

COMMUNITY GARDENING 103

GEOLOGY: FINDING THE PERFECT SITE FOR YOUR GARDEN



When choosing a site for your community garden, it is important to assess your needs and the site's provisions. Making the match is the second most crucial step in keeping the garden active for years to come.

1. Are there open areas at churches, retirement homes, businesses, or parks within your neighborhood or private land that might be made available??

Besides private landowners, San Antonio Parks & Recreation and many local non-profit organizations have loaned land to area community gardens. Send out letters to potential land-lenders or meet with them to discuss the possibilities and benefits for all parties.

2. Is the prospective garden area convenient and accessible to all gardeners?

If the potential garden area is centrally located to the residences of all interested garden members this may increase the cohesiveness of the group and frequency of attendance.

3. Is there a water source at the potential site?

Check for hose bibs if there are buildings on the property.

Vacant lots may have water meters already installed.

Nearby buildings may be a source of rain-catch or air-conditioner condensate.

4. Does the area receive enough sun?

Ideally, edible and ornamental plants need an average of 6-8 hours of sun daily.

Ideally, humans need a little shade—a shade tree nearby would be a welcome feature.

5. Is there any flooding at the potential site? What are the drainage patterns?

Watch the prospective area after a heavy rain.

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6. Are there any potential issues with environmental toxicity of the soil?

If the property is near an industrial area or previously had a home built before 1978, consider having the soil tested for chemicals or heavy metals, such as lead, that might affect the safety of edible food.

Consider using raised beds with good quality garden soil brought in for optimal garden production.

7. What are the local codes and regulations that pertain?

Determine any building setbacks on the lot, which would impact where you want to locate your out buildings.

Keep in mind that, in San Antonio, any underground irrigation must be installed by a licensed irrigator, and all electrical components must be installed by a licensed electrician. Structures, curb cuts, underground irrigation, electrical components, and tree modifications all require permits from the City.

Fences 6 feet tall and over require a permit before installation begins.

Signs and paved paths may require permits from the City.

Public spaces should plan for ADA access. Ensure that all levels of ability have access to the garden space.

8. Begin laying out the garden on paper.

Refer to your responses on Community Gardening 102 to ensure that all desired components are included in the garden plan.

Keep the cardinal directions in mind. Plant and build tall things to the north, so they won't block sunlight from the south, east, and west.

Offer some filtered shade from the west. When the sun is setting in the west, the temperatures and light intensity are at their highest.

Keep the garden open to full sun from the east. This is the gentlest sunlight.

If you want to try to grow tropical flowers, citrus, or bananas, be sure to protect them from the north wind. They need more heat to survive the winter, so plant them close to the south side of buildings where they might also experience some radiant heat.

Create soft borders to delineate between inside and outside, public and members only portions of the garden. Instead of employing a tall, ugly fence, consider planting rose bushes, or raspberries along the border. These both have thorns to discourage passing through, but offer benefits (flowers and berries) to parties on both sides of the border. Some of our thorny native shrubs are another alternative for protective borders.

Consider how big trucks will deliver supplies to your garden. Where can they back up?