



## Facilitating a Community Garden Expectations Meeting

Denver Urban Gardens has a set of basic expectations that all gardeners agree to adhere to when participating in the DUG network of community gardens. These expectations can be found on the back of the Plot Application/Waiver forms distributed to and signed by all gardeners.

In addition to adhering to these expectations, DUG recommends that garden leaders conduct a meeting to set garden wide expectations early on in the season. We find that gardeners who are a part of building the garden's culture are more likely to remain engaged participants throughout the season, and more likely to adhere to the expectations that they had a part in creating. Furthermore, it is easier to hold gardeners accountable when they are not meeting expectations if they were a part of the decision making process from the start.

The overall goal of hosting an expectations meeting is to encourage ownership and active participation in the community garden, while agreeing to a shared set of expectations that ultimately work to create a safe, respectful and inclusive space for all.

### DUG's Core Values

DUG's core values are embodied in the attributes of what we would consider an ideal "*deeply-rooted*" community garden. DUG encourages you to keep these values in mind when setting expectations in your own community garden. A garden that enriches and provides lasting benefits to a neighborhood when it:

- is *collectively initiated* by community members who participate in its organization, design, construction, and on going care,
- is *planned for and protected* as a highly valued neighborhood asset,
- is *inviting, well-maintained and accessible* to all people,
- is *aligned with the broader purpose for its site*, as in the case with a garden in a park, on the grounds of a school, or as part of an affordable housing development,
- *provides access to healthy food and promotes healthy lifestyles*, while its members celebrate growing, cooking and eating together,
- *encourages individual self-sufficiency and integrity, while collectively developing strong social networks* in which participants look after, learn from, and share with each other,
- *gives back* a generous portion of its bounty to others in-need,
- *models environmental stewardship* through its organic practices and its efficient use of resources including composting and water conservation,
- *fosters a sense of belonging and attachment* as an important place in both the lives of the gardeners and in the life of the neighborhood,
- *honors diverse viewpoints and values the strengths of each gardener*, and
- *bridges differences, promotes understanding and develops respect* through the unifying act of gardening together.

Whether facilitating meetings or composing emails to gardeners, DUG recommends the following guiding principles as a general compass for communication in the community garden:

### **Guiding Principles for Communication in Community Gardens**

- Be inclusive, civil and respectful.
- Everyone's voice matters and represents their unique perspective.
- Keep it simple.
- Give others the benefit of the doubt.
- Act with the purpose of doing what is best for the garden as a whole.

### **Guidelines for Setting Group Expectations**

- Generate group expectations collaboratively. Have a leader or team of leaders head up the discussion, but be sure that gardeners know it is their garden and their expectations that they are creating.
- Once someone shares an expectation, be sure that everyone has a clear understanding of what it means for the group (i.e., "supporting each other" may be watering a neighbor's plot when they're out of town; "giving feedback" could be offering thoughtful solutions to issues anonymously using a suggestion box, etc.)
- Make sure that EVERYONE feels that they can live with the expectations and agrees to abide by them.
- Pay particular attention to those that may not feel as comfortable sharing their opinions in a group.
  - Consider requesting feedback through an anonymous or online medium before the meeting. Examples include a suggestion box in the garden with an option to include the gardener's name. Survey Monkey is a great online tool for soliciting feedback, and likewise has an option to provide feedback anonymously ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). Ensure that there are multiple means of providing feedback to accommodate different communication styles.
- Ask gardeners how they will hold themselves and each other accountable to these expectations.
- Make sure everyone has a copy of the expectations that were set at the meeting. Consider posting it in a public space, such as a tool shed or communications board.
- Expectations should be revisited and revised as necessary.

### **Before the meeting**

Ensure that everyone receives an invitation to participate. It could be a good idea to have this expectations meeting the very first time that gardeners meet each season, to set the tone and establish a common understanding for the rest of the summer.

For those who are unable to attend, provide them with the opportunity to share their opinions beforehand, either by having a garden leader or preferably a fellow gardener speak on their behalf.

### **To start the meeting:**

Set expectations for the meeting:

- Acknowledge that every person brings a valuable perspective to the table and should feel free to speak.
- Speak in turn, without interrupting.
- Ask for clarification when needed.
- Avoid accusatory or heated language.
- Be willing to compromise. Remember, you are working to create expectations that everyone in the garden can live with.

### **Some guiding questions to consider asking the group:**

- What does it mean for this space to be a *community* garden?
- What makes community gardens different from backyard gardens?

- What are your visions for this garden?
- How do you want the space to look and feel?
- What do we value as a community? How can we practice those values in the garden?

**Suggested topics to cover in expectations meeting:**

- Communication
  - availability and best ways to get in touch with each other (phone, email)
  - to whom, how and when to ask questions
  - garden leaders' contact information
  - forums for communication and appropriate times to use them: message board, face-to-face, listserv, newsletter, email, phone, text
- Gardener accountability & policy enforcement
  - how to hold one another accountable
  - how to resolve conflicts in the garden as they arise
  - reasonable consequences for not adhering to policies
- Attendance and Participation
  - workdays
  - committees
  - garden meetings
  - other garden events
  - other ways to contribute
- Decision-making processes
  - which decisions do leaders/steering committees make on behalf of the garden?
  - which decisions require the whole garden's input?

**Closing:**

- Thank everyone for coming and for committing to participate in the community garden.
- End on a positive note! Consider partaking in a potluck meal together or continuing the gathering of gardeners informally at a local community hangout, sharing words of affirmation about a particular gardener who has gone above and beyond to make the meeting a success, or saying how excited you are about a certain aspect of the season or garden.