

An aerial photograph of a community garden site in an urban neighborhood. The garden is a large, rectangular plot of land with a grid of raised garden beds. The beds are filled with dark soil, and some have small plants growing. The garden is surrounded by residential houses with various roof colors (blue, grey, brown). A street with several cars is visible above the garden. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with shadows cast by the buildings and trees.

GUIDE TO PARTNERING WITH DUG ON A NEW COMMUNITY GARDEN



Thank you for your interest in partnering with DUG on a new community garden. This guide is intended to help you understand what it means to partner with DUG, the steps for applying to start a new community garden, and how to apply.

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After you've reviewed all the information and decided that you'd like to proceed, you may [apply to partner with DUG on a new community garden](#).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at 303.292.9900. You can also email us at dirt@dug.org or visit our website at www.dug.org.

Warm Regards,

Linda Appel Lipsius
Executive Director



About Denver Urban Gardens

Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) was established in 1985 to support Denver residents in creating sustainable, food-producing neighborhood community gardens. Over the past 35+ years, our network of community gardens has expanded to six metro Denver counties as we have championed the power of plants, the people who grow them, and the communities they nourish.

During that time our program has extended to offering educational resources and skill-building in urban growing for all ages, as well as providing access to seeds, seedlings, and an interconnected network that builds community resilience by growing local, fresh, organic food in community.

We currently operate 190 [community gardens](#) throughout Metro Denver, including more than 70 school-based community gardens. In addition to building and supporting community gardens, we operate [DeLaney Community Farm](#), the [Master Composter Training Program](#), [Grow a Garden](#), provide extensive opportunities for [youth education](#) in nutrition and gardening, and offer Garden Leadership training and ongoing support.

DUG offers individuals, community organizers, grassroots groups, and neighborhood associations essential technical expertise with planning, launching, and maintaining community gardens.

Our support services includes:

- Designing and building gardens
- Supporting garden organization, leadership, outreach, and maintenance
- Connecting nearby gardens and gardeners to each other through our Micro Networks
- Utilizing gardens as extraordinary places for learning and healthy living
- Building gardens to serve as outdoor classrooms
- Linking gardens with related local food system projects and policy

OUR VISION

A sustainable urban future where people are deeply connected to the earth, each other, and the food they eat.

OUR MISSION

To provide the access, skills, and resources for people to grow healthy food in community and regenerate urban green spaces.



DUG's Role in Your Community Garden

Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) is the non-profit organization that supports neighborhoods in developing and maintaining community gardens. Learn more about [how we support our gardens](#).

The following items briefly describe ways DUG can assist with organizing, designing, building and managing a community garden. As much as possible, DUG works with neighborhoods to leverage volunteers and community workdays in all of these efforts.

Use Agreements

- Create garden lease and use agreements
- Offer insurance protection
- Provide volunteer labor waivers

Design and Planning

- Conduct neighborhood design workshop(s)
- Prepare layout plan to dimension and arrange physical site improvements
- Prepare grading and utilities plan to identify finished elevations and drainage
- Prepare planting plan to locate trees, lawn and seed areas, sizes and quantities
- Prepare cost estimate, work plan and schedule
- Develop and submit grant proposals to fund improvements
- Suggest garden management structures

Site Preparation

- Clear site of debris and add soil amendments, as necessary
- Stake and install fence, if required
- Stake the arrangement and layout of plots and pathways

Grading

- Fine grade the site level
- Level and edge pathways in preparation of sub-base material
- Level the entry and gathering plaza in preparation of senior and disabled access

Utilities

- Arrange billing, fees, etc, with water agencies
- Install water tap to main line at street, including backflow prevention
- Trench and install pipe and hardware, including valves, fittings and hose bibs
- Install lighting, as necessary



Paving

- Purchase and haul crusher fines
- Install crusher fines material along prepared pathways

Planting

- Stake tree location, lawn and cover-crop seed areas
- Stake and install new trees and appropriate perennials

Garden Leader Support

- Garden Leader Training
- Ongoing management support
- Continuing education opportunities
- Connection to other nearby Garden Leaders and local resources through garden micro-networks
- In-person meetings when leadership transitions occur, or as needed



Essential Criteria for new DUG Gardens

The interest in community gardens continues to build as communities look for solutions for food insecurity and malnutrition, rising obesity rates, widening culture gaps, a nationwide mental health crisis, and climate change, among others.

In order to fully support our network of existing community gardens, DUG typically builds no more than two community gardens a year, one in the spring and one in the fall. A community garden typically takes three years to build from the time we process and approve an application to completion of all built garden amenities.

We evaluate and prioritize building new DUG gardens according to these guidelines:

- At least one new build a year is prioritized for an area where greater food access and food sovereignty are needed
- A critical mass of at least 10 people from all involved sectors (school, administration, community, neighborhood partners) need to be involved in the garden organizing and be interested in gardening
- All Garden Leaders must be interested in having a plot at the community garden
- The garden must be fully funded before the build begins
- The new garden should not be within 1 mile of a garden that is not at 100% capacity
- The proposed site must have access to water



New Garden Project Process Step By Step

Step 1: Garden advocates fill out the application and return it to DUG.

Step 2: Once approved, we determine together the most suitable site for the community garden and arrange a long-term lease signed for a minimum of 5 years, preferably 10 years. DUG has secured leases and use agreements with many different landowners including: Cities, Public Schools, Housing Authorities, Parks Departments and corporations across the six counties we work in in metro Denver. We have a standard lease agreement that we use and must have signed before we can move forward on a project.

We invest more time in garden construction, programs and neighborhood organization than most people realize. Our charter (corporate by-laws) requires that a certain level of commitment must be achieved through a site lease before DUG can comfortably invest grant funds, technical expertise, and volunteer labor into a project. We also firmly believe that this step is critical to protecting neighborhood investments of time, energy, and hope in their garden project.

Step 3: Together, DUG and neighborhood participants design the community garden. This requires several workshops to brainstorm design concepts and time to draw up the design and revise as needed.

Step 4: For most groups, the next step is to raise funds to turn the site design into a real community garden. The cost to build a garden ranges based on site size and design complexity from (approximately) \$50,000 to \$75,000. DUG can assist with fundraising, but a project moves much faster if the community is also raising funds. As the garden's fiscal agent, DUG can be awarded the grants on behalf of the community garden and will set them aside until the full amount is raised.

See fundraising guides, rolling grant opportunities and DUG's fiscal agent policy [here](#).

Step 5: We next begin site preparation with grading and soil testing. Most sites require clearing the site of debris, grading by heavy machinery, and conducting a soil test to determine the composition and volume of soil amendments required. We often layout and install other basic improvements during the initial on-site work, including fencing, pathways, compost bins, tool shed and community garden entry sign.

Step 6: At the same time, DUG will also invest in permanent irrigation systems for the community garden. This includes arrangements with the water department, installing a tap and backflow prevention, and distribution system to the garden beds and plots.

Step 7: During the next stage of construction, DUG will work with volunteers and community members on organized workdays to install community garden amenities, such as garden plots, entry gates, benches, crusher fine pathways and courtyards, outdoor classrooms, murals by local



artists, shade arbors, information boards, trees, shrubs, perennial beds, etc.

Step 8: When the garden is nearing completion, the focus of work shifts to the neighborhood's efforts to maintain the community garden and full participation, including training the volunteer Garden Leaders. DUG remains in a long-term support role by providing ongoing maintenance, Garden Leader and gardener support and a variety of programs such as the [Master Composter Program](#), [Grow a Garden](#), [education events](#), and [DUG Online](#).



Roles and Responsibilities of the Garden Leaders

DUG community gardens are created with and for the surrounding community. Neighbors are encouraged to participate in all levels of development and site maintenance. Gardens function best when diverse individuals are equally encouraged to enjoy the community gardens, whether that entails gardening, resting on a shaded bench or meeting with friends and neighbors in the garden.

Each community garden site is locally managed by a neighborhood volunteer Garden Leader or Leadership Committee. DUG encourages management by 3 to 5 people, which allows the management responsibilities to be shared so that one person does not become overburdened. Every gardener is required to care for their plot and help care for the whole garden.

DUG Garden Leader(s) basic responsibilities include:

Communicate DUG's and the garden's guidelines and expectations for each garden participant, their household, pets, and guests.

Be the first line of communication between gardeners and DUG. Inform gardeners and community members of opportunities DUG provides at the community garden and for the broader community, including workshops and events.

Secure completed plot applications/waivers from every gardener, every year. This includes shared plot and partners. Signing the plot application/waiver is necessary for DUG's insurance carrier and required by most landowners to secure the property. DUG uses online plot applications and can assist gardens whose gardeners have limited tech access. As much as possible, plot applications should be completed by June 1st. DUG only shares the plot application link with Garden Leaders who in turn share it with their gardeners.

Determine annual plot fees and collect on behalf of gardeners who cannot apply online. DUG recommends that plot fee prices be set between \$35 - \$60 per plot. These fees cover essential garden costs like water, compost, and tools or invested in garden improvement projects. Though DUG serves as the fiscal agent for gardens, the garden leaders are responsible for tracking all funds related to the garden.

Share information about DUG Dues with gardeners. DUG Dues are \$25 per plot annually and support DUG's administrative costs. They are asked of all who can pay.

Coordinate plot assignments. Plots are available to residents regardless of their affiliation with DUG, the Garden Leader(s) or the Land Owner. Typically, one plot is available per family unless there are



vacancies. Seniority is not a priority over a “waiting listed” household. Near-by residency is not a priority. Maintain an ongoing waitlist and do not clear people from year to year unless they have identified they are no longer interested.

Ensure gardeners know the community garden maintenance guidelines.

Organize community potlucks and workdays, (weeding common areas, maintaining the compost bins, etc.) as necessary. DUG suggests scheduling these events at least monthly for social and community-building value.

Contact DUG for assistance with site improvements including water, plots and pathways, perimeter fencing, and tool storage. As our project priority list is constantly in flux, we appreciate a garden’s patience when we are asked to support and/or complete garden enhancement projects. Please know that your project is important to us.

Mediate issues within the community garden. Issues may include neglected/weedy plots, vacant plots (can be planted in pumpkins or a cover crop), watering issues, alcohol, smoking, pets, or harvesting another gardener’s produce. As per the plot application/waiver that every gardener should sign every year, DUG is the “final say” if the participants and garden leaders cannot resolve the conflict.



Suggested Leadership Committee Roles

Leadership Committee

As directed by the entire membership of the community garden, this suggested three-person committee is responsible for conducting the business of the community garden and ensuring a positive, rewarding experience for all gardeners. It is suggested that positions are of a two-year commitment with the potential for renewal.

Administrator – Main responsibility is to provide communication avenues between gardeners, committees and DUG. Other responsibilities include setting monthly meetings and agendas, bringing suggestions/requests to the steering committee, leading meetings, writing minutes, maintaining guidelines and maintaining records and documents.

Membership – Main responsibility is to assign and track membership. This includes assigning empty plots, fielding phone/email inquiries, maintaining the gardener waiting list and tracking member work hours.

Treasurer – Main responsibility is to manage the garden budget and conduct the financial business of the community garden. This includes maintaining financial records, collecting plot fees, paying bills, preparing monthly finance reports and corresponding with the committee leads to ensure reimbursement requests are received in a timely, tax-exempt manner.

Community Building Committee

This committee is responsible for providing outreach and community building activities for the community garden. This could include a formal donation program, outreach events including non gardening neighborhood residents, a garden newsletter, organizing potlucks/social events, etc.

Maintenance Committee

This committee is responsible for ensuring the upkeep of the garden's physical infrastructure. This could include smaller working groups for improvement projects, composting, tools and storage shed, maintaining the perimeter xeriscape beds, the garden irrigation system, etc.

Garden Mentoring Committee

This committee is responsible for offering training/advice or coordinating workshops with DUG to other community gardeners within the community garden. This could include specialty trainings on organic gardening, water wise gardening, composting, mediating garden disputes, youth education, etc.



Gardener Authorization and Responsibilities

The plot application includes acknowledgement of a gardener's responsibilities and a waiver that have been established between DUG and the garden property owner.

Read our DUG Garden Policies [here](#).

Community Garden Maintenance Guidelines

Community garden landowners require Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) to ensure participants keep their garden sites clean, attractive and orderly at all times – especially during the winter. The garden must have a year-round unified appearance to landowners, city officials and the general non gardening public. To this end, DUG established the following requirements of all participants. The benefits of a well-maintained garden are at minimum three-fold:

1. The use agreement for the garden remains in good standing with the landowner;
2. Neighbors and non-gardeners enjoy and recognize the community garden as a community asset, and;
3. Your community garden will harbor fewer pests and weeds and will be healthier from season to season.

DUG serves as the use agreement holder, water agent, insurer, authorized 501(c)3 corporation and primary representative for community garden participants with city officials.

Please remember, it is very difficult for a few gardeners to do all the work; everyone must do their share. View participation in a community garden as a privilege. DUG's staff and volunteers are working very hard to build new community gardens in neighborhoods where this privilege is not yet available. In addition, we are always working to install improvements at existing community garden sites. It's difficult to dedicate our limited resources to the clean-up of existing community gardens. This also runs counter to our goal to empower community gardens to be self-sufficient. DUG is, however, committed to assisting gardeners with cleanup when a garden is out of compliance with these guidelines and is in jeopardy of losing its use agreement.

By following the Community Garden Maintenance Guidelines, you also contribute to DUG's ongoing effort to ensure community gardening continues citywide. Please remember that your community garden can either be a positive or negative example of a community garden project, affecting the ability for DUG to secure space in other neighborhoods for new community gardens.

DUG secures funding for community garden improvements, training and site insurance. In turn, DUG is required to report to funding agencies and foundations as to the status and benefit of their contributions. DUG also must report on your behalf as to the status of your community garden to neighbors and city agencies, such as Property Inspection Services, Assets Management, Housing and Neighborhood Development Services, Parks and Recreation and Public Schools. Your efforts to maintain your community garden allows DUG to focus resources on deepening our roots and supporting existing community gardens.



Participant Requirements

Garden plot: Each plot must be kept clear of weeds, spent plants, debris and trash. Each fall, turn compost and organic material into the soil and cover it with a layer of mulch to regulate soil temperature and retain moisture throughout the winter. This makes a garden plot look cared for to the passer-by. It's important to recognize all gardeners have a significant role and responsibility regarding the sustainability of the community garden. Any perennials in your plot must appear well kept. In addition, you are responsible to maintain the area immediately adjacent to your plot including paths, compost bins, trash collection areas, fences and the community garden's other common spaces.

Vertical structures: Structures to encourage vertical growing, including arbors, trellis, tree branch frames, fence sections and cages are only allowed during the growing season if they are functional, orderly, safe and attractive. Vertical structures used for growing must appear in good condition and contribute to the community garden's overall visual continuity. All growing structures must be disassembled and removed during the off-season. Any permanent structures in the community garden will be allowed to remain if they are in good condition and attractive from the street. Based on our use agreements, DUG is required to approve all new (non-seasonal) structures prior to construction.

"Off-season" storage: All non-permanent structures and items are not authorized to be left standing during the off season and must be disassembled and stored in the garden shed or removed from the site when not in use.

Compost bins: Individual compost bins are not allowed. We do, however, encourage using and maintaining community compost bins. All material used in compost bins must be chopped in one to two inch pieces before being added. Please do not add diseased plant material or food scraps from outside the garden. Plastic bags of spent plants, grass clippings and leaves are not allowed to be stored in your community garden at any time. To "passers-by" they appear as bags of trash. Unopened bags of topsoil, compost or manure are also not to be stored in your community garden. Chop and spread these materials in your plot immediately, allowing for decomposition and integration with your existing soil. Consider trench or pit composting techniques.

Community Responsibility: The community garden is a community responsibility. Everyone must take responsibility for maintaining the common areas of the community garden.



Benefits of being a DUG Garden

Community Garden Management + Preservation

DUG can coordinate the construction process and conduct on-site construction supervision for new gardens, including coordination of volunteer construction groups.

DUG is available to assist community gardens with adding or repairing fundamental site elements required for successful garden function: water, plots and pathways, perimeter fencing and tool storage. As our [project priority list](#) is constantly in flux, we appreciate a garden's patience when we are asked to support and/or complete garden enhancement projects.

DUG is responsible for the strategic planning for long-term preservation of existing sites, including the maintenance of ownership, lease and use agreements with property owners. We also do strategic planning for the preservation of new sites, including negotiation of ownership, lease and use agreements with property owners. Agreement topics include site insurance, security, maintenance, improvements and DUG management responsibilities.

Education + Resources

DUG recruits and trains Garden Leaders to facilitate the organization and maintenance of each community garden.

Garden Education and Composting classes as well as networking tours are offered every summer for gardens in each of DUG's seven micro-networks. All community and backyard gardeners are welcome to attend.

DUG Online connects community gardeners to learn and grow with each other, learn about upcoming DUG events, and access gardening resources.

DUG's Grow a Garden Program offers community gardeners and all residents of Denver to apply for *pay-what-you-can* Grow Kits comprised of seedlings, seed packets, and a Plant Care Guide.

DUG's monthly newsletter, The Underground News, keeps our community gardeners up to date with monthly info, including upcoming events, workshops, seasonal gardening tips, and more.

Ready to get started with DUG?

[Apply now to start a new DUG Community Garden](#)