

## Overland Park Community Garden



In 2009, Beverly recognized the need for a community garden in her city of Overland Park, Kansas. She found a large group of eager gardeners and a location which happened to be an old farmstead deeded to the neighboring public library. This began a beautiful, community-focused relationship.

Beverly had many conversations with community garden leaders. Some used their garden to feed the community but this model relied heavily on the work of a few gardeners. Beverly

decided the Overland Park (OP) Community Garden should spread the workload in order to sustain the gardens for years to come.

In 2011 Beverly and her team broke ground. The first growing season began Memorial Day of that same year. Beverly and ten other original members, have now been gardening this site for 13 years and they welcome new members each year.

*Here are lessons and tips Beverly learned over the years leading the Overland Park Community Garden.*

### Logistics

The OP Community Garden is 5,000 square feet divided into 64 - 4'x10' in-ground, plots. Gardeners may lease one or two plots for the growing season. Hardwood mulch is laid between each 4'x20' rectangle.

Each gardener is responsible for his/her own plot including the harvest. Twenty-two fruit trees have been established onsite and are now bearing fruit for the community to harvest.

An average of 42 gardeners lease plots each year at the OP Community Garden. Applications are first made available to returning gardeners in good standing. Next, they open to OP residents new to the garden. If there is still space, all Johnson County residents can apply. Beverly maintains a waitlist of about 50 people each year.

In addition to maintaining their own plot, OP community gardeners are required to volunteer at least three hours of additional community garden work to support the program.

Gardeners must use organic practices for garden maintenance. Seeds and transplants do not have to be organic.

There is a shed onsite with a padlock where communal tools are stored. The water hydrant also has a padlock. The current season's gardeners receive codes for the locks.

The community garden has at least two work days each year. One in mid-March to spread mulch and compost and another at the end of the season to clear the gardens.



# Community Garden Corner

## *Challenges*

Establishing the community garden required working with city planning commission. Beverly had to send certified letters to businesses and homes within 200 feet of the proposed site for approval. The community garden maintains a liability policy based on an agreement with the library. This was an important step but also the biggest expense for the garden.

The rules and regulations teach gardeners what green waste can be composted onsite but policing it can be difficult. The city doesn't allow food scraps to be composted because of the potential for rodents. The board provides brown yard waste bags to remove items that can't be composted onsite.

Early in program development, the newly constructed shed was burned down by an arsonist. The community garden's insurance paid for the replacement shed, but this was discouraging.

## *Funding*



Gardeners lease their plot for the season. Small plots are \$25/season. Large plots are \$45/season. This money is used for operating expenses including water, liability policy, website hosting fee and PO Box rental.

The local Whole Foods hosted "Community Partner Days" and gave a small percentage of their profits to the community garden for the designated day. As a 501c3 nonprofit the community garden can apply for grants and receive funding.

The city of OP recognizes the garden as an asset to the community and have provided access to water and deliver mulch to the site.

## *Plans for the Future*

Improved signage will help educate visitors about the "Giving Grove" orchard which is open to the public for harvesting and clarifying the private garden spaces are not.

The OP Community Garden is in favor of educational outreach but need a point person to manage it.

## *Tips for Other Community Gardeners*

Design a detailed agreement between the community garden board and the gardeners. Beverly has found this resolves conflict quickly by making the rules and expectations clear.

Prepare gardeners for leadership. Recognize gardeners with skills in web design, marketing and IT and get them involved. Long-time gardeners can serve as mentors for newer gardeners.

Be open to creative partnerships. Several Eagle Scouts have completed projects at the gardens. Some years the library maintains a garden plot to use for special programming. This year a Girl Scout troop is managing one of the plots. Schools sometimes bring students to the garden for field trips. The gardens can be an educational resource for the community.

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