

Four Community Garden Case Studies

The case studies below were compiled by Mary Roberts Brundige and Sarah E. Curtiss during October and November, 2005, as a service-learning project commissioned by the University of Vermont School of Natural Resources and Friends of Burlington Gardens.

Shelburne

The town of Shelburne has a community garden located at the LaPlatte Nature Center that is maintained by the Shelburne Parks and Recreation Department. Like all community gardens surveyed, membership is limited to town residents and must be renewed annually. The 21 lots at this site cost \$15 for 15' x 20' plots or \$30 for 20' x 30' plots. These membership fees cover rototilling, mowing, advertising, administrative fees and water usage. There is a water hook-up on-site, but no hose is provided. Additionally, participants must bring their own tools to the site, as there are no tools or tool shed provided by the town. Gardeners may apply their own fertilizer and while organic gardening is not enforced, it is encouraged.

Age of participants varies from people in their late 20's to those in their 70's, with no particular gender or ethnicity predominating. Sue Craig, Shelburne Parks and Recreation Administrative Assistant, states that relationships between participants are strong as only town residents are allowed to participate and therefore often already know one another. However, there have been problems with theft in which food has been stolen or smashed. These kinds of incidents are always reported to the Shelburne Police. There have also been problems with participants keeping unkempt plots, despite having to sign a gardening registration form in which they agree to keep them "as weed-free as practical." Those who do not tend to their plots risk losing them the following year.

The Shelburne community garden is well-organized, with a documented management plan that may be passed on to future garden organizers and advertisements for plots appearing in Parks and Recreation brochure twice a year. This garden has no community partners and does not employ fund-raising techniques so its operation relies entirely on plot fees.

Charlotte - Ten Stones Community Garden

Ten Stones is an intentional community with about an acre of garden space, which started about 9 years ago with 13 families. The garden serves 16 households but is not an advertised community garden. The garden was organized and installed by Ten Stones community members and is carried out each year by them. Everything is grown organically and includes but is not exclusive to raspberries, blueberries, a few apple trees, garlic, herbs, flowers and many vegetables. The gardens provide about 5 or 6 months of food, some of which is stored through the winter.

The price to take part in the garden is \$125 per adult, half of that for a child, and children under 7 are free. The garden is made up of one large plot and usually people are assigned to a crop and care for that particular crop that year. If a certain crop doesn't do well, then everyone will have less of that crop all around. Everyone has to put in about an hour of work a week and maybe more during the planting and harvesting seasons. They used to have festivals to celebrate harvests and ceremonial seed plantings but have since moved away from those traditions since the children have grown up and are less active in the gardening process. When things are really busy and they don't have enough hands, they hire a few women to do the job for them to ensure that the work gets done.

The tools and equipment are shared among the community and are replaced when they need it with the membership money. There is an electric fence surrounding the garden to keep out pests that might destroy the crops. The irrigation system comes from the nearest house in the community and they set up spigots throughout the garden so that water can travel with greater ease to all areas of the garden. They have a shed to hold the tools and equipment. Also, there are a few chickens and they acquired honeybees recently.

The main challenges that they face are the lack of work that people put into the garden. Some people fall victim to the free-rider idea and end up doing the workload of many when everyone is still getting the same distribution of food. Also, when some crops go bad that season, then no one can have that crop for that season and they lose out on that certain good. At the start of the garden, the soil was not so fertile but it has become more so as time went on.

Williston

The town of Williston has a population of 8,224 residents and 698.08 acres of conserved land (Center for Rural Studies, 2004 Census). Williston has a small community garden located at Brennan Park that is overseen by the town's Parks and Recreation Director, Kevin Finnegan. The garden is comprised of 16 plots, 8 of which are 20' x 30' and 8 of which are 10' x 10'. The larger plots cost \$30 and the smaller plots cost \$10. There is no deposit required at this site. The garden fees cover tilling in the spring and fall and water throughout the growing season. The gardens open on May 5th and are put to bed by October 31st each year. No pesticides or herbicides are allowed but fertilizer may be used. Plots must be tended to on a weekly basis and if neglected the plot is given to someone else. Tools and hoses are the responsibility of participating gardeners and are not provided by the Williston Parks and Recreation department.

This garden was established in 1999 by Mr. Finnegan's predecessor. It is a well-known garden and is quite popular, with plots filling quickly each year. Most of Williston's community gardeners are in their late 30's to mid-40's with several participating seniors. Children with their parents are welcome as well. Many participants are considered regulars and have been gardening at the Park since the garden's inception. It is this fact that allows the Parks and Recreation Department to take care of the cleanup, tilling, and plot assignment duties and then step away from the gardens to allow participants to run it

themselves. This system has worked quite well and very few problems have arisen. Returning gardeners are often given the same plots to allow them to continue improving upon the piece of land they had been working with the year before.

The basic gardening guidelines are documented and most garden-related decisions are made by Mr. Finnegan. He does often consult with the town's Oversight Committee as well. This garden does not have any partnerships and does not do any fundraising. An ad is put in Williston's quarterly recreation guide but no other advertising is utilized. More information may be found at the town's website, <http://town.williston.vt.us/rec/index.htm>.

Winooski

Bob Dimasi is the Director of Parks and Recreation in Winooski, a Vermont town with a population of 6,365 residents and 69.75 acres of conserved land (Center for Rural Studies, 2004 Census). Mr. Dimasi has been with Winooski Parks and Rec. for 7 years and is a gardener himself. He planned the town's organic community garden 4 years ago with a focus on children's education. The garden was integrated into Winooski's Summer Enrichment Program and now aids in teaching children, primarily between the ages of 6 and 14, lessons in health, reading, and math. Thus, the majority of the garden space is reserved for children's plots.

The area available to the general public is slowly growing but accommodating all interested residents is still a problem. The entire garden is 60' x 120' with five 20' x 20' plots offered to town residents for a \$40 fee. This fee covers the cost of water throughout the growing season and tilling services in the fall. The garden is located at Landry Park behind the municipal pool in a fenced area with a combination lock that is provided to participating gardeners. A lean-to that houses all of the necessary gardening tools, including hoses, is provided. The property is run by two full-time groundskeepers, Mr. Dimasi himself, and a summer instructor.

The Winooski community garden enjoys several partnerships with area organizations, including the Gardener's Supply Company, the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), the Intervale Foundation, the Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger, and the UVM Extension 4-H Growing Connections program. Each organization has helped the Winooski community garden in some way, including teaching workshops, donating seeds, compost, and tools, or lending advice when needed. The Winooski community gardening project was also the recipient of the National Gardening Association's Healthy Sprouts Award four years ago. This award is sponsored by Gardener's Supply Company and is given annually to outstanding programs that use gardens to teach children about nutrition and hunger in the United States.

Documented guidelines for running Winooski's community garden currently don't exist, but Mr. Dimasi is confident that should something happen, the town's Advisory Board would be able to step up and take over the operation. Information about this garden may be found in the town's e-news publication as well as in the Winooski Eagle, an online newspaper. Additional information may be found at www.onioncity.com.