



PLANTING SEEDS OF HOPE

www.JusticeGardeners.org

Getting your Justice Garden Started, An Indepth Guide: With a tiny budget and a small group of volunteers, you can provide a regular supply of fresh, organic produce to your Food Justice Partner six months a year. Here's the path the begin.

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Getting Started: In Depth Guide

With a tiny budget and a small group of volunteers, you can provide a regular supply of fresh, organic produce to your Food Justice Partner six months a year. Just imagine the impact you can have on a family who can't afford vegetables at the grocery store! Your efforts nourish body, mind, and soul. Children need a nutritional foundation to grow and learn. Below is the path to get started.

See Getting Started Checklist on page 8.

Physical Requirements

Open Space

The first step to starting your Food Justice Garden is finding land to grow on! It doesn't have to be big. The best growing spaces are open and flat. If your organization doesn't own the land, make sure you have the proper permission to use the space.

Sunlight

Some food-bearing plants need at least 6 hours of sunlight a day, but plants like tomatoes or peppers will want as much light as possible. Take a look at your spot at different times of day to get an idea of how shady the area gets. If there is shade, afternoon shade is easier to grow in than morning shade. If your spot does not get at least 6 hours of consistent sunlight, you may need to consider another location.

Water Access

Plants can't grow without water, so you need a source close by. If you don't have a spigot on your proposed garden space, consider putting in a new water line. In terms of budgeting, this will cost \$3,000 on average, but can be more or less depending on the closest water line connection. Collecting rainwater is another option, but it has to be used properly. Also, having a consistent water source is important for times of less rain or for setting up irrigation lines. In general, 1" of irrigation or rain is needed each week.

See Watering 101 for details on irrigation found on page 9.

Soil Test

Before growing, you'll want to conduct a soil test. Even if you plan to use raised beds, it's important to have an idea of the ground they will be on. A standard soil test will let you know how fertile the soil is and if you need to make any adjustments. It's also a good idea to test for lead. If the test comes back with high amounts of lead, this isn't a

major obstacle but does mean you will need some additional precautions. Lead in soil is a risk for anyone coming in direct contact with the soil, not only for the crops that may absorb the metal itself. This means extra precautions for cleaning up after gardening, more monitoring with child gardeners, and avoiding growing root crops that directly contact the soil. Your local Cooperative Extension office will do a soil test for a small fee. University of Missouri's Cooperative Extension Soil testing program information can be found here: <https://extension.missouri.edu/counties/st-louis/soil-testing>

Produce Storage

When thinking about growing for your community, consider where the produce is going at all points from harvest to donation. Depending on the time between harvest and delivery, you may need to consider cold storage before delivery. For harvest, you will need harvesting baskets, tables to hold produce, and bags to package the produce.

Please view our food safety handout about the best way to collect and distribute produce on page 15.

Beginning Equipment and Tool List

The size of your growing space and potential crops will determine what tools you need. The number of tools and kinds of tools and equipment will change and grow as your garden project does.

Equipment

- Stirrup Hoes
- Triangle Hoes
- Trowels
- Harvest Baskets
- Plant supports
- Pruners
- Scissors
- Hard rake
- Shovel

Irrigation

- Hose Timer
- Hose
- Soaker Hose (100 ft)
- Hose splitter/fittings
- Sprinklers

Harvest Supplies

- Laundry baskets
- Plastic Bags

Soap Pesticide Supplies

- Vegetable oil
- Liquid Dishwashing Soap
- Pump Air Sprayers

Soil Amendments:

- Organic Fertilizer
- Compost

Miscellaneous Supplies

- First aid supplies or kit
- Disinfectant
- Bug spray
- Sunscreen
- Hand Sanitizer
- Towels or Paper Towels
- Twine, string
- Kneeling pads
- Work Gloves
- Bins for storage of equipment

Non-Physical Requirements

Organization Approval and Support

If you are growing within an organization, it is important to create begin a process within organizational structures to ensure that you have the approval to use the land, the support from leadership, staff and board to begin and sustain the project, commitment of resources both human and financial. Creating a collaborative committee with key members of the organization is one way to ensure that the justice garden is integrated into and supported by the organization. Begin with a clear proposal including: mission of the project, people it serves – both your food justice partner and your community, detailed plan to begin the justice garden, Justice Garden volunteer committee to manage the project, and a projected start-up budget and annual costs. Ongoing communication with organization leadership and staff as well as the broader organizational community is important to keeping all engaged with the project.

Justice Garden Committee and Leadership Roles

A garden is nothing without a central contact point and strong leadership. As you plan your physical space, think about who will be involved with the leadership at your garden. It can be one person or it can be a panel of people or even specialized committees with clear roles and responsibilities. Think about what is best for your organization and the capacity of your garden. The bigger your project, the more hands you will need on deck. Here are many of the roles and responsibilities that you will need to consider:

- **Volunteer Management:** recruiting, scheduling, training, organizing and thanking
- **Garden Planner:** planning crops and supplies, purchasing all items needed
- **On-Site Lead:** planning and managing work during communal gardening time
- **Communications:** promoting garden and volunteer opportunities within your institution through social media, newsletters and events
- **Food Justice Partner Liaison:** developing partner relationship, responding to changing needs with partner, regular informal evaluating and annual evaluation of how things are working, delivering produce
- **Liaison with Organization:** communicating with organization including reporting on successes and challenges, coordinating garden needs with staff, ensuring organizational safety practices are in place, working with organizational schedule and calendar.

Budget

Every garden has a different budget based on size and the type of produce being grown. Having a realistic idea of the initial costs, annual costs, and future costs will help the project grow organically. Understanding these costs will also help you request a realistic amount from your organization for the garden to succeed. Even a small annual investment can result in hundreds of pounds of food going toward food security in your community.

Our budgeting worksheet can help you plan out a budget. It can be found on page 12.

Garden Plan

Each year, you'll want to plan what you are going to grow for the year, and we also recommend a multi-year plan for how the garden will develop over time. Start small and grow organically! This could include composting systems, benches, gathering spaces, or even developing more growing space as you are able. Check out our worksheet on how to develop a garden plan on page 17.

Justice Garden Volunteers Engagement

Volunteer gardeners are what make the justice garden successful! You will need to:

Recruit volunteers -- Figure out who is going to be involved with your project and invite them to join. Organizational communications such as newsletters, social media, bulletin announcements are all great ways to invite people to join in the work.

Communicate with your volunteers – an email list combined with social media works well. It is important to ask how people want to receive communications. Regular weekly communication which celebrates weekly successes, plans for upcoming work and events, reflects on the meaning and impact of your work together and expresses gratitude keeps volunteers engaged and enthused about the work.

Create a space at the Justice Garden which welcomes all. Make sure that new volunteers feel welcome, connected with the group and appreciated for their work. Look for ways to include gardeners of all abilities to the extent that you are able. Folks who can't do some of the hard work in the garden can organize the packing of the produce, recording weights of harvest, serve as the welcome and work coordinator, etc.

Training: train gardeners in the tasks that they are expected to do and check in on how they are doing with new tasks. Also train gardeners in food safety. See page 15.

Run well-organized garden sessions by: creating a list of tasks ahead of time, having all tools and equipment ready before volunteers arrive, welcoming volunteers and asking them to sign-in, matching tasks with volunteer's abilities and preferences,

checking in frequently to see if people have what they need, clean up the garden site as you move through the tasks, thank the volunteers as they leave.

Self-Care in the Justice Garden: emphasize that volunteers' bodies are also part of the eco-system and need care. If possible, begin with stretches to warm up. Invite folks to take frequent breaks and take care of themselves. In high heat conditions, call for regular rest and water breaks.

Ensure Volunteer Comfort and Safety: Make sure you have first aid and appropriate safety and comfort gear available. Access to a bathroom and potable water. Leaders can consider getting CPR and basic first aid training

Annual Thank You Event: Celebrate your volunteers at least once a year with a simple thank you event. Celebrate them also within your organization.

Communal Garden Work Plan: Weekly and Seasonal

Spring and fall planting time, final harvest, and close-down are ideal moments to bring together large groups of volunteers and raise awareness about your work. During the rest of the season, communal gardens can be easily maintained by a once-a-week work session. The main tasks each week include:

- Planting (as needed)
- Weeding
- Plant care — removing dead leaves, checking for diseases or problems
- Pest management
- Assessing and adjusting watering to plant and weather conditions
- Harvesting and Packaging Produce
- Community time

Food Justice Partner

If you aren't planning to grow for your own food distribution, you'll want to find a food justice partner. This could be a local food pantry, a soup kitchen, any organization that distributes food to community members. The closer the partner is to your physical gardening space, the more impact you can have on the general community. To find a food justice partner, look at online resources or ask a larger partner if they know any organizations close to your growing site.

Building a Food Justice Partner Relationship

Initial Partner Interview

Meet with your food justice partner to go over the ins and outs of donation. Figure out: who the contact person is, the capabilities of the pantry, see what they are able to handle in donations, the best packaging for donations to arrive in, how much space they have, how often they need donations, if they have cold storage. It's also helpful to understand how food is distributed to guests.

These are some questions you may want to ask your Food Justice Partner when you meet with them for the first time. These questions are meant to be a jumping off point—feel free to add more questions that make sense for you! Please see page 13.

Basic Contact Information

- Who is the primary contact for the organization?
- What is the best method of contact (email, phone, etc.)
- How are you in contact with guests? Do you have regular guests?
 - This question is to help you distribute the survey on what food items patrons will want to eat.

Distribution Questions

- How often do you distribute food?
 - What days of the week?
 - What times?
- How do you distribute?
 - Standard box option – patrons pick up a pre-selected boxes
 - Shopper choice option – patrons shop for themselves
 - Combination – some items in preselected boxes, other items by choice
- Do you distribute hot cooked meals?

Storage Questions

- How much space do you have available for produce?
- Do you have on-site cold storage?
- How would you like produce to be delivered: Bags, boxes, pre-packed in family size bags, etc.

Working Together

- When should we drop off produce?
- Where will we meet up?
- How often will we check in? What is the best way to do that?
- Are there other aspects of the pantry we can help with?
 - Partnering on events, doing canned food and other supply drives, etc.

What to Grow Survey

Figure out what your partner's guests will want to eat. Once you have an idea of what is feasible to grow in your garden, communicate with your food justice partner to survey the guests and what produce they'd like to have. Every community is different and will have preferences for what they want grown. This ensures the food you are growing is appropriate, will be used, and nourishes the community fully. Please see page 14.

Food Safety Checklist and Training

Donating food can be daunting when you want to ensure your produce is the best it can be. Our Food Safety Checklist and guide can walk you and your gardener volunteers through food safety from planting to harvest. Good Samaritan laws will protect you legally in case of issues, but good practices can avoid any issues from the start. Please see page 15.

Growing your Garden Row by Row, Year by Year

As you begin your garden project, you surely have many hopes and dreams. Maybe you hope to grow enough to open your own food pantry, or you dream of providing job training as part of a farm market stand. Maybe you just envision a community hub where people grow, learn, and work toward justice together. No matter what you're thinking, we recommend starting small and having a plan to expand over time.

A garden plan is more than just thinking about what to grow in the upcoming season. It includes yearly goals for deepening and broadening your impact. We advise "growing organically," letting the garden guide you in the ways it wants and needs to grow. No effort is too small, and you will be surprised at how much you can do with very little land, resources and time. Please see garden planning worksheet on page 17.

Getting Started – Checklist

Physical Requirements

- Growing Space and Land
 - Open Space
 - Flat land
 - Ownership - ensure you have permission to grow
- Water Access
- Sunlight
- Soil test - *Offered through your local Agricultural Extension Office*
 - Test for lead. If lead is present, a good idea to test for other heavy metals
 - Test for nutrients and pH. If soil is lacking, consider amending the soil.
- Harvest and Produce Storage
 - Table for harvest
 - Fridge/cold space (if not doing direct harvest to donation site)
 - Harvest bins or baskets (laundry baskets work well)
- Equipment
 - Shovel
 - Hard rake
 - Pruners
 - Hand trowels
 - Scissors

Food Justice Partner

- Identify the group you will be donating produce to
- Conduct Food Justice Partner Interview
- What to Grow Survey obtain guests input about food preferences

Non-physical requirements

- Organization approval - *Support from your host organization*
- Budget
- Garden plan
- Volunteer network
- Designation of leadership roles
- Garden roles
- Food safety checklist and training

Watering 101

How much water does my garden need?

There is no universal answer to this question, but a good rule of thumb is that a vegetable garden should receive 1 inch of water per week (or 62 gallons of water per 100 square feet per week). This means that the total amount of water your garden receives from rainfall and waterings should add up to about 1 inch of water per week. Use a rain gauge to keep track of how much water your garden is receiving.

However... There are a few factors that influence how much water your specific garden may need.

Soil Type – There are 3 basic kinds of textures soil can have: sand, silt, or clay.

- Sandy soil is porous and allows water to drain through quickly.
- Silty soil does not allow water to drain as quickly, but holds onto less water than clay.
- Clay soil is more compact than the other soil types and holds onto water very well.

If your garden's soil has a high sand content, you may need to give your garden more water. Alternatively, if your garden's soil has a high clay content, you may want to use less water. We recommend getting a soil test done so you know what kind of soil you have in your garden.

Temperature – High heat can cause plants to dry out, and more water may be necessary to keep them in good shape. If you are going through a heat wave, you may need to give your garden more water than usual to prevent dehydration.

Humidity – Humidity affects the ability for water to evaporate. In high humidity, water will take longer to evaporate from the soil, and you may want to reduce the amount of water given to your garden. In lower humidity, more water may be necessary.

Type of plant – All plants are different, and will therefore grow best under different conditions. Plants producing large fruit like watermelons are going to require more water than plants like basil. Make sure to do some research to find out how much water your plants need.

When should I water my garden?

The best time of day to water your garden is early in the morning. The temperature is cooler in the morning, which means less water will be lost to evaporation while you are watering. Also, any leaves that get wet will have time throughout the day to dry off, reducing the risk of developing diseases or growing fungus.

If you cannot water in the morning, watering in the evening will still have the benefit of conserving water compared to watering in the peak heat of the day. However, if you choose to water in the evening, it is important to water only the soil and not the leaves of your plants. Allowing wet leaves to sit overnight will increase the risk for your plants to develop diseases or grow fungus.

How often should I water?

It is unnecessary and can even be harmful to water your garden too frequently. Again, there is no universal answer to this question, but in general, watering about 1-2 times per week is likely to be ideal for many gardens. By watering your garden less frequently with deeper waterings, rather than watering very frequently with light waterings, you will help your plants grow deeper and stronger roots, making them more resilient to harsh-weather conditions.

How should I water my garden?

When watering, avoid wetting stems and leaves. The goal of watering is to get the water through the soil to the roots of your plants. Watering just the soil near your plants will reduce the risk of your plants developing diseases from wet leaves, and will help conserve water, as less water is being sprinkled needlessly over the tops of your plants. You can also avoid watering areas in between plants, reducing the potential for weeds to grow. Make sure to water with a gentle trickle/stream (think of how water comes out of a watering can) rather than a powerful spray.

You have several options when it comes to watering equipment, including:

- Soaker hoses
- Drip irrigation
- Basins
- Sprinkler
- Watering by hand

Final thoughts

Nobody knows your garden better than you. Pay attention to the way your plants look and the conditions they are in. Are your plants wilting or shriveling up? Has it been raining more than usual lately? If you notice signs of stress in your garden, do not wait to address them. Ultimately, you and your garden's community are the ones who will know the best way to water in your garden.

Finding a Water Source

A crucial part of setting up your garden space is having a water source. For many gardens this looks like a typical garden hose ran off of spigot on a building. If your garden doesn't have easy access, you will need to explore other options to get water access. This may be putting in a new water line that extends directly to your garden. Depending on the distance, this can cost as high as \$3,000. For many projects near buildings, however, the cost can be lower into the hundreds.

If your garden space is near a fire hydrant, you may be able to work with the city to get a fire hydrant key and hook the hydrant up to a garden hose. How this relationship works is different in every location, contact your local representative (normally mayor or alderperson) to find more information on how this works.

Rainwater collection is another attractive option for gardens, but comes with its own set of issues. For example, if there is a drought and you do not have a back-up water source, you run the risk of losing your crop for the season. Depending on the collection method, the rainwater may be safe for direct to soil watering only, and not widespread watering that could get on the leaves or produce. We recommend rainwater harvesting only if there is a feasible backup.

Unfortunately, if water access is a major issue, it may also be time to reconsider the growing space. In most cases, you should be able to run a line directly to your garden. Even if this ends up costing a bit more than you would like, it is a one time cost that is crucial to your garden's success.

Justice Garden Start Up Budget				
Equipment		Numer	Unit Cost	Total
	Stirrup Hoes	1	40	40
	Triange Hoes	1	30	30
	Trowels	2	10	20
	Plant Supports (10 pack)	1	15	15
	Hand Pruners	2	12	24
	Scissors	6	3	18
	Hard Rake	1	20	20
	Shovel	1	30	30
Irrigation				
	Hose	1	50	50
	Hose Timer	1	40	40
	Soaker Hose	1	50	50
	Hose splitter	1	15	15
	Sprinkler	1	15	15
Soap Pesticide Supplies				
	Pump Air Sprayer	2	20	40
	Liquid Dishwashing Soap	1	3	3
	Vegetable Oil	1	3.5	3.5
Harvest Supplies				
	Laundry Baskets	2	15	30
	Plastic Bags (box, 500)	1	50	50
Soil Amendments				
	Organic Fertilizer	1	20	20
Miscellaneous Supplies				
	First Aid Supplies or Kit	1	30	30
	Disinfectant Spray	1	4.5	4.5
	Bug Spray	1	10	10
	Sunscreen	1	10	10
	Hand Sanitizer	1	5	5
	Paper Towels	1	5	5
	Kneeling Pads	3	4	12
	Work Gloves	5	25	125
	Bins	2	15	30
Total Equipment and Supplies				\$ 745
Seeds and Seedlings				
	Seedlings - 6 plant flat	6	4	24
	Seeds	3	5	15
	Total Seeds and Seedlings			\$ 39
Total Start Up Costs				\$ 784

Initial Food Justice Partner Interview

Basic Contact Information

- Who is the primary contact for the organization?
- What is the best method of contact (email, phone, etc.)
- How are you in contact with guests? Do you have regular guests?
 - This question is to help you distribute the survey on what food items patrons will want to eat.

Distribution Questions

- How often do you distribute food?
 - What days of the week?
 - What times?
- How do you distribute?
 - Standard box option – patrons pick up a pre-selected boxes
 - Shopper choice option – patrons shop for themselves
 - Combination – some items in preselected boxes, other items by choice
- Do you distribute hot cooked meals?

Storage Questions

- How much space do you have available for produce?
- Do you have on-site cold storage?
- How would you like produce to be delivered: Bags, boxes, pre-packed in family size bags, etc.

Working Together

- When should we drop off produce?
- Where will we meet up?
- How often will we check in? What is the best way to do that?
- Are there other aspects of the pantry we can help with?
 - Partnering on events, doing canned food and other supply drives, etc.

Produce Survey

A local garden is growing fresh, organic produce for: (FOOD JUSTICE PARTNER NAME).

Tell them what kind of fruits and vegetables you'd like to see by checking as many as you like on this list. They will do their best to grow as many as possible.

Spring/Fall Crops

Please check all your crop preferences

- Arugula
- Beet
- Cabbage
- Carrot
- Garlic
- Greens
- Collards
- Kale
- Mustard
- Swiss Chard
- Turnip
- Kohlrabi
- Lettuce
- Pea
- Potato
- Pumpkin
- Radish
- Winter Squash
- Sweet potato
- Turnip Root
- Other:

Summer Crops

Please check all your crop preferences

- Green Bean
- Cantaloupe
- Cucumber
- Eggplant
- Greens
- Collard
- Swiss Chard
- Leeks
- Okra
- Pepper, Hot
- Pepper, Sweet
- Summer Squash
- Tomato
- Watermelon
- Zucchini
- Other:

Other vegetables you would like:

Please note: Due to seasonality and other factors, we may not be able to grow all choices.

Food Safety

Clean Soil + Clean Hands + Clean Surfaces = Clean Harvest

Good growing and harvesting practices are essential in assuring that your food donations are as safe as possible. Since many people you serve are from vulnerable populations, it is especially important to prevent foodborne illnesses. Here are some tips for safe growing and harvesting.

Begin with Clean Soil

- Organic growing is the best way to grow healthy and safe produce. That means avoiding synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Natural ways are best.
- Be sure all soil and amendments are brought from a safe source. If using manure, wait 90 days before planting. Choose herbivore-based fertilizer like mushroom soil over carnivore-based like cow manure.
- Do not use rain water. Water from a building is safer for watering plants and washing hands and surfaces.
- Try to keep animals out of the garden area, and especially away from the plants.

Wash your Hands!

- This is the most important step in safe gardening! WASH YOUR HANDS!
- For best results, use soap and water. Remember the 20-second rule and don't forget to wash your thumbs and hands up to the wrists.
- Dry your hands with a single-use towel and throw it away.
- If you cannot use soap and water, use a hand-sanitizer that is at least 60% alcohol.

Clean Surfaces before Beginning

- When planting and tending, be sure all tools are clean.
- Before harvesting, prepare a space for collecting produce such as a picnic or fold-out table, or sanitized mat. Clean containers, like baskets and bins, can also be used.
- DO NOT ALLOW PRODUCE TO TOUCH THE GROUND AGAIN. If it does, toss it in the compost area, or give it to volunteers to take home.
- Use soap and water to clean all surfaces before you begin and sanitize with one Tablespoon of bleach in a gallon of fresh water (or a one-time use sanitizing wipe).
- Cover all wooden surfaces with a material that is easy to wipe down.

Harvest Day

- Try to harvest early in the day and keep harvested produce out of the sun, in a cool spot.
- Before beginning, do a field check and dispose of trash and animal feces. Toss out spoiled produce.
- Harvest each plant the proper way: pull at top of root (turnips, beets); cut with scissors (cucumbers, peppers, okra); or dig (potatoes, yams). If you aren't sure...ASK! You don't want months of effort to go to waste!
- DO NOT WASH THE PRODUCE AFTER HARVEST.
 - Washing produce removes the natural protective layer and allows pathogens to enter.
 - Some traces of dirt are a reminder that produce needs to be washed before eating.
- Deliver produce to the pantry as soon as possible after harvest.
- If not donating on the same day, make sure you have proper storage. Almost all produce will need cold storage such as a refrigerator.
- Before storing, separate produce into bags based on type. Different types of produce should NOT be stored in the same container together.

For more information on general liability for good-faith donors, check out Bill Emerson's "Good Samaritan Donation Act."

Making a Garden Plan

As you begin your garden project, you surely have many hopes and dreams. Maybe you hope to grow enough to open your own food pantry, or you dream of providing job training as part of a farm market stand. Maybe you just envision a community hub where people grow, learn, and work toward justice together. No matter what you're thinking, we recommend starting small and having a plan to expand over time.

A garden plan is more than just thinking about what to grow in the upcoming season. It includes yearly goals for deepening and broadening your impact. We advise “growing organically,” letting the garden guide you in the ways it wants and needs to grow. No effort is too small, and you will be surprised at how much you can do with very little land, resources and time.

First Year: What is feasible to begin with?

Since your primary focus is growing food, prioritize items like growing structures, tools, and spaces for food collection, rather than community structures like benches or gazebos. Think also of the community support you will have in the first year. Even if you have the budget to install a large gardening space, do you have the volunteer power to maintain it? Take a moment to think about all of the resources you have available and make a reasonable infrastructure plan for the first year. We recommend tending toward the cautious side – you will always have time to grow the garden more. Expanding in the second year is better for morale than being overwhelmed the first year.

Third Year: How should we grow?

After the garden has gotten its start, think about how you want to grow and work towards larger goals that include community gathering spaces and justice work.

Fifth Year: Building the space

At this point, you'll know how much space you need to grow the food. This is a good time to think about the longer term goals and community building aspects of a garden. Think about how you would like the nongrowing spaces to look. Do you want lots of picnic benches? Or do you want some kind of structure that could be used for programming, like a gazebo or a farm stand? These long term goals will also give an idea of financial needs your garden will have down the line.

Example Plan:

First Year

- 20' x 20' in ground growing plot
- Trellis
- Compost pile
- Gardening tools
- Picnic table

Third Year

- 2 accessible gardening beds
- Extend growing plot by 5' on each side
- Compost bin system
- 2 picnic tables
- Tool shed
- Additional gardening tools

Fifth Year

- 2 more gardening beds
- Gazebo
- Irrigation system
- 2 picnic tables
- Farm Market "stand"

As you make your plan, try creating a rough sketch for the first year, third year, fifth year, and so on until you have an idea of what you want the final space to look like. Creating a drawing will help you visualize the space and what can feasibly fit. Also try to think of factors like shade, trees, existing structures, and water access.

In general, the garden plan should be tailored to your own garden team and space. The above is a general guideline, but may not follow the direction your garden is growing. Your plan should be flexible to adapt to any changes you may encounter, but still have structure for goal setting. Having a good plan will help with budgeting, fundraising, and getting organizational support. Every year, preferably in the winter months when the garden is quiet, take a moment to look over your plan and make adjustments as needed. Remember, the space will grow over time so there is no need to rush. Any amount of food justice is a major step in the right direction — even the smallest impact can change lives!

How to Plan Growing

Great news – growing for food security is one of the easiest gardens to plan. Because you are growing with the goal of food donations, it is best to focus on a few crops and higher yields. To determine what crops to grow, we recommend surveying your food justice partner. This will help you grow the most popular food and connect better with your community.

In general, there are two to three growing seasons in the United States, depending on how warm your climate is. Usually the spring and fall have similar crops, and the summer has more heat-tolerant crops. Every state has an Agricultural Extension Office, and these offer great information on crops that work seasonally for your state. As a general rule, spring and fall see crops like leafy greens and root vegetables, whereas summer is the season for fruiting plants, like tomatoes, okra, and peppers.

Once you know what you want to grow in each season, create a drawing of the space for spring, summer, and fall. Research how far apart the crops need to grow and break up your garden space depending on yields. Bigger crops, like okra and tomatoes, will need more space in your garden to produce high yields than a smaller crop, like collard greens and carrots. Again, you can find the appropriate spacing for crops on your Agricultural Extension Office's website. Once you have your plan, ordering seeds and seedlings for the upcoming season becomes much easier!