sacrifice so much for our country to keep us free.**

**As it is, this toolkit is nothing more than a seed in the soil.**

**Therefore, it is our hope that you will utilize this to grow gardens of your own on U.S. military bases at home and abroad, fostering that same space for community and well-being you have created for all of us, a space that you so nobly defend, protect, and preserve for us day-in and day-out.**

**Team Helping Hands  
In Partnership with  
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County**

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# Acknowledgements

**This community garden toolkit for the military community and their families would not have been possible without the help and support of those who freely volunteered their time to lend a helping hand. We are deeply grateful to the following individuals and organizations.**

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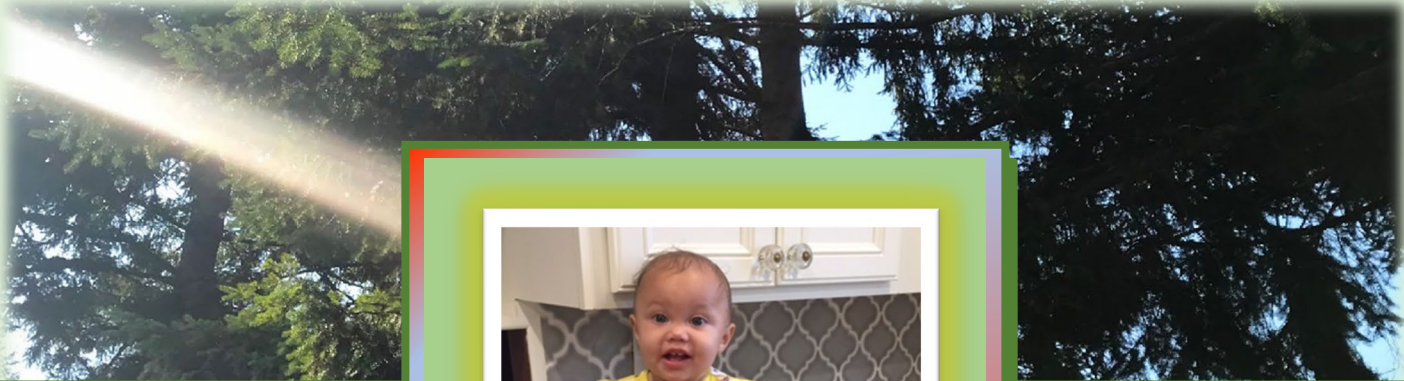
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## Community Gardening

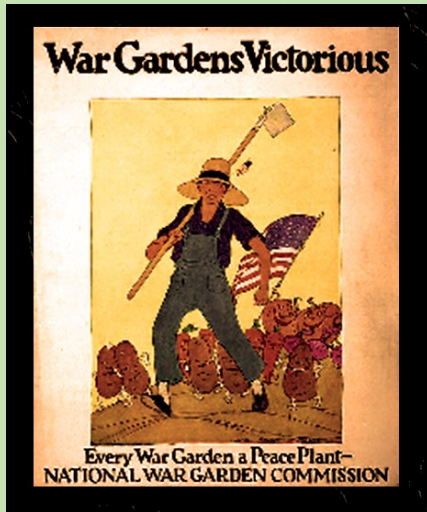
### What is a Community Garden?

You are likely reading this Toolkit because you are curious about what it takes to start a community garden on your military installation, but what exactly is a community garden and how have they been used historically? Community gardens are typically shared gardens. The garden may be one big space where participants all pitch in to take care of the garden and share in its harvest or a shared piece of land with individual garden plots for each person or family to tend to and claim the spoils. However, community gardens have the potential to be much more than the enjoyment of the harvest, especially in the military community.

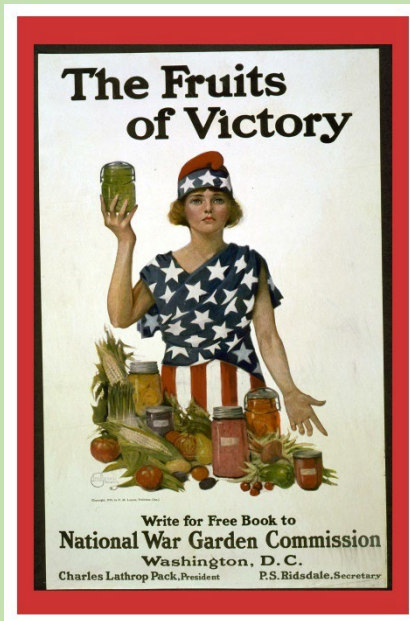
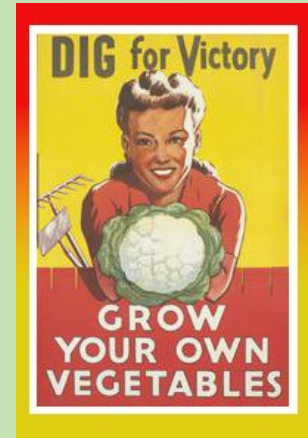
For frequently moving military families, the social connection of a community garden can be especially important. Meaningful relationships and connections to the surrounding community can be built and fostered through the shared gardening experience. Community gardens also encourage a healthy lifestyle, allow an opportunity to engage the whole family in activities, and connect individuals and families with others on the installation.







The military has a long history of supporting gardening. In 1917, at the start of the United States' involvement in World War I, the primary motivation for cultivating community gardens shifted from urban areas connecting with nature to a basic need to address food shortages. Fort Benning, for example, maintained a hatchery for poultry to help feed soldiers being trained on the installation.



According to the War Garden Commission, in 1917, 3.5 million war gardens produced crops worth approximately 350 million dollars. Victory gardens were a popular concept during the Second World War, and by 1944, an estimated 18-20 million victory gardens provided 40 percent of America's vegetables.<sup>1</sup>



In recent decades, individuals and grassroots organizations have continued to expand community gardens that promote environmental

stewardship, revitalize urban neighborhoods affected by disinvestment, provide healthy fruits and vegetables, and strengthen community bonds. With a 100-year history within the United States, it would seem that community gardening is here to stay and ever-expanding in its application.

<sup>1</sup> Smithsonian Institution. Derived from the Smithsonian Institute's Community of Gardens Exhibit "Wartime Gardens". Accessed February 28, 2022.

<https://communityofgardens.si.edu/exhibits/show/historycommunitygardens/wartimegardens>

## Need for and Benefits of Military Community Gardening

The transient nature of military life makes building community relationships and bonds invaluable for our military members and their families. When service members and families actively engage in community activities and build relationships with other service members of the community, they tend to have more confidence that the community will be there to support them in their time of need.<sup>2</sup> A potential source of community bonding lies in community garden participation.

**“Just like the plants weathered the storms, so has your family and you can do it again, but this time it will just look a little different.”<sup>2</sup>**



Community gardens benefit the gardeners themselves and the broader community. They can supply food and high-quality nutrition, improving food security. Community gardens can also serve as a beacon of permanence for traditionally transient communities, offer a space to congregate, and provide recreation opportunities and physical activities within neighborhoods.<sup>3, 4</sup> They can also restore a connection with nature, provide educational opportunities, and even provide topics



<sup>2</sup> Syracuse University. “Civic Engagement and Sense of Community in the Military”. Accessed February 28, 2022. <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/article/civic-engagement-and-sense-of-community-in-the-military/>

<sup>3</sup> Koay, W.I. and D. Dillon. 2020. “Community Gardening: Stress, Well-Being, and Resilience Potentials. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2020 Sep; 17(18): 6740.

<sup>4</sup> Ioby. 2019 “Reclaim it guide” Accessed February 28, 2022. <https://blog.ioby.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Reclaim-it-guide-final.pdf>



for conversations with deployed family. Families who move after investing in the garden may feel reassured leaving their plot for another family to nurture. Finally, community gardens help support “green” initiatives.

Gardens also provide an opportunity to improve nutrition through increased vegetable consumption. The U.S. Army 2020 Health of the Force Report noted less than half of soldiers are eating the recommended two or more servings of fruit per day (33%) or two or more servings of vegetables per day (42%).”<sup>5</sup> The National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey (FoodAPS) found adults with their own garden had a 30% greater prevalence of acquiring enough vegetables to meet USDA recommendations for at home vegetable consumption than those without access to a garden.<sup>6</sup> Most garden intervention studies demonstrate a positive influence on children’s fruit and vegetable consumption.<sup>7</sup>



### Various forms of Military Community Gardens

Established community gardens, which already exist on some military installations, are described below. To best position your community garden for success, this toolkit endeavors to highlight best practices and lessons learned. These are based on the results of our survey of other military community gardens, as well as a review of community garden data generally.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Army. 2020. “2020 Health of the Force Report. Accessed February 28, 2022.

<https://phc.amedd.army.mil/topics/campaigns/hof/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Tchounwou, P.B. 2021. “Garden Access, Race and Vegetable Acquisition among U.S. Adults: Findings from a National Survey. *IJERPH* 18(22):12059. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182212059>

<sup>7</sup> Savoie-Roskos, M.R., Wengreen, H., and C. Durward. 2017. “Increasing Fruit and Vegetable Intake among Children and Youth through Gardening-Based Interventions: A Systematic Review” *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 117(2): 240-250.

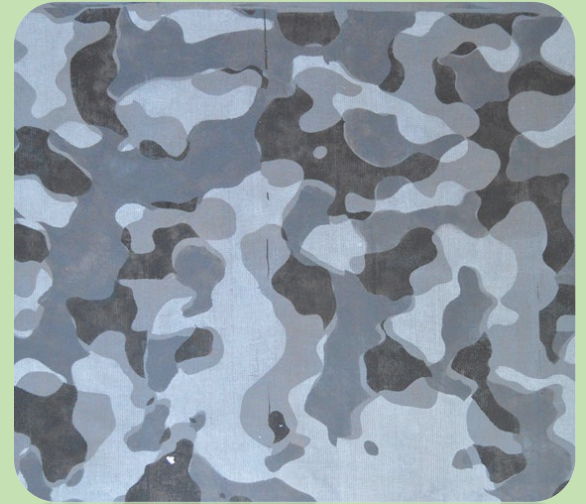
<sup>8</sup> U.S. Army. 2020. “2020 Health of the Force Report. Accessed February 28, 2022.

<https://phc.amedd.army.mil/topics/campaigns/hof/Pages/default.aspx>

## Existing Military Gardens

### **Fort Drum, NY**

Fort Drum is in Jefferson County, which is home to the 10th Mountain Division. Despite the short growing season, Fort Drum has established a community garden with individual plots available to families. The community garden plots are maintained by Mountain Community Homes, a private company that owns and operates the installation's housing. Plots are available for free to residents. In coordination with MWR and Mountain Community Homes, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Jefferson County provides educational programming to Fort Drum families and county residents on topics such as basic home gardening, composting, and preparation of healthy meals.



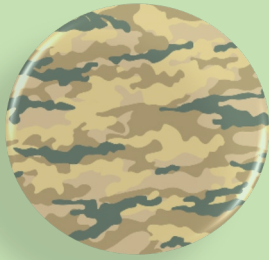
### **Fort Gordon, GA**

Fort Gordon is an Army installation in Augusta, Georgia. Its community garden has a garden club that meets monthly and sponsors monthly workshops, a support program for new gardeners, and partners with Fort Gordon Child & Youth Services as a teaching garden. Fort Gordon's community garden utilizes an individual plot model, rather than one large shared garden, and charges a plot rental fee.

### **Fort Rucker, AL**

Fort Rucker is an Army installation in southeastern Alabama. The community garden utilizes an individual plot model, charges a plot rental fee, and emphasizes





knowledge sharing, organic gardening, neighborhood improvement, connection to the environment, and relationship nurturing.

### Luke AFB, AZ

Luke Air Force Base is located in Glendale, Arizona. The community garden utilizes an individual plot model, charges a plot rental fee, and the military installation provides the water source.

### JB Lewis-McCord, WA

Joint Base Lewis-McCord is a joint Army and Air Force installation located near Tacoma, Washington. The installation houses two separate community garden locations, both utilizing an individual plot model and charging a plot rental fee. The garden provides rakes, compost, and water hoses for all gardeners.



**Green Thumb Gatherings**  
Saturday Mornings

Share your knowledge at our community garden with a small group of fellow gardeners during our Saturday morning gathering!

Topics May Include:  
Companion Plants • Pest Management  
Soil Protection • Pollinators  
Plants for Beginners • Weed Management  
Kids & Gardening • Canning & more.

Sign up at ODM for a date and topic of your choice.

**Plot Rental**  
\$25 per year

Gardens are located across from the Youth Center behind the Thrift Store.

20 plots (4x8').  
First come, first serve basis.  
Tools provided.

FORCE 21FSS PeteRecreation 21FSS.COM Outdoor Recreation

### Peterson Space Force Garrison, CO

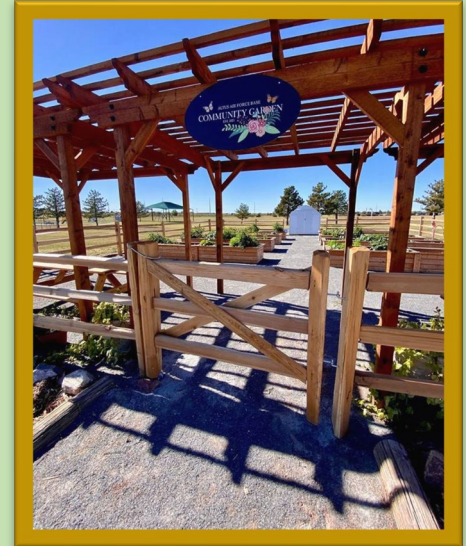
Peterson Space Force Garrison is located in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The community garden utilizes an individual plot model, charges a plot rental fee and includes water spigot and hose access, use of a pull cart, and a 5-gallon bucket of hand tools.

### Hill Air Force Base, UT

Hill Force Base is located in northern Utah. The community garden utilizes an individual plot model, charges a flat water usage fee, and tills the plots for its members.

## Altus Air Force Base, OK

Altus AFB is located in southwestern Oklahoma. The community garden is fenced and utilizes an individual plot model with raised beds, and charges a plot rental fee. The privatized military housing company provides the water source. The base provides soil, compost bins, finished compost, two spigots with water hoses, and a shaded seating area for gardeners. A garden club meets monthly and emphasizes organic gardening while discussing gardening tips, learning new topics, and sharing upkeep responsibilities. The installation planted native grasses and forbs to attract pollinators to the garden to improve yields.



## Establishing a Garden on a Military Installation

### Role of the Sponsor

Military community gardens are most commonly sponsored by preexisting installation entities, often a support function office (such as the medical facility nutritionist or family support services coordinator) or a private organization (such



as a spouses' group or noncommissioned officers council).<sup>9</sup> Both sponsorship models have proven successful, but recognize that the rules and parameters governing your garden will depend on its sponsoring organization. Whomever you choose as a sponsor will ultimately affect the garden's funding source and its operating guidelines.<sup>10</sup>

A sponsor or the sponsoring organization's role is four-fold under either sponsorship model: (1) establish and then maintain the garden; (2) provide oversight; (3) help obtain funding through appropriated, non-

<sup>9</sup> Less commonly, private organizations are established for the express purpose of facilitating a community garden.

<sup>10</sup> Gardens sponsored by support offices are ordinarily funded by appropriated funds and subject to DOD FMR 7000.14-R, as well as service-specific, limitations. In the Air Force, DAFMAN 65-605v1, *Budget Guidance and Technical Procedures*, is applicable. Whereas private organizations are service specific and in the Air Force governed by DAFI 34-223, *Private Organizations Program*.



appropriated, and grant sources, and (4) serve as the biggest cheerleader on the installation and within the local community for the garden and its gardeners.

To do so, your sponsor will need to be sustained, engaged, and passionate. An effective sponsor is likely the single most important ingredient for establishing and sustaining a successful community garden, particularly in the transient military environment. If you are reading this as a sponsor, thank you! We are absolutely thrilled you are ready to undertake this leadership challenge and have included resources to prepare you to lead.<sup>11</sup>



### **Obtaining Stakeholder Support**

Similarly to the importance of choosing a sponsor, stakeholder support is also invaluable. Engaged stakeholders will care about the garden’s growth while doing what they can to help ensure its success. Whether word-of-mouth advertising, opening valuable resources or otherwise easing startup hurdles, stakeholder support is critical. Do not hesitate to engage stakeholders early. Understand that rationale or impetus for each stakeholder’s support, as well as their contribution, may vary. Tailor your message or pitch uniquely to your audience.

“To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.” — Audrey Hepburn

The stakeholders listed below are uniquely positioned to help by virtue of their



<sup>11</sup> University of Georgia Extension. “How to Start a Community Garden: Getting People Involved”. Accessed February 28, 2022. [How to Start a Community Garden: Getting People Involved | UGA Cooperative Extension.](#)

position and influence. We encourage you to engage them and others for initiative buy-in and future assistance. We would also encourage you to ask stakeholders, “How might the community garden help further their installation interests?” Asking that simple question may open the door to a meaningful collaboration.

### Command Structure

Advocates for community gardens should enlist the support of your installation’s command staff. The base or garrison commander, and by extension its deputy and senior enlisted advisor, as well as civilian leadership, are charged with both taking care of the installation’s soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and guardians, as well as, maintaining good order and discipline.



As a result, command may be interested in the garden as an expanded hobby option for the installation populace. Commanders may also have authority to designate funding to support the community garden, as allowed by that Service’s regulations. Highlight that community gardening is an attractive activity for the entire installation populace – retirees, active-duty members, dependents and civil servants alike—and that gardening provides wonderful health benefits. Both the act of gardening and consuming its farm-to-table bounty improve physical health and thereby further



military readiness. Similarly, mental health is also improved through gardening. Time outdoors, while surrounded by nature, is restorative. Both physical and mental well-being are integral to military readiness.

From a strategic standpoint, the command team will likely recognize the food security issues that face the military community and appreciate this as a potential local partial solution. Highlighting other installations’ community gardens and the positive effect the gardens have



had on community relations will also be helpful. However, as the ultimate risk assumption authority on the installation, the command structure will be very interested in risks associated with the garden; the commander will likely ask the legal office to be involved on its behalf to ensure the garden's compliance with Department of Defense (DoD) regulations and service-specific instructions. Notwithstanding, not all command teams have been supportive of community garden initiatives. Funding constraints and continuity are typically cited as concerns.



### **Civil Engineering Squadron**

The installation's civil engineering squadron (Air Force) or Department of Public Works (Army) maintains the totality of the installation's physical infrastructure – from land use to environmental issues to utilities. Installation real estate professionals will be knowledgeable on the

installation's land, permitted land use, and where an edible garden can be safely planted. Engineers will know about the installation's water resources and the feasibility and allowability of using the installation water supply. Environmental personnel can locate sensitive natural resource areas and areas with contaminated soil or groundwater. Civil Engineering (CE) Operations personnel will need to mark any installation utility lines in the area before any excavation can occur. Finally, the CE command team may permit participation in the garden creation as an authorized, operational training activity – and may be able to designate continued maintenance funding for the project. Some civil engineering squadrons and public works departments may own the cranes, bulldozers, and other machinery useful for creating a top-notch community garden which may be available to support such a project with Command approval.



Engineering functions on some installations are operated by contractors; development of a community garden may be outside the scope of their contract and require additional funding for execution. In trying to get your engineer team on board, be sure to highlight the integral role that civil engineering squadrons and public

works offices have played in other installation's community gardens. Also, be sure to have a facility management plan with assigned responsibilities to ensure that maintenance will not eventually fall on CE Operations or other personnel who are not responsible for garden upkeep.

### **Morale, Welfare, and Recreation**

Installation Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) staff may be interested in helping to operate or facilitate community gardens too. As these offices are only partially funded through Non-Appropriate Funds (NAF), these organizations may require fees from users for participation. Those fees will help cover garden manning and supplies.

### **Housing, Family Support Groups**

On-installation support offices with an outreach mission may be interested in supporting or even sponsoring your community garden too.<sup>12</sup> For example: a Military Treatment Facility participated as a way to further its wellness mission and the Civil Engineers at Altus AFB, OK, participated as an operational training opportunity for their



<sup>12</sup> Obtaining sponsorship from an on-base support office alleviates some funding concerns because their offices and initiatives are funded by appropriated funds rather than relying upon dues, fundraisers or donations for funds.

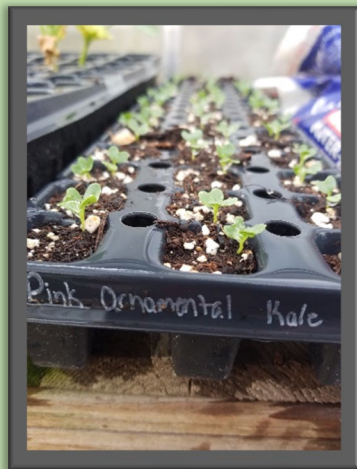


engineers. Alternatively, privatized housing offices at some installations have also used their private funds to sponsor gardens and make their housing developments more attractive to prospective tenants.

### **Local Gardening Groups**

Local gardening groups can provide regionally specific expertise and guidance for your community garden and may be able to assist with resources.

Establishing a relationship with a local group can assist with the longevity of a community garden on a military installation with transitioning members.



Members with access to the installation (such as retirees) may also aid during periods of extended leave or mass deployments. To locate local gardening groups you may start by reaching out to your local Cooperative Extension service, typically found at land-grant universities. More information on these resources can be found below in the Training and Education section.



## Youth Organizations

Non-profit youth organizations can be mutually beneficial partners for a community garden. This collaboration provides an opportunity for children to learn new skills while helping with some of the labor-intensive tasks. A few of the most well-known national youth organizations include the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and 4-H clubs. Local scout groups and 4-H clubs are usually associated with area schools and often have chapters located on military installations or can be located by contacting the organization directly. 4-H is a

Cooperative Extension

youth development program that encourages hands-on learning under the guidance of adult mentors. Child and youth services, typically part of Morale, Welfare and Recreation Offices, are another office which may partner with the garden.



## Natural Resources & Potential Limitations

An important consideration for establishing a community garden is finding a suitable site. The installation Natural Resources Manager will know if a site contains sensitive natural resources such as floodplains or threatened and endangered species.



While the requisite installation approver will have to approve your garden location, and coordinating with military civil engineers when

considering garden plots is critical, here are a few additional characteristics to consider.



## Site Selection Considerations

- Is there adequate sunlight, 6 to 8 hours per day?
- Is it relatively flat?
- Does the site have adequate water drainage (not too many persistent wet spots)?
- Is it within walking distance from housing or is there existing parking?
- Is the site visible for enhanced safety and enjoyment?
- What is the current use of the area?
- What is the historical use of the area? This could be important for potential soil contamination.
- Will you have the soil analyzed (for soil structure, pH or contaminants)?
- Are there deer, rabbits, or other animals that may need to be fenced out?
- Will you need to install fencing, sign posts, shade structures, etc.? If so, you will need to submit an 811 locate request for city utility lines to be marked and a separate dig permit request to CE to mark installation utility lines.
- Are there local government restrictions on applications of EPA registered pesticides (including herbicides)?



## Water Source

Once you narrow down potential sites, you need to consider water availability. How will you water the plants? You will want to clarify:

- Is water readily available or does infrastructure need to be built to provide water to the garden?
- Will there be a fee for the water?
- Is it potable?
- Can you attach any type of irrigation equipment?



- Does the installation shut off water lines during the winter? (Oct. – Mar.)

### **Garden Model**

There are many different models and purposes for which you may choose to start a community garden.

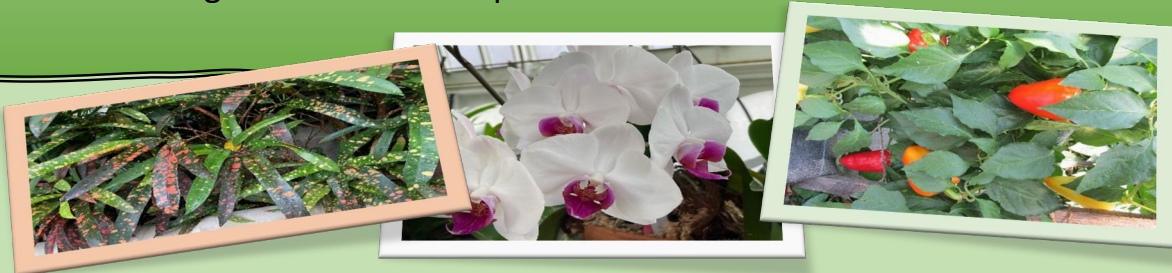
Two popular models are individual plots, each maintained independently by a responsible party, or a common, shared garden in which all participants contribute to the labor and share in the harvest equally.

### **Decide early on the following:**

- What is the purpose of the garden?
- Who will the garden serve?
- Will the garden be cared for collectively or divided for individuals to care for?
- Are the beds communal, assigned, or how are they designated?
- Will there be a fee charged for gardeners to cover expenses?

### **You will also want to consider:**

- Will you use raised beds?
- If individual plots, how will you separate the plots?
- Are there expectations for plot maintenance? How will plots be maintained during leave or deployment?
- Who is responsible for off-season tasks or plot maintenance between tenants?
- Are there additional chores gardeners are expected to volunteer for?
- Who is responsible for damage to gardens or equipment used by gardeners and their families/guests?
- How are violations of the ground rules handled?
- Will the garden be organic? If so, will there be rules about pest management and which products can be used?





## Crop Residues

A third site consideration is managing crop residues. You may want to consult with the installation environmental office (solid waste manager) to determine appropriate options for waste disposal, to include off-site composting for yard waste. Options may include composting within the garden, which can then be used to supplement soil or fill in raised beds in the future. Compost is frequently available for free from official on-post compost operations. Wood pallets can often be sourced for free and make a great DIY compost bin. Composting sites can attract insects and be unsightly if not properly planned or managed so approval may be necessary.

A man has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit. – Elton Trueblood

## Climate

Knowing the hardiness zone will help identify the types of plants that are appropriate for the geographical region. USDA provides



online maps and zip code searches to assess the climate in your area. Knowing the climate will also be helpful in determining the length of the growing season. For example, warm-season crops such as sweet potatoes or melons are ill-suited to northern locations with cold soils. Cold-season crops such as spinach or mustard will do poorly during the heat of south or southwest summers.

### Equipment Needs and Storage

Gardens require a variety of tools, equipment, and infrastructure. Contact military grounds or Civil Engineering personnel to assess what equipment might already be on site. Also, for initial one-time use of equipment such as those needed for shaping beds, consider asking stakeholders if there are opportunities to borrow, work with volunteers, or rent equipment.

Storage for equipment, particularly larger items like wheelbarrows might also be necessary. If not available, consider starting with container or table gardens. Again, due to the transient nature of military life, consider if a stakeholder will partner with the community garden and bring tools to workdays.



Another option to explore is donations of shared resource tools for everyone to use while in the garden. Installation lending closets, public works self-help organizations, and even MWR offices might also stock and lend tools to program participants. Finally, the “bring your own” tools approach might also be appropriate for your garden.

### Financing and Garden Rules

Early in the planning process, your team will need to develop a budget and, if private organization-run, identify funding sources.





## Budget

Even if all the labor is provided by volunteers, either the garden or individual users will need to buy seeds, fertilizer, compost, and other garden necessities. The Community Garden Start-Up Guide developed by the University of California Cooperative Extension, Los Angeles County, says that starting a basic community garden typically costs between \$2,500 and \$5,000. We estimate that starting your on-base garden will cost two-thirds less, because many of your start up and recurring resource expenses will come at no cost to you. For example, the installation will provide the land and potentially the water, and the gardeners can provide their own seeds. It is important to consider annual maintenance and reoccurring costs in an annual budget.



“A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust.” – Gertrude Jekyll

## Funding

Ideally, installation commanders will approve funding for a community garden; however, this is not always possible.

Community gardens that cannot

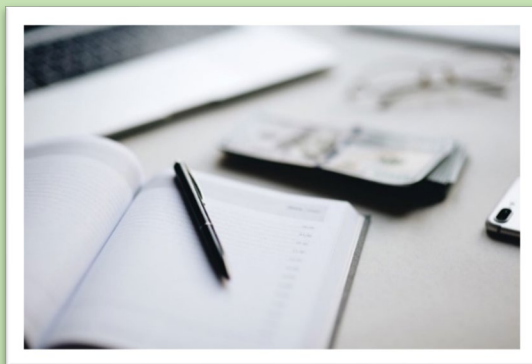
rely on appropriated funds commonly look to four funding sources: self-funding through membership dues, fundraising, soliciting monetary or in-kind donations, and grant funding.

## Plot Membership Dues

Dues are a common means to ensure sustainability of private organizations, such as community gardens with each member paying an annual fee. Fee structures vary across gardens; some gardens have gardeners pay more or less depending upon whether the individual plot has water, plot size, or the gardeners' income or military rank.

If your garden opts for this structure, remember:

- Your organization constitutes a private organization operating on a military installation. As such, there are limitations on the amount of funds that your organization can collect and hold in a given calendar year. Check your service specific guidance to ensure compliance.
- If your garden is organized within the command structure (e.g., the unit-sponsored dormitory in which the senior ranking noncommissioned officer is put in charge of the garden), junior members must not be coerced into participating. While your legal office can advise you further, generally, be careful about encouraging subordinates to participate in a dues-required community garden. Remember that government employees may not solicit funds from a subordinate. Any pressure, subtle or otherwise, on unit members to contribute is prohibited. For the donation to be truly voluntary, an employee must be free to determine the amount of the contribution or make no contribution at all.



### Fundraisers

Military private organizations commonly raise operating funds through fundraisers. Car washes, bake sales, concession booths at airshows and other installation-wide events are common. We would encourage your private organization to do the same. Not only does it





raise funds, but it also serves as an effective form of publicity and advertisement for the garden and furthers good will. In addition to traditional fundraisers, explore gardening specific fundraisers too, such as selling seeds or plants.

Fundraising pre-approval is often required and accomplished by completing and routing your installation-specific fundraising form.

### **Soliciting Donations**

Donations are a wonderful way to help resource your garden. When local garden nurseries or hardware stores learn of the initiative, they are often eager to make in-kind donations of seedlings, soil and tools in exchange for good will with the installation. However, be aware of the ethics limitations that govern how you may request donations and who may, in fact, donate.<sup>13</sup> These rules apply to both DoD personnel and their family members, per the Standards of Conduct Office, the office that governs DOD ethics. Remember to consult with an ethics attorney at



the Staff Judge Advocate office as you encounter issues to ensure compliance and to explore workarounds.

### **Seeking Grants**

While various grants to fund projects such as this exist, the approval process can be

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<sup>13</sup> A request for donations must be done in a personal capacity and during your personal time. Meaning that you cannot be in uniform, refer to your unit, organization, office, title or authority. The same rules apply if you solicit funds through your unit's private organization or unofficial activity. Nor should thank you notes be written on agency letterhead. Regarding donations, you cannot directly solicit or receive donations from a known "prohibited source," meaning any company, organization, or individual who is doing business with your service or on your joint base.

long and cumbersome. Doing a Google search will reveal many sources of garden funding. Other DoD sources of funding may be worth considering. For example, a truncated source of funding is specifically earmarked for programs that help Airmen and the Air Force, AFWERX Squadron Innovation Funds. Each year at present, Air Force installations receive approximately \$100K in funds to sponsor innovative ideas that enable the Department of the Air Force to operate faster and smarter. Military personnel assigned to the installation can submit ideas for consideration under the program. Community of Excellence awards might be another option for Army installations.

### **Sample Use Agreement/Rules**

It is important to establish both a Gardener Agreement and Garden Rules. While your garden must operate within the requirements of its military installation, it is still useful for members to know what is expected and required of them. The Agreement gets your gardeners' concurrence to comply with requirements, addresses issues of liability and liability insurance, and



cites the rules. The rules remind gardeners that they are required to comply with installation and garden requirements while on site and enumerates specific garden operating requirements. Sample Community Garden Rules and Agreements are linked for your consideration and modification to meet your installation's requirements and garden's needs.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> National Policy and Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity and ChangeLab Solutions. 2011. *Ground Rules: A Legal Toolkit for Community Gardens*. Accessed February 28, 2022. [https://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/CommunityGardenToolkit\\_Final\\_%28CLS\\_20120530%29\\_20110207.pdf](https://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/CommunityGardenToolkit_Final_%28CLS_20120530%29_20110207.pdf)



## Maintaining a Garden on a Military Installation

Congratulations, you've established a community garden on your military installation. Now what? Planning for the maintenance and upkeep of the garden are important long-term considerations.

### **Communication**

A good communication plan is key to the success of your garden. Consider creating an in-person or virtual, online presence, such as a closed Facebook group, where you and your community can congregate to discuss the garden and share tips. You should also establish an email distribution list with all community garden members, including your stakeholders. You can use the email distribution list to send reminders, notify members of upcoming events, and keep track of all correspondence associated with your community garden.

To generate interest in your garden, consider placing flyers around the installation, running articles in the installation newspaper and advertising the community garden and garden club online. Each should explain the benefits of gardening and

highlight the fun that awaits! Garden club meetings should have a standing agenda with rotating hosts or guest speakers to run the meeting, as well as someone to keep minutes for future meetings. When planning your meetings, consider recurring agendas that discuss seasonal topics, such as which plants or vegetables to plant, where to buy seeds, and an open forum for questions for newcomers and seasoned members, to ensure new members can benefit from the information.



## Build a Community

Create more than a garden, build a community. Consider infrastructure like a picnic table where gardeners can sit, relax, and have a snack. Plant a bed with cut flowers and then hand out bouquets to random passersby or have a system where deployed personnel can request a bouquet for loved ones on base or post. Have a garden themed story time for kids. Plan a “salad treasure hunt” where kids find the ingredients for a salad and then prepare one together. Maybe host a pot luck featuring items from the garden. Possibilities are endless and require just a touch of creativity.

To schedule time together, designate community work days where all gardeners come together to tackle projects. Consider using dues or getting donations to provide lunch at the end of the workday.





## Job Descriptions

A community garden needs committed volunteers in addition to the sponsoring organization and stakeholders discussed above.

There are many tasks that need to be done to make your garden successful, so everyone should find jobs that best suit their skills and abilities.

Don't know anything about gardening but are

good with finances?  
Volunteer to be the garden club treasurer.  
Do you find stress relief in getting your

hands dirty with manual work? Volunteer for the grounds crew or the composting crew.

Are you a social butterfly who loves planning parties? Volunteer for the events crew or community relations crew. Born organizer? Volunteer to be the plot coordinator. Below is a suggested breakdown of jobs to consider for your community garden.

You may decide some of these jobs can be combined, or dropped altogether, depending on your garden approach and size.



Community gardening is a rewarding labor of love. Growing your own fresh fruits and

## Job Descriptions

### Garden Co-leaders

It's best to have more than one leader if possible, not only to share the responsibilities, but also to encourage a grassroots leadership approach. The co-leaders should serve as the primary contacts, coordinate or facilitate meetings, and generally provide leadership and guidance for gardeners and volunteers. Co-leaders should ensure critical tasks are covered by volunteer assignments, and review, edit, obtain gardener buy-in, and enforce garden rules.

### Plot coordinator

Creates and maintains a garden map with plot assignments, organizes registration, manages any wait list, and maintains gardener contact information.

### Grounds crew

Ensures the common areas of the garden are neat and maintained.

### Maintenance crew

Responsible for upkeep and maintenance of common tools, if available, and any tool sheds, water hoses, or other equipment belonging to the garden.

### Supply crew

Responsible for securing supplies of common garden materials, if applicable, such as compost and tools.

### Composting crew

Responsible for oversight of composting process and bins, including communication of composting rules and guidance.

### Events crew

Coordinates events such as social get-togethers and educational workshops.

### Treasurer

Responsible for collecting fees and donations and disbursing funds for common supplies and equipment.

### Communications crew

Organizes and distributes a garden newsletter or blog. The communications crew might solicit expert feature articles from outside sources for inclusion in the newsletter. The communications crew is also responsible for communicating events, meetings, and important information to all gardeners, whether by bulletin board, email, phone calls, etc.

### Outreach and community relations

Responsible for ensuring the garden and its participants maintain a positive relationship with neighbors and stakeholders. This might include coordinating with the events crew to include neighbors and stakeholders in social events.

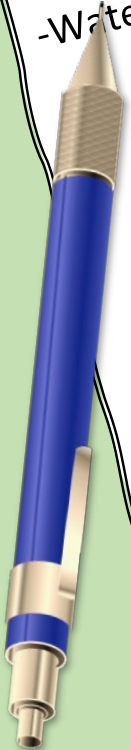
### Horticulture advisers

This position may be filled by outside stakeholders who possess gardening expertise. Responsibilities include mentoring new gardeners, ensuring the welcome packet includes relevant gardening resources, and coordinating educational workshops with the events crew.

### Plot Monitors

Responsible for monitoring plot usage and contacting gardeners who are not keeping their plots maintained. Also communicates plot availability to the plot coordinator.

- Pick up
- Buy see
- Mulch
- Water



*Many hands  
make light work.  
- Old English proverb*





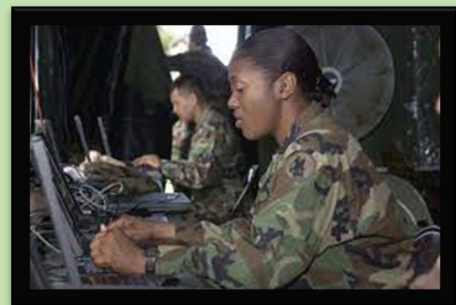
### **Welcome Packet for New Gardeners**

Preparing a welcome packet for new members helps get everyone off to a good start! Consider what information a new member might need. You may want to include a welcome letter introducing the garden leadership, a copy of your garden design so members understand where their plot is, copies of any use agreements and rules, and a list of contact information and roles of garden members. The welcome packet could also contain frequently asked questions, job descriptions and information about how to sign up for a position, and information about expectations for garden members. Finally, include schedule information for garden club meetings and any upcoming social events.



### **Sustainability Despite Military Turnover**

Military installations face a unique challenge with turnover. Not only does the installation see a continuous cycle of outgoing and new residents, but many service members also temporarily vacate the installation due to deployment, extended leave, or extended temporary duty. Ideally, the garden club will designate civilian employees or spouses who can help provide continuity. Regardless, a contingency plan can be used to formally establish processes and procedures to protect the garden in the event of a temporary or permanent relocation of those responsible for maintaining it. The contingency plan should cover resources, minimize inconvenience, and identify vital personnel by assigning specific responsibilities. Also, developing a plan for the backfill of support for individuals to tend to the garden will ensure the garden has the best harvest possible during the growing season. If a contingency plan has not been established, it could risk erosion of the garden due to not being maintained and weeded frequently. This could result in a significant decline in harvest or edible items.



## Training and Education

Successful community gardens incorporate education with a gardening club, where members can share ideas and experts can share their knowledge. Below is a list of resources that may be helpful in providing content for gardener education.

## Resources

### Cooperative Extension System

Local Cooperative Extension offices can be a good resource for sourcing expert speakers, gardening tips, and advice.<sup>15</sup> The Cooperative Extension System is a

partnership between certain public universities and federal, state, and local government that specializes in providing non-formal educational outreach in areas such as agriculture, nutrition, and youth development.

## Soil and Seed Maintenance



Proper soil and seed maintenance are critical to the success of any community garden. Here are a few tips that will ensure your soil is ready for your seeds to take root:

- ☑ Check to make sure that your soil is on relatively flat ground and close to a water source
- ☑ Make sure your soil is enclosed with a fence and kept on a raised bed, particularly if it is in an urban area where the integrity of the soil could be contaminated by rubble or has poor drainage
- ☑ Add compost to your soil to improve its health and help it sustain a neutral pH, then conduct a soil test to check for nutrient levels
- ☑ Keep your soil loose to make sure water and nutrients soak through and feed the plants
- ☑ To preserve and organize your seeds, keep them dry in a zipper bag with carefully labelled cards attached, including the type of seed and the date it was purchased
- ☑ Store your seeds in a dry and cool area at between 40 to 50 degrees F
- ☑ Packets may be placed in sealed jars if pests are raiding your inventory

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<sup>15</sup> USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. "Cooperative Extension System" Accessed online February 28, 2022. [Cooperative Extension System | National Institute of Food and Agriculture \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/extension)



## Master Gardeners

Master Gardeners are also a good resource for community gardens.<sup>16</sup> Master Gardener programs are also often associated with the Cooperative Extension



System. Most Master Gardener programs require trainees to volunteer a minimum number of hours educating others to be certified, and volunteer additional hours each year educating others. This required component of the Master Gardeners' certification program makes them an ideal candidate for your community garden to engage for expert guidance. The American Horticultural Society website can help connect you with additional gardening clubs and organizations in your area.<sup>17</sup>

## USDA National Agricultural Library<sup>18</sup>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Alternate Farming Systems Information Center provides a plethora of online resources for community gardening, from start-up guides and toolkits to fact sheets, legal resources, articles, and links to national gardening organizations.



<sup>16</sup> American Horticultural Society. "Master Gardeners". Accessed online February 28, 2022.

<https://ahsgardening.org/gardening-resources/master-gardeners/>

<sup>17</sup> American Horticultural Society. "Connecting Gardeners". Accessed online February 28, 2022.

<https://ahsgardening.org/gardening-resources/societies-clubs-organizations/>

<sup>18</sup> USDA National Agricultural Library. "Community Gardening". Accessed online February 28, 2022. [Community Gardening | Alternative Farming Systems Information Center | NAL | USDA](#)

## American Community Gardening Association (ACGA)<sup>19</sup>

The ACGA is a non-profit organization that provides education, resources, and support for community gardening.

## The National Gardening Association (ACGA)<sup>20</sup>

The NGA is dedicated to promoting and teaching gardening. One helpful tool on their website is the USDA Hardiness Zone Finder.<sup>21</sup>



## Fort Gordon Community Garden<sup>22</sup>

The Fort Gordon Community Garden,

located in Georgia, has a host of educational resources on its website. They include presentations on different ways to water your garden, dealing with pests, ways to preserve the food from your garden, composting, toxic plants, and more reference material from the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.



## Seed to Supper from Cornell Garden-Based Learning<sup>23</sup>

The seed to supper program has resources for urban to rural gardens and every situation in between. They include presentations on vegetable gardening basics such as soil preparation and pest identification. They also

<sup>19</sup> American Community Gardening Association. "About Community Gardening". Accessed Online February 28, 2022. <https://www.communitygarden.org/>

<sup>20</sup>The National Gardening Association. "The National Gardening Association" Accessed Online February 28, 2022. <https://garden.org>

<sup>21</sup> The National Gardening Association. "USDA Hardiness Zone Finder" Accessed Online February 28, 2022. [USDA Hardiness Zone Finder - Garden.org](https://www.usda.gov/hardiness-zone-finder)

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Army Family and MWR Site. "Helpful Information". Accessed Online February 28, 2022. [Helpful Information :: Ft. Gordon :: US Army MWR](https://www.usarmyftgordon.com/helpful-information)

<sup>23</sup> Cornell University. 2021. "Cornell Garden Based Learning" Accessed online February 28, 2022. [Learn, Garden & Reflect with Cornell Garden-Based Learning](https://www.cornell.edu/garden-based-learning)



have a seed to salad curriculum to promote healthy eating and reduce food insecurity. Genesee County Cornell Cooperative Extension also hosts a page with Information on community gardens and links to additional resources.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Farmer Veteran Coalition<sup>25</sup>**

This coalition’s mission is mobilizing veterans to feed America. Programs and resources, including training, are available on their website. As a network of military veterans involved in agriculture they may provide relatable insight.

### **Operation We Are Here<sup>26</sup>**

This is a resource for the military community and military supporters. There is a specific program on gardening called, “Farm Therapy Programs for Military Veterans,” as well as a list of additional farming opportunities for veterans.<sup>27</sup>

### **Beginning Farmers<sup>28</sup>**

Beginning Farmers offers information on how to start a farm, planning a new farm, funding resources and finding land to start your farm on. Their website has a Military Veteran Farmer Training Page providing information about beginning farmer training programs specifically targeted toward military veterans.<sup>29</sup>



### **Project EverGreen<sup>30</sup>**

GreenCare for Troops and SnowCare for Troops is a needs based program for Active Duty deployed service members.

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<sup>24</sup> Cornell Cooperative Extension. “Community Gardening” Accessed online February 28, 2022.

<http://genesee.cce.cornell.edu/gardening/community-garden>

<sup>25</sup> Farmer Veteran Coalition. “Our Mission: Mobilizing Veterans to Feed America” Accessed February 28, 2022.

<https://farmvetco.org/>

<sup>26</sup> Operation We Are Here. “insights and caring for...” Accessed February 28, 2022. [operationwearehere.com](http://operationwearehere.com)

<sup>27</sup> Operation We Are Here. “Therapeutic farming, gardening and beekeeping programs for military veterans.” Accessed online February 28, 2022. [operationwearehere.com](http://operationwearehere.com)

[Farm Therapy for Military Veterans \(operationwearehere.com\)](http://operationwearehere.com)

<sup>28</sup> Beginning Farmers. “Homepage”. Accessed February 28, 2022. <https://www.beginningfarmers.org/>

<sup>29</sup> Beginning Farmers. “Military Veteran Farmer Training”. Accessed February 28, 2022.

<https://www.beginningfarmers.org/beginning-farmer-training-programs/military-veteran-farmer-training/>

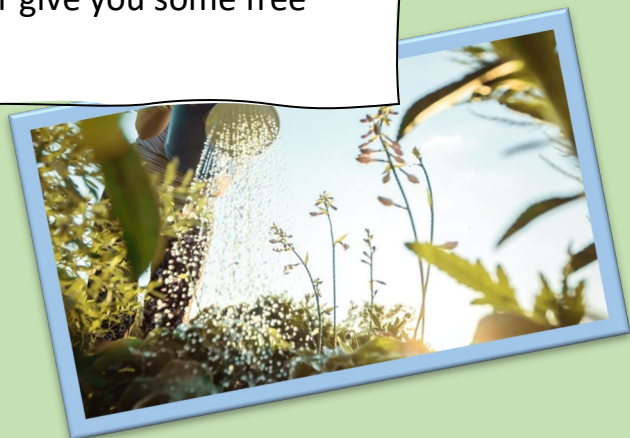
<sup>30</sup> Project Evergreen. “GreenCare for Troops/ SnowCare for Troops” Accessed February 28, 2022.

<https://projectevergreen.org/greencare-for-troops/>



## Best Practices

- ✓ Use local promotions, whether it's posters or upcoming activities in the community, to get the word out about your community garden, especially when it's just getting up and running.
- ✓ Partner with master gardener clubs and local neighborhoods that support the concept of community gardening.
- ✓ Host regular get-togethers or celebrations with the local community, including gardening harvests, to show off the success of the garden and most importantly, show your gratitude to everyone for their local support.
- ✓ Map out your area with landmarks to demonstrate to stakeholders and operators the best place to put garden plots, such as areas where there are trees for shade, good soil conditions, adequate sunlight, space for expansion, etc.
- ✓ Use the first year to get the garden going before coming up with plans for expansion. A little bit can go a long way when it comes to making the community grow.
- ✓ Keep a toolkit close by to the garden with essential things to know, like peak sunlight hours and first aid instructions, in case someone needs assistance.
- ✓ You can never have too many volunteers. Installation of fences and other gardening necessities require a lot of hands, especially at the outset.
- ✓ Set a realistic budget goal per annum and manage it diligently.
- ✓ Get buy-in from local businesses, community leaders, and stakeholders as soon as possible. If they are not able to help finance, perhaps they can at least spread the word or give you some free advertising at their place of business.





# Dedication

**Dedicated to the honorable men and women of the United States military  
who protect our country's freedom.**

**Thank you for planting the flag.**

**You have given future generations a safe space to grow.**

