

## Planning & Organizing A Garden Project

### Before You Begin

Children and youth often see the world differently than adults. As you begin to develop your program, it is critical to explore the most effective ways to engage children in the planning, design, and implementation of your program. Young people have tremendous skills to bring to the decision-making table in their communities. They can be innovative, creative, and often have different insights, which make their perspectives unique. In addition, young people can learn a lot from the process of planning, instead of just “showing up” once a garden is in the ground, or a nature trail is already in place.

Despite all the ways in which programs could gain from partnering with children and youth, it usually doesn't happen. As adults, we often move ahead in our decision-making, not thinking about the ways in which young people could greatly add to the process. We may think that it takes too much time, or that it's too difficult to do. We may view children as naïve, and thus not knowing what's in their best interests. We may be stuck in old and comfortable habits. Sometimes, we may simply feel best if we're in control. Sometimes we regard youth voice and decision-making as giving them the choice to weed, water, or plant, when there is so much more they can bring to the table. There is so much more that we can learn from working with young people and a lot that they can gain from the experience too!

### Getting Started

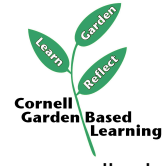
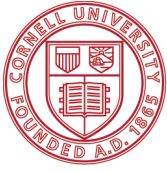
A good way to ensure your youth gardening program starts off on the right track with youth participation, is to consider the following:

- Where did the idea come from?

This should be the first question you ask yourself when beginning a gardening project. Then ask yourself the following:

- Is this a vision shared by a group of dedicated people or is it a one-person-driven show?
- If the idea originated with one person, has it been embraced by many others?
- If the gardening project will culminate in a garden designed for young people, have you asked youth what they think, or is there opportunity to do so?

The long-term success and health of your program will depend a great deal on whether or not you've developed a broad base of interest for the project. Imposing a program on anyone, adult volunteers or youth participants, can squelch excitement and momentum. Take a step back—if need be—to generate support, ask for input, and cultivate ownership of the project among the people involved.



## **Doing to, doing for, doing with... and why it matters.**

### Doing *to*:

- A top-down feel.
- A group of adults think a gardening project would be good for students or community youth, so they go ahead and plan and build the garden. They do all this without youth support.

### Doing *for*:

- Starts with a demonstrated need.
- A group feels like they are responding to that need by creating the gardening project for young people.
- Not a lot of involvement and ownership, and the project fizzles out from a lack of long-term support

### Doing *with*:

- Involves collaboration during each step of the project.
- Young people and community members are involved all along the way, increasing ownership and the likelihood for long-term support.

## **Who will be involved?**

### Adults:

- Who are the adults involved with the project: parents, teachers, club leaders, Master Gardeners, a principal?
- What are their roles: recruiting volunteers, serving on the planning committee, community outreach, fund raising, garden maintenance, etc?

### Youth:

- Who are the young people involved in the project: students at a school, 4-H club members, youth who frequent a community center?
- What are their roles: in planning the garden, in generating support for the garden (enthusiasm, funds, materials), in building the garden, in caring for the garden?

### Partnerships:

- What are some possible partnerships in your community: Elementary School – Master Gardeners – Local Nursery; 4-H Club – Garden Club – Nature Center?
- What roles will each partner play: planning the garden, providing expertise, supplying materials, building the garden, recruiting volunteers, raising funds, etc?

\* Don't be shy about clearly outlining the roles that partners and individuals will play. Having these in place early will not only save time, but will also prevent misunderstandings or tasks slipping through the cracks. Be sure that everyone agrees on the roles they're assigned.

\* Don't get discouraged if early on you have more roles than people. Look around and see who you might approach to take a more active role in the project.