



The Mentor Program at Forsyth Community Gardening

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a “mentor” is “**an experienced and trusted adviser.**” The goal of the Mentor program at Forsyth Community Gardening is to build local leaders’ knowledge, skills, and connections, so they can serve as “experienced, trusted advisers” that help support and sustain successful gardens in Forsyth County.

Mentor Activities and Training

Mentors provide consistent community organizing and horticultural guidance to a specific garden, and serve as a liaison to the Forsyth Community Gardening (FCG) program. We also have some Mentors who take on specialized, program-wide roles.

New Mentors first complete a two-day training covering the community organizing skills and basic horticultural knowledge needed to start and sustain a community garden. The training can be offered in English and Spanish. To continue growing their knowledge skills, and networks, Mentors also participate in potluck meetings, *Forsyth Extension Gardener* workshops, and a ‘buddy program’ that pairs Mentors for mutual support and learning.

Mentor Assignments

After the initial training, Mentors are either matched with a community garden of their choosing (often a garden where they are already involved), *or* work with the Community Gardening Coordinator (**CGC**) to identify a program-wide role based on their gifts.

- **Mentors to community gardens** offer hands-on guidance in organizing and gardening, answer questions, and serve as a link between their garden and FCG. Mentors *may* also be a garden member and/or hold a garden leadership role, but this is not required to be a Mentor. FCG provides Mentors with technical assistance, seeds, tool lending, soil pH and nutrient testing, and publications on community gardening topics. The CGC is always available to assist Mentors and their gardens.
- **Mentors in program-wide roles** draw on specialized interests and talents to benefit the FCG program. For example, Mentors on the New Garden Team give introductory presentations about starting a community garden, and guide new groups through the initial steps. Other potential program-wide roles include community relations, media and communications, volunteer coordination, and any ideas you may have!

The rest of this document outlines the **duties, and boundaries, of Mentors to specific community gardens**. Duties for Mentors in program-wide roles will be different and are developed on an individual basis with the Community Gardening Coordinator.

Duties of a Mentor to a Community Garden

1. **Meet with the Community Gardening Coordinator (CGC)** at the beginning of the growing season to discuss plans for your garden and what resources you need.
 - Mentors may use a goal-setting worksheet, available in English (<http://tinyurl.com/FCG-BestPractices>) or Spanish (<http://tinyurl.com/FCG-BestPracticesSpanish>).
2. **Meet regularly with your garden group to guide organizing, crop planning, and garden operations, and answer questions.**
 - Garden organizing should include: engaging members, articulating a mission, establishing leadership roles, and developing systems to share responsibility for garden maintenance (e.g., group workdays, written rules and agreements for plot-holders, and/or a rotation of people to tend the garden).
 - Garden operations may include: planning crop rotations, soil preparation, crop planting and maintenance (watering, trellising, etc.), pest management, and harvest.
3. **Encourage best practices in garden organizing** (e.g., diversity, inclusion, defined and assigned leadership roles, regular workdays) **and sustainable horticulture** (e.g., crop rotation, soil testing, cover cropping, cultural practices for pest control, food safety).
4. **Help your garden form a leadership committee.** For suggested leadership roles, see: <http://tinyurl.com/FCGGardenStartUp> ("Garden Organization and Rules" document).
5. **Communicate regularly with the CGC** to share the garden's progress, successes, and challenges, and to schedule site visits as needed.
6. **Participate in Mentor potluck meetings** to share your experiences and seek ideas and support for your work. If possible, participate in the Mentor Association as a leader or on a committee (e.g., Plant Distribution, Resource Distribution, or Social Events).
7. **Attend educational programs offered by FCG**, such as Forsyth Extension Gardener workshops (<https://tinyurl.com/ForsythExtGardener>).
8. **Share information from FCG with your garden's members**, including programs and technical resources. Encourage gardeners to attend educational programs.
9. **Help your garden keep current records** on www.forsythcommunitygardening.com.

Stay in touch with Megan: gregormm@forsyth.cc or 336-705-8823.

Boundaries for Mentors to Community Gardens

Boundaries are as important as responsibilities for Mentors. Setting and clarifying boundaries will give you confidence in responding to situations or requests from your group, help you maintain a healthy degree of responsibility and involvement (i.e., avoid burnout), and empower the garden group to assume collective responsibility for the garden's success. Important boundaries for Mentors are outlined below.

1. **Mentors should NOT make all decisions** regarding garden organizing, crop planning, and operations. Mentors SHOULD assist the garden group in developing decision-making procedures that involve all gardeners.
2. **Mentors should NOT maintain other gardeners' plots, nor should they be solely responsible for common plantings.** Mentors can be most helpful in two ways:
 - Mentors SHOULD provide horticultural advice to gardeners (e.g., how frequently they need to water, weed, etc.), and
 - Mentor SHOULD help the garden determine a system to ensure that all gardeners help maintain common areas, and have the skills and guidance to do so effectively. Holding regularly scheduled workdays, planned and overseen by a Workday Coordinator or Committee, is ideal.
3. **Mentors should NOT purchase materials and supplies for the garden from their own resources.** Mentors MAY assist the garden group in developing a plan for soliciting in-kind donations and/or fundraising (e.g., through events, small grants, and/or requesting modest budget support where a garden is part of an organization's programming). If Mentors are also garden members (i.e., have their own plots for personal or family use) and the garden collects a membership fee, it is appropriate for Mentors to contribute equally to all other members.
4. **Mentors should NOT feel pressured to contribute more hours than they can manage** given their other commitments to work, family, and/or community activities. If a garden requires more assistance than a Mentor can give, that Mentor should notify the Community Gardening Coordinator. Mentors may also encourage other garden members to complete the training and become a co-Mentor.