

The Pleasantville Community Garden

By Devin Juros and Dave Juros



History of the Pleasantville Community Garden

Devin Juros – at the age of 11 – found out that 20% of Westchester County was food insecure and decided to do something about it.

Devin decided that he wanted to build a community garden and all food grown would be donated to local food pantries



He worked with his family at first and then with area experts and supporters , raised money, gathered support and in June 2014, his vision was realized and the garden was built with more than 100 members of the community.

History of the Pleasantville Community Garden

We had identified an organization to donate our vegetables to – Hillside Food Outreach – who delivers food to 2500 people who can't get to food pantries in Westchester as well as Putnam and Fairfield Counties.



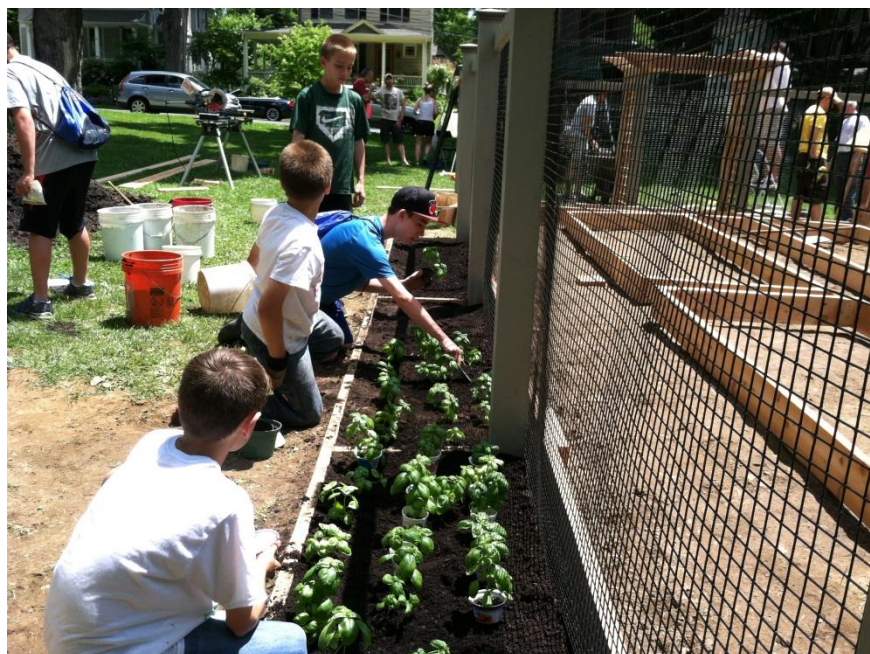
A farmer at our local farmers market contacted us and asked if they could donate to us. This started the second phase of our project – collecting fresh produce. The first year, farmer donations yielded 1000 pounds of additional food for us to donate.

History of the Pleasantville Community Garden

In 2014, we **donated 1,500 pounds** of fresh food to Hillside Food Outreach.

In 2015, we increased our totals by collecting full year from the farmers market and started to hold special collection events with local organizations – churches, sports teams, school clubs. This increased our **total donated increased to 11,000 pounds** and with this, we also were able to donate to 3 local organizations.

In 2016, we made a partnership with the local Board of Education to grow in the school gardens in the summer and increased the special collection events significantly. We **increased our donation to 16,000 pounds** and helped to support 4 local organizations.



History of the Pleasantville Community Garden

In 3 years, we've been able to accomplish many things:

- Donated **more than 33,000 pounds** of fresh fruit and vegetable to organizations working with people in need.
- Annually work with **our volunteers** who help us tend the garden, harvest, collect at the farmers market, fundraise, run fresh food drives and serve on our Board.
- More than **1/3** of these volunteers are kids **between the ages of 4 and 18**. They help in the gardens, collect at the market, run food drives, get their organizations involved, serve in managerial positions and help strategically on our Board.
- Helped to **educate** our supporters and our community on the hidden hunger that exists in our area as well as the issue of food waste.



Why are we here today?

We are here to help you think about adding a nutritious food project to your program.

- We started this with NO special knowledge – just the desire to help.
- We'll review the basics of starting a simple growing project that can expand over time.
- We'll review the basics of starting a simple fresh food collection project which can enhance your program.
- The issue of hunger and lack of nutrition continues to grow and we can all help this issue by ensuring fresh fruit and vegetables for all!



We will show you the basic skills we've learned - - so you can consider introducing growing and/or gathering to the program you are currently running.

Adding a growing project



Growing food can be an incredibly satisfying project and can help program participants get additional nutrition in their diet.

Programs that would benefit from adding a garden include:

- daycare
- summer camp
- food pantry
- elder care
- academic enrichment
- community kitchens



You have an existing group of program clients who can be potential volunteers to help with the tasks and who would benefit from the vegetables grown.

To get started:

- A small space – as small as 4' x 4' – is all that is needed to get started – either open land or space to place barrels and pots.
- Determine if you need to protect your garden from pests (deer, raccoons, rabbits, etc.)
- Gain approval to use the land

Getting Started



An easy way to get started is using ½ barrels and large pots to grow in. These can be used very effectively and clusters of pots can provide plenty of growing space in urban areas and where land is not available for growing.



Getting Started



If land is available, the easiest way to get started is by building a simple raised garden bed. A raised bed is 4 planks screwed together – sitting on top of the existing land and filled with dirt and mulch. The plants are grown in the bed.

If you have pests which might disrupt your garden – you can add upright boards and simple deer fencing or netting can be nailed or stapled around to protect your garden.

Here are a couple of images of what this simple garden might look like:



Garden Considerations



If your audience is children – make sure the beds are not too deep – as little arms cannot reach too far into the beds.



Garden Considerations



If your audience is seniors – raise the height of the beds to make it easier to reach the beds without kneeling.

Choose a spot that gets good sun during the day. If the area is too shady – it will be harder to grow.

Also choose a spot near a water source – to make it easy to water the garden when needed.



Soil and compost



Once built, the garden beds will need to be filled with soil for growing.

The best scenario is a **combination of dirt and compost** for soil nutrition. This can be purchased, created by composting or donated. Many towns and local nurseries or farms will donate to your garden or share with you.

It helps the soil to **add more compost – layered on top – a few times during the year**, if possible. This helps to keep nurturing the soil and your plants will grow big and produce more fruit!



Seeds and plants



Seeds and plants should be planted once frost is no longer an issue. Typically – this can start as early as April for seeds – or May for plants.

Plant simple vegetables – that are easy to grow and that will benefit your clients the most:

From Seeds:
Snow Peas
Green Beans
Zucchini Squash

From plants:
Tomatoes
Peppers
Eggplant

Greens are fun and easy to grow – plant lettuce, kale and spinach. These can be continuously planted through the season so you have greens growing always

Seeds are inexpensive – around \$2 for a pack of 50-100 seeds

Seedlings – or small plants – are more expensive - \$3-\$5 per plant – but few are needed

When planting – **follow the instructions noted** on the seed package or typically on a stake in the plant. Most important is **to not CROWD the plantings** – plants need space to grow and



Watering, Care and Harvesting



Watering – soil should remain **moist 2” deep**. Easiest way is to stick your finger into the dirt and feel for moisture. In a typical year – once plants are growing – standard rainfall should be enough – but in dry seasons, more water is needed.

Care – **keep the beds weeded** – once the plants are growing – to give your vegetables room to grow.

Once the vegetables get to typical size – it’s time to harvest and taste your vegetables! Nothing tastes better than a freshly picked vegetable. Urge your volunteers not to harvest early!



Logistics



To give you an idea of the costs involved for a simple garden – following are 3 versions – with current costs from Home Depot for the items needed.

Barrel Garden
- 2 barrels

Barrel x2 = \$25 each
Soil/Compost x3 = \$6 each
Seeds/Plants = \$20

Total = \$88

Small Bed Garden
- 4'x4' bed

Cedar Planks x2 = \$18 each
Screws = \$5 per bag
Soil/Compost x4 = \$6 each
Seeds/Plants = \$30

Total = \$95

Larger Bed Garden
- 2x 4'x8' beds

Cedar Planks x6 = \$18
Screws = \$5 per bag
Soil/Compost x 10 = \$6 each
Seeds/Plants = \$40

Total = \$213

Logistics



In addition to the costs to start the garden – either barrels or beds, you may need some additional supplies. From our experience these will often be donated by your supporters.

Supplies you might need include –

- garden gloves
- hand tools for digging
- watering cans
- bins for carrying the harvested food



Timing – all of the garden projects noted can be built or set up in just a couple of hours. Once the garden is set up – maintenance and harvesting will only take a few hours a week – to water, weed, tend and harvest. Of course – the bigger the garden, the more work needed, but the hours needed are very reasonable.

Adding a gathering project



Gathering fresh food from local sources can work towards helping to solve the issue of food waste and can provide extra nutrition for your program clients.

An amazing **40% of all food in the US is wasted** – thrown away – while in perfectly edible condition. Fresh fruit and vegetables are a big part of this, due to their short life expectancy.

Partnering with the right organizations to help source produce that would have been discarded can help everyone involved:

- Your program will benefit by adding no cost fruits and vegetables
- Your clients will benefit by adding more nutrition to their diets
- The partners will benefit by giving food they can't use – to a worthy program.



The produce we gather from our farmers market likely would have been composted at the farm – so our farmer partners are happy to donate it to use to help those in need.

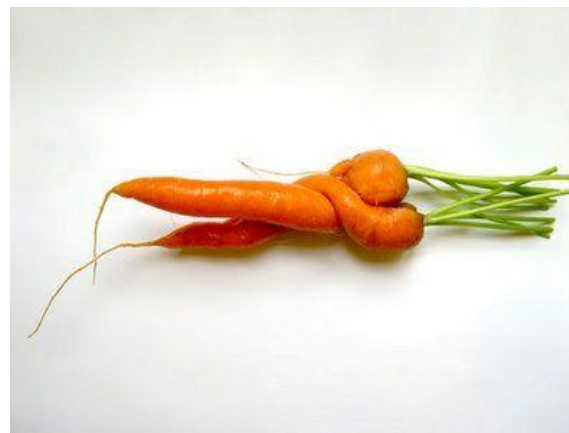
Getting Started



Identify local sources for fresh food and approach about creating a partnership

Options include:

- **Farmers Markets** – often the farmers don't want to bring the leftovers back to the farm – and are happy to donate to a good cause.
- **Local Farms** – most are happy to provide some of their crops – especially misshapen fruits and vegetables that are hard to sell.
- **Private home gardens** – there are always overages – certain times that gardens are overproducing and people are usually willing to share
- **CSA or Farm shares** – deliveries of boxes of fresh vegetables from local farms – but individuals often cannot use all of their produce or don't pick up their boxes.
- **Grocery Stores or small delis** – often need to move remaining produce before the next shipment arrives and will offer these to programs.
- **High volume local restaurants** – often overbuy and are willing to donate the vegetables they have left in order to purchase new, fresh produce.



Creating the Partnership



Understand that not all sellers are willing to share in this way, but asking about unused, unneeded or unsellable fruits and vegetables helps to start the conversation.

There is a difference between good produce that is able to be donated and inedible fruits and vegetables that are too far gone. There is a window of opportunity that these foods are still fresh and perfect.

Food sharing helps to promote community and working together for a common good – using food that would have gone to waste reduces garbage and is a source of free nutrition that is normally very expensive.

Don't be afraid to say no – if the food you are offered is not in good shape. We are working to get nutritious food to people who need it – but the food should still be edible and fresh.

The food we collect from our local farmers market will typically last at least 7-14 days if stored properly. This gives us enough time to get the food to the organizations we work with and to their clients while keeping the food fresh and nutritious.

Storage and Distribution



Different vegetables need different types of storage and understanding this can help to ensure good, fresh food for your clients.

Store in refrigerator –

Apples, apricots, blackberries, blueberries, cherries, grapes, raspberries, strawberries, artichokes, asparagus, green beans, lima beans, beets, Belgian endive, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, green onions, leafy vegetables, leeks, lettuce, mushrooms, peas, radishes, spinach, sprouts, summer squashes, sweet corn

Store only at room temperature –

Bananas grapefruit lemons limes mandarins mangoes muskmelons oranges papayas persimmons pineapple plantain pomegranates watermelons cucumbers, onions, eggplant, garlic, peppers, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes

When distributing to your clients to take home – be sure to include this list so the produce can stay fresh

Following these storage rules will make sure that your clients receive fresh fruits and vegetables that will stay fresh for as long as possible.

Summary

Adding a Food Growing or Food Gathering project to your Program can bring lots of benefits:

- New educational opportunities
- Low cost source of increased nutrition for your clients
- New Volunteer opportunities for your clients and/or supporters
- New ways to be part of your community

Growing



Learn where food comes from
Teach growing skills
Build events around garden needs
Tasting events with fresh food

Gathering



Make community partnerships
Educate about food waste
Promote volunteerism
Promote community sharing

Now is a great time to get these programs rolling for the spring!
Planting can be done in April or May – once frost is past
Gathering can be done anytime – but Spring is a great time to start

References

Here are some resources that we've found very helpful as we've created and grown our project and we hope these will help you as well.

1. **The Farmers Almanac** – great resource for new growers – charts for when to plant, “dummy’s guide to vegetable growing” – great information. On-line at <http://www.almanac.com/gardening>
2. **Cornell University** – along with their website – they have regional *Cornell Extension* offices where their staff will help you with questions about soil, pests, etc. On-line at <http://www.vegetables.cornell.edu/>.
3. **Gardener’s Supply Company** – not only a great place to buy supplies, their website also has lots of great information, tips and how-to’s. On-line at <http://www.gardeners.com/how-to/vegetable-gardening/5069.html>
4. **Johnny’s Seeds** – great source for seeds – especially if you are looking for different varieties. They are well known as a great source for seeds. On-line at <http://www.johnnyseeds.com/>
5. **American Community Garden Association** – a great organization and resource. Their website can be used without signing up and paying. Great resource to connect to other gardeners. On-line at <https://communitygarden.org/>

For More Information



If you would like more information or have questions after this seminar, we are happy to continue the conversation with you.

Please reach out to Devin or David by email at info@pvillegarden.org

We are happy to talk to you about your ideas and to help you get started.

We are passionate about these missions and while happy about the success our organization has achieved, we would like to see more food growing and food gathering projects get started.

Thank you for your interest and your time!

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Pleasantville Community Garden

www.pvillegarden.org

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