



THE ULTIMATE ONSITE VOLUNTEER PROJECT GROW A GIVING GARDEN

Get some exercise, fresh air and a little Zen by planting a worksite garden and donating produce to a local shelter or food shelf.

SEEDING AN IDEA

In 2007, a trio of employees at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota sought permission to dig up a section of lawn around the corporate headquarters, putting their green thumbs to use and starting a garden. But this was no ordinary garden. These employees created a “Community Giving Garden” on Blue Cross’ property to provide fresh fruits and vegetables for a local shelter and food shelf.

The Community Giving Garden has been the catalyst for a network of more than 20 corporate giving gardens across the Twin Cities, demonstrating innovation in serving our community. Leveraging employee talent and support for access to healthy food, the giving garden is a great way to engage employees while meeting community needs.

PLANTING BASICS

- **Volunteers, the garden’s most important ingredient.** Start with a small, dependable group and build. Your garden will grow in direct proportion to volunteer involvement.
- **Crops.** Think ease of maintenance, volume of produce, location, weather and growing season. Involve your recipient organization in the planning.
- **Water and irrigation plan.** Use existing resources.
- **Pests.** Build a rabbit fence. Research organic pest control methods.
- **Funding.** Worksite support or donations from volunteers? What is the budget?
- **Mentors.** Check with your county’s Master Gardener Program or Agricultural Extension Service.

GET STARTED NOW

- **Plan**
- **Who, what, when, where and how**
- **Determine location.** Worksite lawn, planters, raised beds.
- **Find a recipient.** Food shelf, shelter, social service agency.
- **Get corporate backing.** Present plan to your leadership highlighting benefits to the company.
- **Enlist support from Facilities.** Maintenance, watering, pest control, logistics.
- **Recruit employees.** Volunteer council, wellness group, known gardeners.

SHARING THE BOUNTY

A key to your worksite garden's success is communications. Internally, you can build an email list or use a corporate database if available to share frequent garden updates with gardeners, management and the broader employee base. For external audiences, create a blog or website if it's within your company policies. Keep your communications department apprised of photo opportunities, garden milestones and produce deliveries to share with local news media.

Build a relationship with your receiving organization that goes beyond the garden. Learn what they need in addition to vegetables. You'll find that your volunteers will get involved in more than the garden. Also consider identifying additional organizations that could accept produce — your harvest may be greater than you anticipated.

GROWING BENEFITS

- Encourage physical activity among employees
- Support healthy eating and wellness initiatives
- Connect with co-workers
- Reduce company's carbon footprint
- Connect in the community

ADOPTING A CROP INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING

- Planting the seeds
- Thinning
- Weeding
- Harvesting
 - Pick
 - Rinse
 - Bag for delivery

Time commitment is 15 to 45 minutes a week for each row.

OUR GARDEN CROPS

Asparagus	Kohlrabi	Rhubarb
Beans	Lettuce	Sage
Beets	Mixed pepper	Spinach
Brussels sprouts	Okra	Strawberry patch
Cabbage	Onion	Summer squash
Carrot	Parsley, basil and rosemary	Thyme and oregano
Cucumber	Peas	Tomato
Dill and cilantro	Potato	Summer squash
Eggplant	Radishes	Walking onion and chives
Green pepper	Rainbow chard	Watermelon
Kale	Raspberry bushes	Winter squash and pumpkin

