



The Community Garden Mentor Program: Overview

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a “mentor” is “**an experienced and trusted adviser.**” The goal of the Community Garden Mentor program is to support and sustain community gardens in Forsyth County by giving local leaders the skills and connections they need to serve as “experienced, trusted advisers” that help gardens succeed.

Community Garden Mentors provide consistent community organizing and horticultural guidance to a specific garden, and serve as a liaison to the Forsyth Community Gardening program. Participants first complete a two-day (12-hour) training centered on the American Community Garden Association's *Growing Communities* curriculum. To continually develop their knowledge skills, and networks, Mentors also attend monthly potlucks, *Sustainable Growing Series* workshops, and other horticultural programs offered by Forsyth County Cooperative Extension Service (**CES**).

After completing the initial training, Mentors are matched with a community garden in Forsyth County. Mentors support these gardens by giving advice, answering questions, offering hands-on help, and serving as a link between their garden and Forsyth CES. In turn, Forsyth CES provides Mentors with resources for their assigned garden such as technical assistance, seeds, tools (via the tool lending shed), soil nutrient testing, and printed materials on horticultural topics. The Community Gardening Coordinator is always available to assist Mentors and provides support to them throughout the year.

Mentors *may* also be a garden member and/or hold an elected leadership role (such as garden president or manager), but this is not required to be a Mentor. Whether or not a Mentor also takes on these other roles is up to each Mentor.

This document outlines the **duties** of a Community Garden Mentor, as well as the **boundaries** that Mentors should adhere to for their own well-being and the empowerment of the garden groups with which they work.

Duties of a Community Garden Mentor

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.
2. **Meet regularly with your garden group to guide organizing, crop planning, and operations, and answer questions.** Try to meet weekly during “prime” gardening season.
 - Garden organizing should include: recruiting, articulating a mission, and establishing a leadership committee, rules, and schedules for meetings and workdays. If the garden charges a membership fee, ensure there are scholarships for those who need it.
 - Garden operations may include: planning crop rotations, soil preparation, crop planting and maintenance, pest management, and harvest.
3. **Encourage best practices** in garden organizing (e.g., diversity, inclusion, democratic decision-making, assigned responsibilities, community engagement) and sustainable horticulture (e.g., crop rotation, soil testing, cover cropping, cultural practices for pest control, food safety).
4. **Help your garden to form or maintain a leadership committee.** For suggested leadership roles, see: <http://tinyurl.com/FCGGardenStartUp> (“Garden Organization and Rules” document).
5. **Regularly communicate with the CGC** to share the garden’s progress, successes, and needs, and to schedule site visits as needed.
6. **Attend as many educational programs offered by CES as possible**, especially Sustainable Growing Series workshops (<http://tinyurl.com/FCG-SGS>).
7. **Serve as a conduit for information from Forsyth CES to your garden’s members**, including programs and technical resources. Encourage gardeners to attend educational programs.
8. **Assist your garden in keeping current records**, particularly on www.forsythcommunitygardening.com).
9. **Assist your garden in compiling and reporting accurate harvest totals** to the CGC.
10. **Encourage your garden to donate a portion of the harvest to neighborhood pantries.** Help facilitate a system of getting donations to pantries that accept fresh produce. (See list on www.forsythcommunitygardening.com).
11. **Attend monthly Community Garden Mentor meetings.**

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

Boundaries for Community Garden Mentors

Boundaries are as important as responsibilities for Community Garden Mentors. Setting and clarifying boundaries will give you confidence in responding to situations or requests from your garden, help you maintain a healthy degree of responsibility and involvement (i.e., avoid burnout and frustration), and empower the garden group to assume collective responsibility for the garden's success. Important boundaries for Community Garden 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 for ensuring that all gardeners help maintain common areas, and have the skills and guidance to do so effectively (see sample garden rules at: <http://tinyurl.com/FCGGardenStartup>). Holding regularly scheduled workdays, planned and overseen by a Grounds 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 and small grants). 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 Community Garden Mentor training and become a co-Mentor.