Collard Greens and Common Ground: A North Carolina Community Food Gardening Handbook
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Preface

Across North Carolina, community gardens are making a positive difference by strengthening neighborhoods, increasing food security, and giving thousands of people a place to grow a food garden of their own.

Behind every successful community garden are people just like you. We dedicate this publication to you and your fellow community gardeners, and to the sponsors, supporters, public agencies, faith communities, and other organizations that help turn community garden dreams into green and growing realities.

Many excellent documents and websites already explain the benefits of community gardening. The writers of this guide, both experienced community gardeners, highly recommend exploring them.

We hope to address a different objective, however, by emphasizing practical information you can use to help make your community garden a success, whether you are a beginner starting your first garden or a veteran community gardener looking for ways to make your garden even better.

This publication is not an academic study, although we did our homework. We purposely focus on specific, practical, and applicable suggestions. We hope this guidebook will equip you with tested tools and techniques you can adapt to create successful solutions to match your own community garden’s needs.

We owe a great deal to community garden organizers across the country who inspired and taught us over the years. We want to thank two grassroots organizations, The North Carolina Community Garden Partners (NCCGP) and The American Community Gardening Association (ACGA). They each have valuable resources and networks, and we urge you to join both.

Best of luck in your community gardens!

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1. Introduction

This tool for organizing and managing a community garden in North Carolina covers the entire process, from the first steps in organizing a new garden to long-term strategies to keep gardens growing successfully over time. Our goal is to encourage the creation of successful and sustainable community gardens that benefit citizens across our state for decades to come.

What is a Community Garden?
The Brooklyn Botanic Garden’s book, *Community Gardening* (Kirby and Peters 2008), defines a community garden as “anywhere a community of people joins together to garden.” By their nature, community gardens are highly diverse. Some target a special population—for instance, homeless people or recent immigrants. Others provide horticultural therapy to those with physical or developmental challenges or offer a soothing sanctuary for patients in hospice care. Community gardening programs include wildflower meadows, street tree projects, and outdoor gathering places for neighborhoods.

Community gardens have long been part of the American landscape. In 1759, Moravian immigrants established Bethabara Garden in Old Salem, North Carolina, North America’s first documented colonial community garden. Bethabara is still an active community garden today.

Modern community gardens come in an endless variety of sizes, shapes, and purposes, from tiny pocket parks to expansive urban farms. They are as culturally diverse as America itself. In spite of their differences, however, all community gardens share something essential in common. Whether it’s a church project to grow food for the hungry, a market garden to engage urban youth in an entrepreneurial adventure, or a traditional allotment garden where families rent plots to grow vegetables for themselves, a community garden’s success depends directly on the gardeners and how actively they support their garden.

Benefits of Community Food Gardening
In this publication we focus on community food gardens, defined as community gardens that make growing food their top horticultural priority.

Community food gardens boast a long list of benefits, from improving access to fresh food to building stronger neighborhoods. Community food gardeners and their families eat a wider variety and larger quantity of fresh fruits and vegetables, leading to an
overall improvement in nutrition. The gardens’ harvests also help reduce grocery bills. Some gardeners supplement their incomes by marketing a portion of the produce they grow. Being active in a community garden also increases gardeners’ physical activity and overall health. Gardening can reduce stress, muscle tension, and blood pressure. In addition, a community garden can transform a group of separate individuals who happen to live in the same place into a community. These gardens invite people of all ages and backgrounds to cooperate, work, and socialize together. The organizational and leadership skills gardeners learn while working with their community gardens help them become more effective and engaged citizens.

Community Food Gardens: Plots and Co-ops

There are two contrasting ways to organize a community food garden: as a collection of individual plot gardens or as a cooperative garden.

Plot Gardens

Community food gardens with individual plots, similar to allotment gardens in the United Kingdom, are subdivided into individual gardening areas. Plots normally range in size from 100 to 500 square feet. Each gardener is responsible for planting, maintaining, and harvesting her or his own plot, and the harvest is usually for the gardener’s home consumption. A well-established variation on plot gardens, especially in urban areas, provides gardeners with raised-bed planters instead of plots. Planters average 32 to 60 square feet.

Cooperative Gardens

In a cooperative community food garden, the entire space is managed as a single large production garden that is tended by a group of gardeners working together. The harvest may be distributed equitably to member gardeners, donated to food banks or soup kitchens, or sold at local farmers’ markets as an entrepreneurial project.

Each strategy has advantages. While plot gardens allow more personal control over what to grow and how to grow it, they require gardeners to have knowledge and experience and be committed to managing the plot for the entire season. Cooperative gardens are more accessible to gardeners because individuals can join anytime in the growing season with no prior knowledge or experience, and gardeners can contribute as much or as little time as they want. It is also easier to manage crop rotation on a cooperative garden. However, some cooperative gardens tend to be directed “top down” and may not allow gardeners to take a meaningful role in decision-making and leadership.

Experience shows that either strategy can be used to create a successful and sustainable community garden. Both approaches benefit greatly from appropriate location, layout, and management as well as ongoing community engagement.

Mixing Plots and Co-ops

A community food garden may offer a mix of individual plots and cooperative areas. For example, a plot garden may set aside a cooperative gardening area for
space-hungry crops, such as corn or watermelons, or for collaborative efforts to grow fruit trees, bushes, and vine crops.

Organizing a Garden: A Quick Overview

There are two distinct phases in establishing a community food garden: starting the garden and managing the garden. Both are equally important. A community garden’s success is determined not by how good it looks on opening day but on whether gardeners are still successfully gardening there ten years later.

Starting the Garden
Starting a new garden begins with forming a group—a garden team—to manage the many tasks needed to organize and set up the garden, from finding a site, to recruiting gardeners, to improving the soil. The timeline for the start-up phase depends on many factors. Three to six months from starting to opening day is possible but optimistic. A year is more realistic.

Managing the Garden
Community food garden management continues throughout the life of the garden. Management involves taking care of the gardeners as well as the garden. Communication, publicity, fundraising, and community engagement are also critical factors. During the management phase, the garden team ideally evolves into a garden-based organization as gardeners take on increasing responsibilities.

Is a Food Garden the Right Project?

Before starting any community food gardening project, organizers must thoughtfully discuss if a food garden is the right project to pursue.

Do potential gardeners and their neighborhood or organization want a community food garden? Will a community food garden meaningfully address the needs and hopes of the community and the gardeners? Is there another food garden in the area that could be expanded rather than creating a new garden?

The self-defined needs of the community must come first, because without community support the garden will likely fail. For instance, if neighborhood youth dream of a place to play soccer, creating a soccer field on a vacant lot may make more sense than using it to grow vegetables.

The best way to answer this question is to go into the community to discuss the proposed garden in one-on-one and street corner conversations as well as at formal informational meetings.

In areas where community gardens are unfamiliar, raise awareness by educating people about the many benefits these gardens bring to the community. At the same time, balance personal enthusiasm for community gardening with a commitment to listening respectfully to everyone, including those voicing questions, concerns, and criticism.
2. Getting Started

A community food garden may begin with a neighborhood leader’s idea, a casual conversation over coffee, or a formal proposal from the parks department. No matter who sows the seed, community garden organizers face the same challenge: how to transform an appealing vision into a thriving garden. North Carolina Community Garden Partners (NCCGP), The American Community Gardening Association (ACGA), and other experienced garden organizers suggest a step-by-step approach.

Form a Garden Team

Creating a community food garden is like a barn raising: don’t try to do everything yourself. Starting and sustaining a community garden requires a committed group of people working together. Forming this group is the first step in creating a garden. For convenience, we will call this group the garden team.

Organizing a garden team isn’t difficult. Usually, two or three people are already involved right from the start, informally discussing the potential for a garden. Recruit others who are interested in community food gardening, particularly people with skills, experience, and perspectives that can help the effort.

Keep the size of the team small and manageable at first, about a half-dozen members, to make collaborative work and communication easier. As the project progresses, expand the group to include resource people, highly motivated volunteers, and most importantly, potential gardeners.

Research Community Gardening

Even as the garden team is forming, learn as much as possible about community food gardening. Contact local community gardeners, and take a group to visit them and their gardens. Take pictures and ask lots of questions: What do they like about their garden design? What would they do differently? Community gardening programs outside your area are accessible for “virtual” visits, thanks to the Internet. Research city zoning and land-use policies to understand how these policies could affect the practices and long-term sustainability of the garden. See the References section for suggested resources.
Chapter 2. Getting Started

Garden Questions

- Who will the gardeners be? Where do they live? How will they be recruited? How can they obtain a plot or become members of the garden co-op?
- Where will the garden be located? (Selecting a site is covered separately in the next chapter.)
- What size will the garden be?
- Will the garden be organized in individual plots or as a cooperative project?
- How will the team and the gardeners make decisions, assign tasks, and establish leadership roles?
- What are the general standards for plot maintenance?
- Will the garden be all organic or pesticide-free, or will gardeners be free to choose their own pest management strategies?
- Will gardeners pay dues? What about those who can’t afford dues?
- Will the garden focus on a particular group or set of needs? Will it restrict membership to a certain group or exclude some types of people?

encourage community gardeners to learn more about participatory decision-making by reviewing guides such as Facilitator’s Guide to Participatory Decision-Making by Sam Kaner.

Write a Summary Description
When the garden team is reasonably clear about how they envision the garden, write down a brief summary of key ideas. Keep this summary close at hand, and update and improve the text as the project progresses.

Organize and Assign Tasks
After team members have reached consensus, decide how to divide responsibilities and tasks among the team. A simple, informal organizational structure may work best early in the project. For many small-to-medium-sized gardens, this informal structure remains effective even after the garden is well established. Set target deadlines for completing tasks. Even if the team can’t meet every deadline, a timeline is a powerful incentive and organizational tool.

Small is Beautiful
Organize your garden project as a series of bite-sized steps rather than trying to create a huge, perfect community food garden from day one. Working in phases provides better, quicker, and more sustainable results than trying to do an overly ambitious project all at once. For instance, consider beginning with plots for five or six enthusiastic gardeners and a single hose line. The garden can expand as the gardeners’ success attracts more interest.

Spread the Word
With the garden’s written project summary and proposed timeline in hand, reach out to the broader community. Organize community meetings and presentations for potential gardeners, neighborhood associations, public agency representatives, possible funders and sponsors, and others who are curious about community gardening. Focus on potential host neighborhoods and sponsoring organizations. Have answers ready for practical questions such as, “How do I get a plot?” and “When can I start gardening?” Long before you have even chosen a site, people will want answers to these questions.

Finding a Sponsor
For many new community garden groups, finding a sponsor is a high priority, and with good reason. A sponsor is an organization or individual that helps to set up and manage the garden. This person or entity may lend financial support to help pay for tools, supplies, fencing, land preparation, water lines, and insurance. In some cases, the sponsor provides the land for a garden site, at no cost to the gardeners, and funds a garden coordinator or other support staff.

A sponsor may be a public or private entity. Parks and recreation department community garden programs are good examples of public sponsorship. Faith-based groups, such as churches, may sponsor gardens on church property or work to support community
food gardens at sites throughout their areas. Other sponsors might include land trusts, food banks, slow food groups, and other non-profit organizations. Organizations and agencies with an interest in community gardening are often on the lookout for sponsorship opportunities, especially projects with strong community support and a well thought-out plan.

Sponsors sometimes set strict conditions or insist on making all garden decisions. For this reason, some grass-roots community garden groups decline sponsorship, preferring the freedom to make their own choices to the security of having a sponsor.

The benefits of working with a sponsor, however, often outweigh potential drawbacks. Just be aware that the garden team, the sponsor, and eventually the gardeners must all be able to work together effectively.

**Community Garden Support Programs**

Community garden support programs provide advice and assist community gardens, particularly during their start-up phase. Though they do not sponsor gardens, they can act as a bridge between a new garden and potential sponsors. These programs are now active in an increasing number of US cities, often staffed by AmeriCorps, VISTA, or Food Corps volunteers.

### Potential Community Garden Sponsors

- Parks and recreation departments
- Communities of faith, such as churches, temples, and mosques
- Colleges and universities
- Local Cooperative Extension centers and Extension Master Gardener programs
- Food banks and food security organizations
- Neighborhood associations
- Land trusts
- Slow food and local food groups

Many other possibilities exist, including non-profit organizations and private businesses.

### School Gardens and Community Gardening

First Lady Michelle Obama’s White House garden and concern for the health and nutrition of children and youth have helped reawaken national interest in youth gardening at pre-, elementary, middle and high schools.

School gardens are specialized community gardens, so much of the information in this manual will be useful in setting up a school garden. However, we also recommend seeking out additional resources that directly address school gardening, particularly focusing on curriculum and lesson planning, which is not a concern for most community gardens in non-educational settings.

Working with a school adds additional layers of complexity and challenge to setting up and managing a garden. As with any community garden, the wider school community, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, and maintenance workers, must support and take ownership of the garden. Once there is buy-in, many approaches to gardening can work in a school setting.
Chapter 2. Getting Started

Students, the most important stakeholders in a school garden, are sometimes excluded from planning the garden, despite the wonderful learning opportunities inherent in the early phases of garden planning. Identify age-appropriate activities throughout the process to involve students from the beginning.

Simply having an inspiring idea is not enough to create a successful school garden. School garden organizers must forge cooperative partnerships with the principal and staff, as well as the teachers, students, and parents. They must also work with custodians, and sometimes hired landscape contractors, to ensure the garden is being managed in a way that works for everyone. In addition, school gardens also must satisfy requirements of the school’s governing body and respond to interest and concern from neighbors and funding agencies.

If a suitable site is available near a school, combining a school and community garden has many benefits, including the possibility that community gardeners can tend and harvest a food garden over the summer when school is out. One relatively easy option in a plot garden is to reserve a plot or two for a nearby school.

Here are a few practical suggestions for creating a school garden:

- In the piedmont, coastal plain, and warmer mountain valleys, plant cool-season varieties (lettuce, broccoli, root crops) in August as part of back-to-school.
- As the garden grows, include it in science lessons.
- Make compost from leaf drop in between Thanksgiving and the winter break.
- Plant lettuce, radishes, and other cool-season plants in March.
- Older children can start their own seedlings indoors using lights and even take warm-season crops, such as tomatoes and peppers, home for their family gardens when school lets out for summer.

Visit the following resources for more information on youth gardening:
- Grow For It, NC 4-H (growforit.org)
- Junior Master Gardener (jmgkids.us)
- LifeLab program (lifelab.org)
- Garden Mosaics, Cornell University (nyc.cce.cornell.edu/UrbanEnvironment/UrbanEcology/GardenMosaics/Pages/GardenMosaics.aspx)
- Natural Learning Initiative (naturalearning.org)
3. Site Selection

A community food garden’s site has a big impact on its identity and long-term viability. No site is perfect, but some sites are much better choices than others.

Locating Potential Sites

Many times, a garden team may start by driving around the area targeted for the garden, scouting for interesting potential sites, and asking local officials, residents, and community garden groups for suggestions.

Gardeners also look at county GIS maps that show parks and other publicly owned land. Google Maps are also helpful and readily accessible, allowing a virtual flyover of the target area.

Site Evaluation

The next step is to evaluate finalist sites. When rating sites, consider the needs of the gardeners, the site’s suitability for food gardening, and the options available for gaining secure, long-term access to the site for gardening.

Gardener Needs

Safety. The perception of safety and actual safety are both important. Gardeners will reject sites where they do not feel safe, and some gardeners may be anxious even in areas where others feel relatively safe. If pushers currently use the site for drug sales, a gang considers it their turf, aggressive dogs wander nearby, or the site is isolated, the garden team must address these risks or select an alternate location. The presence of a community garden can discourage crime and vandalism, but this takes time.

Convenient location. The garden should be reasonably close to where gardeners live and convenient to reach by walking, biking, or driving a short distance. Make sure that parking will not be a problem.
Community factors. Be sure the site is acceptable to the neighborhood, especially to those living right next door. If the team must decide between two similar sites, one next to an outspoken garden critic and the other beside a garden supporter, the choice is obvious.

Current uses of the site. For example, is it the unofficial neighborhood dump? Will that pattern continue even after the garden is there? Do the kids play soccer there? Where will they go?

Secure land tenure. It is only fair to gardeners that their garden be treated as more than a temporary land use. Seek a minimum five-year commitment, ten years preferred.

Suitability for expansion. Is there an easy, obvious way for the garden to grow bigger if there is high demand for plots?

Food Garden Needs
Reliable water. A community food garden site must have a reliable water source for optimal food production and gardener success. Transplants and newly seeded vegetables require daily watering until they are established, and productive food gardens need roughly an inch of water per week during the growing season.

A municipal water line is a practical way to provide water for a community garden. Look for a water meter on the site, which makes water hook up easier and less expensive. If there is no meter, locate the closest municipal water line that the garden can tap into.

As an alternative, partner with a nearby business, place of worship, or private home willing to let the garden obtain water by running a hose from their tap.

If there is a well on site, test the water and the flow rate to ensure the quality and volume are sufficient to supply the garden; if so, determine the cost of installing and maintaining a pumping system.
Harvesting rainfall is an excellent idea, if only to supplement other water sources. If the garden is interested in this option, look for an adjacent roof suitable as a collector.

Gardeners can also haul in water themselves using containers and watering cans. For highly motivated gardeners in small gardens, this sometimes provides adequate water, at least enough to get a garden started.

**Full sun.** Most plants need at least 8 hours of direct sunlight to flower and fruit. However, it is possible to grow vegetables to harvest the root, stem, or leaves (radishes, celery, spinach) in as little as 6 hours of full sun per day. To grow the fruit of the plant (tomatoes, peppers, squash, melons), 8 hours per day is the minimum. Be sure to consider light through the whole growing season. An appealingly sunny spot in February may be shaded in May after the oaks leaf out.

**Safe, workable soil.** Vegetables grow best in rich, well-drained soil. Look carefully at a site’s soil, enlisting the aid of an experienced gardener, farmer, or Cooperative Extension agent. If the soil is extremely poor or contaminated, consider the pros and cons of building raised-bed planters. For more information, see chapter 8, *Soil, Plots, and Planters.*

**Other Considerations**

**Trees.** Mature trees are good for a community garden, offering beauty and a place to rest in the shade. Unfortunately, their leaves and roots also compete with food crops. Be sure the site is large enough to locate vegetable plots in sunny locations well away from large trees. Bring a compass to check directions. Trees or tall buildings on the south side of the garden may block needed sun, but those located to the north will not cause problems.

A site without a steep slope is easiest to lay out and manage.

**Fire ants and bermudagrass.** Fire ants, bermudagrass, and tough weeds can be very difficult to control after the garden is established, especially if the garden only allows organic techniques and bans synthetic pesticides and herbicides. The best strategy is to control tough weeds and pests on a site before attempting to establish an organic garden. See chapter 13, *Troubleshooting,* for more ideas.

**Trash.** Removing trash is part of starting a garden on many urban lots, but take note if the kind of trash demands extraordinary measures (for instance, large items, such as junked cars, or the presence of broken glass or used needles).

**Parking and bulk supplies.** Is there a suitable place to drop bulk supplies such as compost and mulch? Is there plenty of space for a parking area for gardeners and volunteers?

**Land use and zoning.** Check zoning and land use restrictions. For example, if a site is in a floodplain or greenway, permanent structures, such as sheds, fences, and raised-bed planters may not be allowed due to environmental restrictions.
Chapter 3. Site Selection

Drainage and flooding. Heavy rains and flooding are part of life in North Carolina. Check sites carefully for flooding potential and drainage issues, especially near creeks. A simple drainage system may be all a site needs to thrive.

Call before you dig. Dial 811 to have any underground utilities on the site located and marked. If there are underground utilities where you hoped to garden, consider a different location.

Arranging to Use a Site

After selecting a site, the garden team must formally arrange to use it for a community food garden. Begin by requesting affirmation from the landowner, ideally in writing, that community gardening will be the officially designated land use on the site for a period of at least five to ten years. Gardeners, sponsors, and supporters invest time, money, and creativity to develop a successful garden. If a site’s owner, public or private, is unwilling to offer clear assurances that the garden will be protected from summary eviction, consider another site. A fair agreement should also have an escape clause allowing the owner to reassert control and to use the site for other purposes if the garden is abandoned or badly neglected.

The garden team should seek official approval, in writing, even for a garden on a publicly owned site, such as a garden in a public park. Draft a “letter of commitment” that affirms use of the land for a garden for five or more years and clarifies the relationship between the garden and the public agency. This is particularly important when existing policy documents, such as the Park District Master Plan, have no provisions for community gardens.

Private Leases

For privately owned property, begin by locating the property owner. Schedule a meeting to share information about the garden project. If the owner is receptive, start negotiations on rental payments and a lease.

Check with other local community gardens to find a model of a lease agreement that has stood the test of time. The lease agreement should cover the following issues: How much is rent, and when is it due? What constitutes grounds for terminating the lease or agreement? To whom do improvements belong if the garden must close? Is the landowner willing to assist with garden resources such as water or a fence?

Insurance

Some landowners, and even some public agencies, will ask that a community garden be covered by liability insurance purchased by the garden group. Jack Hale, former president of the American Community Gardening Association and an authority on this issue, cautions that liability insurance is not always necessary. He urges community gardeners to research the insurance question carefully before embarking on a fundraising campaign to pay for an expensive but unneeded policy or giving up on a promising garden site. If the garden does need insurance, ask supportive organizations for help. For instance, can the garden be covered through an existing policy held by a large non-profit or university? If buying a policy is necessary, Hale suggests working with a firm that represents many different carriers and getting at least one quote from one of the ten largest insurance carriers.
4. Food Garden Design

Good garden design pays off handsomely for community food gardens, although few community food gardens are professionally designed. An elaborate and costly garden landscape design is not a prerequisite for success. Food production, peaceful human relations, and practical ease of maintenance are the prime design objectives for a community food garden, and these fundamentals should never be eclipsed by other considerations, including creative expression.

A skilled garden designer or landscape architect who has taken the time to study and understand community gardening can be helpful. Community gardens are heavily used and often in public view, so both functionality and appearance are important.

If the garden team decides to design the garden on its own, seek assistance from someone with design skills. A graduate student in landscape architecture may be able to help with the design process and produce neat, accurate, scale drawings of the garden plans.

A Step-by-Step Method

We suggest adapting a simple, three-step process for garden design:

1. Decide what goes in the garden. Everyone with a stake in the garden discusses and makes suggestions about the elements and general structure of the garden. List your choices and priorities.

2. Determine the site layout. Next, go out to the site and walk around. Discuss where different elements might go. For instance, where will the front gate and entrance be? Where can you put a compost area? Where will you need a water tap? Take pictures.

3. Draw the garden plan. Recruit someone with visual design skills and experience to transform the team’s ideas into clear scale drawings that accurately show the garden’s actual layout on the site.

What Goes in the Garden?

Begin by reviewing the garden team’s initial descriptions of the garden. The garden design process goes a step further by asking more specific questions. Different garden elements are described in greater detail in the second section of this chapter. Read through the list of elements for suggestions and ideas.

Hold a Design Charrette

Design professionals such as planners and architects have developed a technique known as a charrette, a structured brainstorming and design meeting. A charrette can be a valuable tool in the garden design process. Recruit someone experienced to facilitate the charrettes and to help organize the ideas they generate.
Chapter 4. Food Garden Design

Community Food Garden Design Questions

- How many gardeners will be able to participate in the garden?
- Will the garden use native soil or build raised bed planters? If both strategies will be used, how much space will be devoted to each option?
- How big will each plot or planter be? Will there be a choice of sizes or a single size? How will plots or planters be laid out on the site?
- For cooperative gardens, how will the food gardening area be laid out?
- How wide will different kinds of paths be? Will they be mulched, mowed, graveled, paved, or left as dirt?
- Will the whole garden be organic? If not, will there be a designated area set aside for organic gardening? Where and how large will it be?
- What kind of sign or bulletin board will there be? Where should it go?
- Where will water come from? Where should the water spigots go, and how many are needed? How many hoses are needed and how long should they be? Will you need watering cans?
- Will the garden harvest rainfall? What will the system look like, and where will it go? Who will have the harvested water tested?
- Where’s the best gathering area? What kind of seating will be available? Is there shade? Is there enough space for meetings and social events?
- Where will people be able to wash their hands and go to the toilet?
- Does the garden need a fence? If so, what kind and what type of gates will it have?
- Will there be a shed for storing tools and supplies? Where will it go? What will the shed look like? Will a shed require a special zoning permit?
- How will the garden handle compost-making and soil stewardship? Where will the composting area be? Will it be a shared pile or individual bins?
- How can bulk materials, stakes, and other supplies be stored and concealed from view?
- Will ornamental flower beds be created? Where should they go?
- Will there be joint growing projects, such as berries or large-space crops, such as sweet corn?
- Will art have a place in the garden? What kinds?
- What will the garden look like to the public, particularly the garden’s entrance?

Draw the Garden Plan

Next, create a scale drawing of the garden plan based on the ideas from the discussions. Start by creating a base plan, showing only the boundaries of the site and any permanent elements, such as mature trees, existing structures, underground utilities, and paved areas, as accurately and as close to scale as possible (¼ inch = 1 foot and 1 inch = 10 feet are commonly used scales).

The county’s GIS system or Google Maps makes it easy to create a preliminary base map. (Be sure to double-check measurements on the ground!)

A digital version of the base plan is very helpful, created using design software. Do not try to make a rough schematic using a document program such as MS Word or Excel. Neat work done the old fashioned way on a drafting table using pen and paper is a vastly better alternative and creates a document that can be easily scanned into a computer.