



START A COMMUNITY GARDEN

A COMMUNITY RESOURCE GUIDE

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Please read through the whole guide to get an understanding of what is required to start a community garden. Once you've done this, email us at hello@3000acres.org to tell us you're interested in starting one or to ask us any questions and we'll work with you to explore the options available and any next steps.

Deciding to start a community garden

If you're keen to have a community garden in your neighbourhood, the first step is to see what's already there. Check your local council website or do a google search for community gardens in your suburb.

If you find that your area does not already have a community growing space, or is in need of more, this short guide will lay out some steps for you to take. At any point, please feel free to get in touch with us at hello@3000acres.org about your ideas to see how 3000acres can help.

Identifying a site

This may be the trickiest part in the whole process!

- Is there a piece of land you already know about?
- Do you know who owns the land?
- Could you unite with others interested in finding land?

Finding land that is available for use and appropriate for growing activities can be difficult and a slow process. We can help you get the ball rolling.

Publicly owned land

Public landholders such as councils and statutory bodies often hold large amounts of land, which may or may not be suitable for use as a community garden. 3000acres has built relationships with a number of these groups to better help the community identify what land might be available.

With publicly owned land, a great place to start is to get in touch with 3000acres, or your local council.

Privately owned land

Many vacant lots around Melbourne are privately owned. It could be land that is owned by a property developer who is waiting for planning or building approval or it could be an individual who is figuring out what to do with the land.

Find out who owns it

If it's privately owned land, the first step is to find out who owns it.

- You can do a title search through **LANDATA**
- Put **a poster** up on the site
- Ask around your neighbourhood – you would be surprised how often one of your neighbours knows more about that vacant lot at the end of the street than you do!

Make contact

Once you know who the owner is, dealing with private landowners is really all about building a relationship with them and coming to an agreement about things like access to the land, insurance and maintenance.

When you have found out who owns the land and are ready to start a discussion with them about accessing that land for urban agriculture, you will need to contact them and organise a meeting.

Coming to an agreement

Once you have started the conversation, you should try and get an agreement with the owner in writing.

Here you can find **a simple agreement** that, once filled in, will allow you to really feel committed to the site and start working on the other elements that you need to get the garden started.

If you or the owner needs a bit more certainty about your legal relationship you may want to consider entering into a lease. The lease can include conditions about how long your group will occupy the site, any agreements about payments, and how the site will be used and maintained. More information about leases is provided below.

Talk to the locals

Although (we doubt) anyone will have serious objections to building a community garden, you might find some resistance from local residents who are not involved in the process.

Don't become concerned if you experience some opposition. Like the process of dealing with landowners, it's all about developing a relationship.

Listen to concerns and do your best to address them openly. If trust can be established the biggest opponents can become your greatest advocates. Who knows, they might even want to get involved themselves.

3000acres suggests informing people of your proposal, progress and activities as soon and then as frequently as possible. Getting the neighbours onside (and having a written record of this process) will help assure council of the appropriateness of a garden on the site, and hopefully speed up the permit process.

Download a **template letter to send to the neighbours**, for an idea of how you might want to begin the conversation with locals.

Getting organised

The key to the success of your proposed garden is getting a team together. You can search for like-minded people in your area in a number of ways:

- Get in touch with local neighbourhood houses and other community gardens
- Post on Facebook in local groups such as Good Karma Networks
- Letterbox drop in the area around your proposed garden
- Put an ad in your Local Leader
- Hang flyers at the local shops

Once you have an agreement with the owner of the land it's time you and your fellow aspiring gardeners get organised so you can take the next steps to set up your garden.

Insurance

It is very important to be insured. Having the right insurance is not only a way of managing risk when you have a group of people gardening on a leased piece of land, but also goes a long way to provide peace of mind to you (the growers), the owner of the land and council.

Insurance can also be expensive – however, the good news is that 3000acres has identified an affordable and reliable source of insurance for community gardens through Gardening Clubs Australia (GCA). GCA offers a range of insurance (including public liability, volunteer, personal injury etc) to its affiliates.

The first step to accessing this insurance is to become an affiliate and then apply for the insurance cover. You can download **full details and application forms** to become an affiliate and access insurance.

Planning permission

Any new use of a site may require a planning application. Once you identify a potential site you will need to contact your local council planning department to find out the process. If your council has a sustainable food or urban agriculture officer they may be able to help.

Good governance

Setting up a community garden can require a bit of tenacity and hard work. It's important to make sure you have a dedicated group of growers who are going to work together and cooperate to achieve a common goal.

Here are our suggestions to help you get it right from the start:

A vision

Before you even start to do any detailed planning or design work, sit down with your group and work out your vision for the site. We're not talking touchy-feely statements here, but important questions like:

- Why are we doing this?
- What do we want to achieve?
- Who will be involved?
- How will we work together?
- Is there a time limit or end point to our project?
- What does success look like?

A management plan

To ensure the core group is all on the same page, you will need a management plan.

A management plan is about social rather than site design – who does what, and what do we do when things go wrong?

This plan will make sure you have the processes in place to discuss and deal with the various issues that arise from the setting up and running of the garden. It will also demonstrate to council, private landowners and other supporters that you are dedicated, organised and professional.

See the **article on garden management plans** from the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network for information about how to create a management plan including a list of things you might want to include.

Getting formal

Like it or not there are a number of formalities that need to be dealt with when setting up a garden.

The 'paperwork' involved in arranging leases, permits and insurances can be involved, but don't let it stop you. There are plenty of groups, including 3000acres, to give you help and advice.

One of the most important decisions landowners will want to know is 'who' they are dealing with. Who has legal authority to sign a lease? Who is responsible for public liability insurance? Who can be contacted when something goes wrong?

You may need to decide on a legal structure to formalise your group.

Association

One way that you may choose to become official and commit to the project is to incorporate as an association. This is not as scary as it sounds! Associating will allow you to

access insurance and sign a lease as an association – as your garden, rather than as an individual.

For more information about how to become an incorporated association and the rights and responsibilities that go with that status visit the **Consumer Affairs Victoria website**.

Partnering with an existing organisation

If setting up an incorporated association sounds like more of a headache than it's worth, the best alternative is to find an existing organisation that is already incorporated and which is willing to partner with you.

Groups such as your local gardening club, or a local service club or even school might be willing to get on board and partner with your garden to cover you for things like insurance.

For more details about the this process, refer to the following documents:

- **What type of organisations could I partner with?**
- **Template partnership request letter**

Get designing

Here's where the fun begins.

Designing your garden will not only help create an achievable goal for your group, it will also help you with legal formalities like getting permits and insurances.

Perhaps start by going on a tour of a couple of different gardens with your core team. Feel free to contact existing groups to seek out their tips on garden design.

Have a look at what you like and think about how you might do it on your site. Also spend some time on your site, think about its unique qualities – hours of sunlight, large trees, gradient of the land, access to water. Consider how you might use that space best for the purpose of a garden.

Think about what your group is trying to achieve from the garden. Question whether you would be best off organising the garden as a set of allotments or a shared garden.

Detailed design guidelines

For tips on how to design and manage your garden, check out the excellent **Community Garden Manual** released by the Helen McPherson Smith Trust. It provides details on materials, costs and design, among other things.

Get funding

There are lots of ways to fund your garden.

You might decide that growers should fund their own material for the garden and perhaps pay an annual subscription fee to cover basic costs like water, or maybe you would like to seek funding from an external source for set up and ongoing maintenance costs.

Here are some options for where to find funding:

- Most local councils will have a small grants program for groups operating within their municipality. Check online with your local council community development department.
- **Self-funded/membership model**
- For heaps more ideas on how to raise money, visit **The Funding Center**.

Stay Safe

A well designed and managed garden will provide you with healthy food and connect you with your community and nature. But like any activity there will be some hazards to be aware of in order to avoid injuries to you, your group, or passers-by.

Your Management Plan should include a section on safety. You may even wish to prepare a simple 'risk management' plan. **Here** is an example courtesy of sustainableneighbourhoods.org.au

While every site will be different, and we can't predict what types of hazards may be relevant to you, some of the issues you may wish to think about are:

- Use, storage and maintenance of tools, fertilisers and chemicals.
- Appropriate training for use of tools (especially power tools), fertilisers and chemicals.
- Safety equipment, such as gloves, eye protection, footwear, respiratory and hearing protection.
- Management of pest plants and animals.
- Tripping hazards.
- Overhanging branches.
- Sharp objects, such as garden stakes, fence posts and rakes.
- Supervision of children.
- Fencing off the site from roads and public transport infrastructure.
- Overhead electrical wires.
- Land contamination.
- Underground infrastructure such as gas lines, electrical wires and water pipes. Find out more at 1100.com.au.

NEXT STEPS

Email us at hello@3000acres.org to discuss any queries you have about starting a community compost or to explore options and next steps.