

Preventing and Facing Theft/Vandalism



We may not like to consider theft and vandalism as a reality for community gardens, but ignoring it does not protect your gardens against it.

Taking a proactive approach can help maintain positive morale among gardeners while protecting the hard work from the season.

Here are some long and short-term strategies for preventing problems at the community

garden.

- Build strong relationships with neighboring businesses and homeowners. Share the harvest with them and invite them to visit the garden. Having more eyes on the gardens from people who are familiar with the neighborhood is beneficial for keeping it safe.
- Offer a community fruit/vegetable plot and identify it so visitors can have free access. A food donation box can also be installed for gardeners to share their harvest surplus.
- Post signage indicating police and neighbors monitor the site.
- Use fences, gates and locks to secure the premises. Use a coded lock so each gardener can be granted access. Reset the code each year so only the current gardeners can gain entry.
- Invite the public to visit the gardens during an annual gathering. This will build community and reduce the temptation to be destructive out of curiosity.
- Post a sign at the entrance of the gardens telling visitors how they can become members of the gardens, especially if there is a locked gate. This is a more positive message inviting newcomers rather than posing the challenge of trying to enter.
- Establish clear rules among garden members for harvesting. Harvesting from another's plot (without permission) is grounds for dismissal from the community garden.
- Encourage gardeners to harvest regularly or to ask for help if they are unable to harvest in a timely manner.
- Assign roles for the gardeners to maintain the communal areas of the garden. Encourage them to work at different times of day to extend the number of hours people are onsite.



Community Garden Corner

- Provide lighting at night and increase visibility in the gardens by eliminating large shrubs and walls. Keep gazebos/picnic areas open.
- Grow less popular varieties. Everyone is familiar with red tomatoes. Those less experienced with gardening may not find heirloom varieties as enticing.



If theft/vandalism does occur report it to gardeners and police. Rally the gardeners and repair any damage quickly. Maintain a reporting sheet in the tool shed where gardeners can record incidents to promote vigilance among the gardeners.

Community gardens are more likely to experience theft/vandalism during the first few years of establishment. Once the newness and curiosity subside incidents typically decrease. These tips are good practices in general for keeping everyone safe at the gardens.

[ACGA Theft and Vandalism](#)

Show us your community garden! Share what is working for your organization.

Email Cynthia at cdom@ksu.edu to be featured in an upcoming newsletter.

Cynthia Domenghini, Horticulture Extension Specialist

