



GROWING IN CONFIDENCE

Community Food Project



How-To GUIDE

A joint initiative of the Health Service Executive
and the Organic Centre, Rossinver, Co Leitrim

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Introduction

Recent years have witnessed major concerns about the quality of the food we eat and the availability of healthy food to all people irrespective of income. In response to this the Health Service Executive and the Organic Centre set up a pilot Community Food Project to enable people managing a tight budget to learn to grow, prepare and cook organic fruit and vegetables.

The pilot project, which became known as Growing in Confidence, has run successfully for two years in two locations in urban Sligo and rural Leitrim. This How-To Guide is based on the experience of running these projects and is aimed at any community or group interested in running a similar project.

As well as the health benefits of an improved diet participants enjoyed working outdoors and fostering an easy-going community spirit. We hope this guide will be a starting place for many such projects, a building block for Growing in Confidence.



Core Standards

So what is particular to a Growing in Confidence Community Food Project? The following is a list of the core values/ standards that identify this project:

- It is first and foremost a not-for-profit education/training project.
- The focus is on delivering a training programme to meet the aims outlined in the introduction
- The gardening skills training element is based on the principles of Organic food production (see Other Useful Information)
- It is accessible to people managing a tight budget
- The bulk of the learning is hands-on, practical experience in the garden or kitchen
- It is participatory: the management (Steering Group) should involve as many stakeholders as possible including participants, gardeners, administrators, funders etc.
- Participants get to harvest, take home, and use the produce that they help grow
- The project runs over the growing year (March - October) and covers certain key learning points (see programme outline)

What Do You Need To Run The Project?



- Land
- Insurance
- Equipment
- Participants
- Gardener
- Administrator
- Steering Group
- Budget
- Funding

THE SITE

The amount of land required can be quite small. It will depend on the size of the group and other factors as will be mentioned below. In general no more than 100 square m is needed. The diagram below is just one example of a possible garden layout. In this design it would be important to allow for access for delivery of compost material to the compost area.

As the gardener and participants will only be working in the garden once a week it is necessary to make provision for watering/maintaining protected growing areas such as greenhouses, polytunnels and seed propagators if they are used.

It is also important that participants have easy access to the garden; that toilet and hand washing facilities are available nearby; and that shelter from inclement weather is also available.

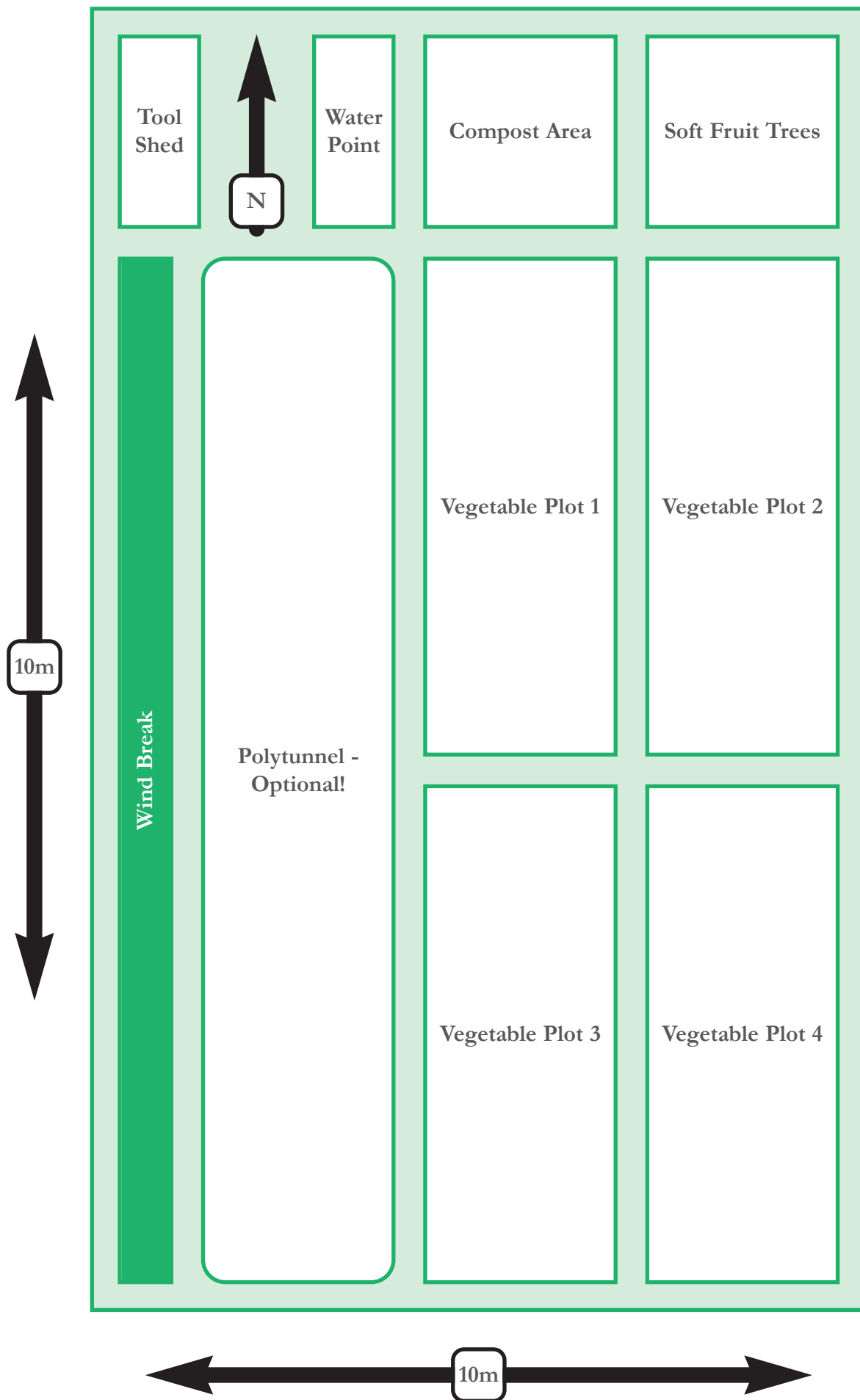
Security may also need consideration particularly if the garden might be vulnerable to vandalism.



Growing in Confidence:
The Organic Centre, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim



Growing in Confidence:
St Michael's Family Life Centre, Sligo Town



STARTING THE VEGETABLE PLOT FROM SCRATCH

An experienced organic gardener can advise you on how best to do this. A design should be discussed and agreed upon by the relevant stakeholders.

The following should be considered:

Aspect	Wind (is protection from the prevailing wind needed?), shade, light (e.g. areas facing south get the most direct sunlight)
Slope	Is it practical for working? Water run-off, drainage etc.
Size	What do you want in the garden e.g. open vegetable plots, protected growing (polytunnel, greenhouse, cloches, other types of cover), fruit trees (soft and top fruit), compost area, tool shed, wind breaks etc.
Climate	Macro (the general climate of a large area e.g. the North West of Ireland) and Micro (the climate of a small area e.g. by the south facing wall of a garden etc.)
Access	Where is the best place for the garden in terms of: availability of space, other activities, security, access by people and machinery, protection from wind, exposure to the sun (e.g. is it facing South where sunlight will be optimised, any structures that will shade the garden), access to water etc.
Soil	Drainage, types, structure, fertility
Current and previous vegetation	Previous cropping history, weeds, fertility

SOIL

A site with fertile, self-draining, weed-free soil with good structure is ideal but not always possible. The soil can be improved over time with regular weeding and addition of organic matter (e.g. well-rotted compost) but you should avoid:

- Ground on or near areas of industrial activity that may have dangerous toxins in soil e.g. chemical wastes
- Areas that have been compacted by heavy machinery or have been used to dump building rubble
(It may still be possible to use these areas if imported soil is built up on top of the ground in raised beds)
- Bog, wetlands or any existing area of environmental importance
- Peaty soil: this can be very acidic and may need special treatment

There are many types of soils and it can be difficult to know what you are looking at e.g. soil type and structure, Ph level etc. Usually the soil condition and fertility can be improved through the generous addition of organic matter and small amounts of lime and/or calcified seaweed powder. An experienced organic gardener will be able to advise further.

CULTIVATING THE GROUND

The ground can be prepared by digging it over by hand or with machinery (be careful when using rotovators or ploughs on shallow soils as this can cause problems), seek advice if unsure. Organic matter (e.g. compost, well-rotted farmyard manure etc.) can be incorporated at this stage.

If the ground is covered in perennial weeds - e.g. ground elder, creeping buttercup, docks, dandelion, nettles, horsetail, couch grass, bind weed - then measures such as weakening the weeds by covering them with black plastic, for as long as possible, may be helpful. These weeds can be removed, roots and all, by digging or by planting crop vegetables through a mulching layer.

Insurance

The insurance that will be required depends on the activities of the project. Your organisation or the place where the garden is located may already have insurance such as public liability. It is worth talking to your existing insurers about the project to see if you are covered.

Any insurance cover should take into account the following:

- Trainees taking part on the course
- Gardener (as responsible for the group) and other staff
- Public liability
- Equipment

Insurance quotes are usually made on an individual case basis. Contact a reputable insurance company for further information.

A rough estimate looks something like:

- Employer's liability (linked to wage of gardener) €200
- Public Liability (for trainees; unpaid; taking part once a week; using only hand-held tools; no produce sold) €600

Equipment

A list of gardening equipment that may be required is given in the Budget section. Some of these items may not be necessary for your project. For example it may be decided that no protected growing is necessary (this will restrict the variety of crops that can be grown in some climates) or that a wind-break is not needed.

It is important that there is somewhere to wash tools and a safe place to store them (a tool shed may be required).

It is essential that a suitably large supply of organic matter (e.g. compost, well-rotted farmyard manure from a nearby organic farm) should be secured for the garden.

A water supply (e.g. a tap, hose, water butt) is essential for watering plants, seeds, and for washing tools

Participants



Who?

The first thing to decide is who your target group is (target criteria). This could depend on a number of factors including:

- The needs of people in your area
- The nature of your organisation e.g. you already work with a particular group of people, with particular needs
- Funding: you may be able to obtain particular funding for particular target groups e.g.
 - In the 2004 Growing in Confidence CFPs it was agreed that, in order to meet the criteria in Building Healthier Hearts, participation would particularly be sought from people 'managing a tight budget'.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment can be carried out in a number of ways depending on the above e.g.

- Raising awareness and interest within your existing group
- Making connections with appropriate groups in the community for referrals e.g. clubs, statutory professionals and groups, community groups
- Publicity, including posters/flyers in appropriate venues, adverts in local paper, word of mouth etc. (this may require an interview process for applicants to ensure target group is represented)
- An initial information session can be held to explain the project and 'enrol' participants. If the project is over-subscribed a decision will have to be made as to who will not be included. Target criteria could be used and/or a 'first come first served' policy.

IMPORTANT:

- Each group of people will present its own benefits and challenges. It is important that the gardener is well aware of the specific needs of the participants in the group e.g. learning difficulties, physical limitations, language, other health issues. Special training/guidance may be necessary for the gardener in order for them to be able to work with these people.
- It should be made clear what sort of physical activity will be involved in the project and the application process should allow for participants to explain their physical condition so that plans can be made to accommodate individual needs and prevent the risk of accidents or injury.
- Health and safety: this is an important issue for any organisation and there should be in place policies/procedures for staff and trainees in how to deal with injuries, awareness of dangers etc.
- In general we recommend no more than 12 participants per project. In order to replace people who 'drop-out' you can start with 15 participants and/or have a back-up waiting list.
- Care provision and transport for individual cases should be made available (and mentioned on promotional material) and budgeted for.

Examples of an information leaflet, an advertisement for recruiting participants and an application form are given in the Other Useful Information section.

These are only examples and do not include questions or information regarding the possibility of care provision or the suitability of the programme for people of varying ability.

ADVICE FOR PARTICIPANTS

By former Growing in Confidence participant Donal Conaty

What CFP has to offer participants:

Apart from the obvious benefits to dietary health and weekly budget resulting from growing your own vegetables, the course provides an easygoing learning environment and a good social outlet. Working outdoors in groups of two or three is good fun - weather permitting - and good for you. The hands-on approach to learning to grow your own organic produce is particularly good at building confidence in your ability to develop your own vegetable patches. Finally, the delicious taste of the produce you harvest makes the thought of returning to supermarkets for your grocery shopping distinctly unappealing.

Top tips:

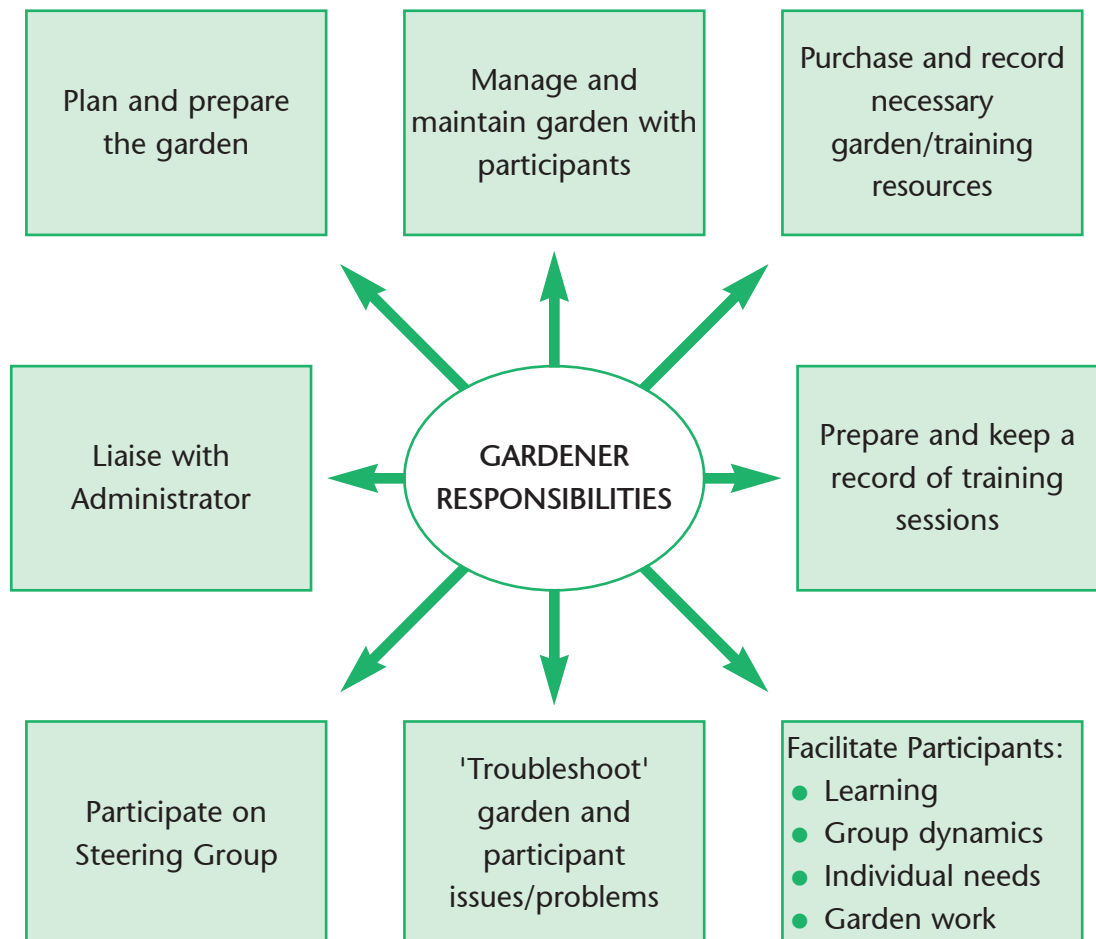
- Try to keep a course diary, it will help you retain what you learn
- If you have land, plant a vegetable patch at home simultaneously with the course; this will also help you to retain what you have learned and enable you to ask the CFP gardeners questions about your own soil type etc.
- Ask questions
- Dress for the weather but make sure clothes are loose-fitting for working

Experience on Steering Group:

The experience of joining the Steering Group gives participants insight into what motivated the Health Service Executive and Organic Centre to set up the Community Food Projects. As a result you learn a lot about what is going on in the world of modern food production and make good contacts should you wish to take your interest in organic growing further. The input of participants is also useful in that it helps the steering group to finesse the courses so that they continue to meet the needs of participants.

Gardener

The gardener is a key person for the project as they have the main contact with participants from week to week. Their main responsibilities are:



GARDENER'S WAGE:

- €25 per hour (as at 2005)
- 3 hour per week x 28 weeks €2100
(1 hour prep, 2 hour contact time)
- 3 hour per month meetings X 7 months €525

* Amount excludes employer PRSI contributions

RECRUITING A GARDENER:

This should be undertaken in line with employment legislation (*see Other Useful Information*)

The following is an example of an advert for a Gardener that could be placed in appropriate publications:

The Organic Centre Community Food Project requires an

ORGANIC GARDENER

To train adult participants in organic food growing in Rossinver on a part-time basis.

Knowledge and experience of organic gardening and an interest in working with people are required

Please send CV to Hans Wieland or call 071 9854338 for more information Email: organiccentre@eircom.net

Funding information

The following is an example of an interview score sheet that lists some appropriate criteria and questions for interview and selection purposes. Interviews should be carried out with at least two interviewers present who should score separately and add results together to find the most appropriate candidate.

Criteria	Essential/ Desirable	Description	Highest mark possible	Mark Given
QUALIFICATION	Essential	Interest and basic introduction to organic gardening	50	
	Desirable	8 month or longer course in organic gardening	50	
EXPERIENCE	Essential	2-3 years gardening experience	50	
	Desirable	Work with groups and/or adult training experience	50	
KNOWLEDGE	Essential	Basic Organic principles, techniques and theory	50	
	Desirable	Advanced knowledge	20	
SPECIAL APTITUDE	Essential	Interpersonal skills, communication skills, motivation, commitment	50	
	Desirable	Leadership, teaching skills, presentation	30	
SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES	Essential	Clean licence and access to car, work during school hours	50	

AMPLE QUESTIONS AS A GUIDELINE:

- Explore CV in terms of qualifications and experience as it relates to the job
- What can you bring to the Community Food Project as a gardener?
- How would you start to prepare the garden for the coming season?
- How would you facilitate the participants' learning?
- How would you deal with a participant who was disrupting the group by behaving inappropriately?
- Do you have any questions?

ADVICE FOR GARDENERS

The following is an edited compilation of observations and ideas from Growing in Confidence Gardeners Aisling O'Connor and Ingrid Foley, as well as words of wisdom from elsewhere.

As a gardener working on a Growing in Confidence CFP you should be prepared for:

- A site which may have fertility challenges e.g. perennial weeds, no compost, manure
- Limited facilities e.g. propagation area
- Varying needs of the group e.g. work rates, amount of questions asked, various abilities, special needs
- Planning for the sessions- both the practical content and theoretical information
- Troubleshooting: thinking on your feet, answering questions, delegating jobs, flexibility
- Health and safety issues, policies and procedures
- Not taking on too much and being too busy: keep the garden to a manageable scale

People Skills:

- Make the work as enjoyable and fun as possible with a balance between authoritative decision-making and 'community ownership' of the garden particularly at harvest time
- Try to be inclusive and be sure to know the individuals in the group and their needs e.g. if someone has special needs make sure that you are equipped by the appropriate people to help manage their needs
- Be aware of group dynamics (e.g. people who need space from each other, any inappropriate behaviour, group tensions etc.) and try to quietly address these
- Be aware of policies and procedures for dealing with complaints, incidents etc.

Practical considerations:

- Keep the grass around the garden cut, it may need to be done outside of the contact sessions but by whom?
- Other maintenance outside of sessions e.g. watering (seeds, polytunnels etc.). Who takes charge of this? Perhaps a participant lives nearby or the garden is located in an area where someone working nearby can help.
- Security. Is the garden safe from vandalism etc? If not, what can be done?
- Keep records of what you do each session (e.g. a short diary) as well as any theoretical information you give.

Administrator

The Administrator manages the overall project. The job is part time and can be carried out by existing personnel in an organisation if possible/appropriate. If a new staff position is necessary then the above advert and interview schedule can be modified to fit the requirements of the job (see below). The Administrator is mainly accountable to the Steering Group although other staff procedures already in place may also apply.



ADMINISTRATOR'S WAGE:

The possible budget given below suggests €3,000 for the administration of the project. This figure should cover wages as well as expenses such as stationary, travel, telephone, electricity, heating etc. This figure may be higher if a computer and accompanying equipment are not available.

Wage:

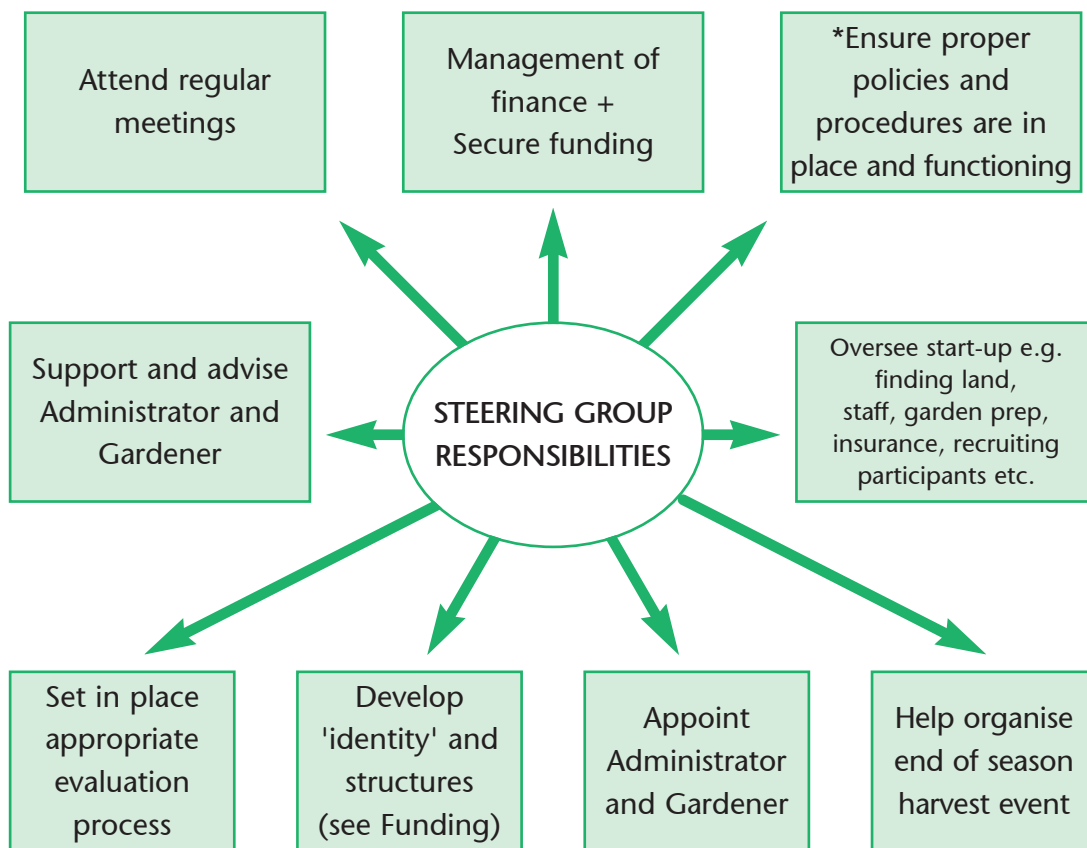
- €15 per hour (as at 2005)
- 3 hour per week x 40 weeks €1800
- 3 hour per month meetings X 7 months €315
- **Total** €2115

* Amount excludes employer PRSI contribution

Steering Group

The Steering Group is a committee set up to oversee the start of the project and subsequent development. The steering group should include in its membership: Participant representatives, Gardener(s), Administrator, Representatives of connected/partnering organisations, Appropriate funding representatives, Other interested and appropriate individuals.

The Steering group will usually meet once a month. A chairperson is selected who will be responsible for setting the agenda and directing the meetings. Minutes can be kept and distributed by the administrator.



POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Health and Safety guidelines and procedures such as accident reporting, first aid arrangements, emergency procedures, risk assessments etc. The publication 'The Essential Guide to Health & Safety for Horticulture' published by the HAS and Bord Glas is available from these organisations (see Other Useful Information for contact details)
- Employment/Staff: Conditions of employment (e.g. sickness provision, holidays, wage payments etc.), Fair Employment guidelines, Discipline and Dismissal procedures, Dealing with Discrimination and Bullying, Grievance procedures (making complaints, recording etc.)
- See Other Useful Information (Useful Contacts and Publications) for sources of further information on the above

POSSIBLE BUDGET FOR STARTING A COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECT

- The amounts given below are approximate based on a variety of quotes/experiences as at 2004/2005. The total is for a project starting from scratch, subsequent projects may not cost as much
- It may be possible to reduce the amount needed by finding alternative ways of providing the same quality of programme (e.g. donations of equipment, other voluntary contributions, using existing resources etc.). You may also find some of the items at a lower cost
- Items marked with an asterisk * are those which are either not necessary or essential or may vary in the amount needed

MANAGEMENT OF PROJECT

Ground preparation*:

- Wages €20 per hour x 40 hours €800
- Equipment hire..... €275

Gardener's Wage** - €25 per hour

- 3 hour per week x 28 weeks €2,100
- 3 hour per month meetings..... €525

- Administration/coordination** €3,000
- Cooking Tuition..... €500
- Insurance €800
- Monitoring/Evaluation €500
- Ads/publicity/recruitment..... €500
- Miscellaneous*:..... €3,000

e.g. travel costs, harvest event, venues for tuition, care provision, tool replacement etc

Total..... €12,000

** Amount excludes employer PRSI contribution

TOOLS/EQUIPMENT:

Some of the following items are optional or may not be needed. Where this is the case the item is marked with an asterisk *

Crop fleeces (to protect from wind, frost, pest etc.)

- Crop Fleeces..... €20
- Pins for fleece €20

Propagation

- Seed and potting compost..... €100
- Seed trays/modules €70
- Pots..... €40
- Seeds €100
- Labels..... €10
- Watering cans for seedlings..... €10

Other useful equipment:

- Secateurs..... €50
- Watering can €15
- Dustbins x 2 (for liquid feeds and rubbish) €30
- Harvesting knives x 5 €75
- Strimmer/lawnmower* €150-250
- Garden shears €50
- Hoe €25-30 x 3 €75-90
- Digging fork €35 x 3..... €105
- Spade €40 x 3 €120
- Hand Trowels €25 x 3 €75
- Row Marker €40
- Rake €40 x 3..... €120
- Buckets x 2..... €10
- Compost forks €40 x 3..... €120
- Wheelbarrow €50 x 2..... €100
- Tool Shed* €300-400
- Fertility (FYM, Compost) €200
- Black Plastic for covering beds..... €50

Protected growing*

- Small Glasshouse €500-600
- Small Hobby Polytunnel (3.6m x 6m) €600-700
- Erecting Polytunnel..... €500
- Propagators (8 seed tray capacity)..... €150
- Other types as an alternative e.g. cloches €200

Other watering (assuming access to water supply which is essential)*

- Watering hose €30
- Watering lance +attachments..... €70

Wind Breaks*

- Wind-break Green Net (1m x 50m)..... €50
- Fence Posts..... €50

Total €4,620

Total cost for starting project €16,620

There are a number of ways to approach funding:

The first step we would recommend is to get a copy of Café Publications/Clann Credo Irish Fundraising Handbook 5th Edition 2003-2004- I Publications, 10/11 Earl Street South, Dublin 8, Tel:01 4736600, email I@connect.ie

- Private contributions: this would involve a network of individuals and/or supportive businesses committing to provide a certain amount each to raise the total amount.
- Grant Aid funding: this involves applying to a grant-awarding body for the total or a proportion of the costs

Both these approaches involve some organisation and effort and although they require slightly different approaches there are a few important considerations to keep in mind:

Be clear on what you are going to do and who is going to do it (e.g. who is on the steering group and who will do what). Set goals (this guide may help).

- What legal identity will you have: You may wish to set the project up as a separate company limited by guarantee and/or as a charity or perhaps it will be part of an existing organisation. Further information can be found from the contacts given in the Other Useful Information section (including Office of the Revenue Commissioners, Combat Poverty Agency, The Companies Registration Office)
- Set up the structures for accountability e.g. how will records be kept, who will see them, what bank accounts will be created?
- Where do you want to get funding? (see Other Useful Information for contacts and publications)

Phone your local Health Promotion Office and ask for advice about funding. Similarly there are other local organisations that can help if you phone and explain what you are trying to do (see local phone directory) e.g. Local Development Companies, Local Partnerships.

Contact details are given in the Other Useful Information section for national organisations including The Department of Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs and Area Development Management Ltd. (ADM).

Programme Outline

TIMESCALE:

- March - October
- Sessions 2-3 hours once a week
- Finish with a harvest meal, celebration, certificate presentation

Although each programme may differ depending on the participants, the gardener, weather, the garden, equipment etc. the following table is a guide to the content of the training programme. Only three sessions a month are accounted for below, in order to allow for flexibility.

All the learning points can involve both theory and practical elements although the teaching should be mainly practical.



Mid March	<u>Week 1:</u> Initial information and recruitment meeting	<u>Week 2:</u> Planning the garden / garden design Ordering seeds Preparing beds ('lazy', raised, digging, composting, lining out)	
April	<u>Week 1:</u> Bed Preparation Seed sowing (indoors)	<u>Week 2:</u> Principles of Organic Gardening Seed Sowing	<u>Week 3:</u> Seed and tuber sowing (direct) Maintaining indoor seeds Continue sowing Preparing supports for peas, climbing beans etc.
May	<u>Week 1:</u> General garden maintenance Herbs for the garden	<u>Week 2:</u> Planting out Direct sowing Weeding	<u>Week 3:</u> Cooking session 1 (see Eat-Well- Be-Well programme)
June	<u>Week 1:</u> Weeding, hoeing Planting	<u>Week 2:</u> General Maintenance Review of vegetables so far Harvest?	<u>Week 3:</u> Soft Fruits and Top fruits (introduction)
July	<u>Week 1:</u> Harvesting Earthing-up Maintenance Herbs	<u>Week 2:</u> Review/evaluation of programme so far	<u>Week 3:</u> Cooking session 2 (see Eat-Well- Be-Well programme)
August	<u>Week 1:</u> Planting late crops Harvest and maintenance	<u>Week 2:</u> Composting Fertility feeds (seaweed, comfrey etc)	<u>Week 3:</u> Disease and pest control Winter crops
September	<u>Week 1:</u> Planning for End of Season Harvest Celebration	<u>Week 2:</u> Final Harvest Prepare beds for winter	<u>Week 3:</u> End of Season Harvest Event

Eat Well Be Well Programme

(Adapted from information and text supplied by Emma Ball, Community Dietitian Manager, HSE-NWA)

Eat Well Be Well is a community-based, nutrition intervention project which has been running in the former North Western Health Board region since 1999. The course is delivered by trained "lay-health" tutors, (i.e. non-health professionals) and is based on a community development approach.

The aim of the course is to promote nutritious, affordable meals by practical "hands-on" application.

OBJECTIVES:

- To introduce the Food Pyramid and how it works in the real world.
- To discuss ways of providing nutritious food at an affordable price.
- To explore food labelling and its meaning
- To learn ways of reducing fat intake
- To cook and taste nutritious meals.

Each course usually incorporates six sessions with each session 1.5-2hrs in duration, but it can be longer or shorter and its content tailored to suit the needs of each group.

For the Community Food Project, while the Eat Well Be Well tutors are used, the content is modified. The focus is on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption within the parameters of healthy eating guidelines.

There are 2 sessions provided to the participants instead of the normal 6 week course and it is more practical than theoretical. The aim is to provide the participants with recipes and suggestions for cooking the products that they grow and to incorporate them into healthy nutritious meals. The tutors use the produce from the garden as much as possible with the participants involved in the preparation of the meals.

While the Eat Well Be Well programme is specific to the North West Area, in other parts of the country, tutors could be sourced from similar type programmes such as 'Healthy Food Made Easy' or 'Cook It'.

Sample Recipe

COUNTRY VEGETABLE SOUP

Ingredients

- Selection of vegetables in season (for example: carrots, parsnips, leeks, onions, turnips, celery, tomato, mushrooms, etc.)
- Two large potatoes diced small
- Two ounces of lentils
- Vegetable stock cube

Cooking Instructions

- 1 Wash, peel and chop vegetables
- 2 Heat the oil in a large saucepan and gently fry leeks and onions until soft. Add the rest of the vegetables, stock cube, lentils and a pint of water.
- 3 Simmer until everything is cooked
- 4 Add fresh parsley or herbs season to taste

Handy Hints

- Puree or use a potato masher for a finer soup
- Try adding pasta or noodles
- If you are trying to gain weight add butter, cream and milk
- Chopped nettles or diced chicken / beef may be added to this before serving
- Try flavouring with garlic for variety

Utensils Needed

- Knife
- Chopping board
- Saucepan
- Wooden spoon
- Measuring jug

Preparation time: 15 Minutes

Cooking Time: 45 Minutes



Harvest Celebration Programme 2005

This is primarily a celebratory event but we also recommend it as a review of the year's work and as an opportunity for participants to discuss their plans for the following growing season.

FOR PARTICIPANTS:

11:00-11:30 Tea and Scones, introduction

11:30-11:45 Slide Show/review of the Year

11:45-1:15 Facilitated evaluation session

FOR PARTICIPANTS AND INVITED GUESTS

1:15-1:30 Arrival of guests, welcome address

1:35-2:30 Lunch

2:45-3:15 Presentation of Certificates

3:15 Garden Tour

Evaluating

Evaluating the project is important for a number of reasons:

- It can help you to see if the aims and objectives are being met. This will usually involve planning how to measure whether or not they have been achieved i.e. what are the indicators that show it? This information can be useful for future funding and may even be a requirement of the current funders. It is also encouraging to be reminded that what you are doing really is worthwhile.
- The Evaluation can help you monitor how the project is progressing and if any immediate changes are needed.
- A good evaluation can help you to improve the project for the next year e.g. added objectives, new ideas, making changes etc.

There are a number of ways of carrying out an evaluation:

- Self-evaluation: this is when the evaluation is carried out 'internally' i.e. you do it yourself. It is very important to be clear on how you will do this: what will the indicators be (see above) and how will you measure them (e.g. what questions will you ask and to whom will you ask them?); who will do the work of collecting the information and putting it together in a readable format? In this case it is useful to see how other such projects have been evaluated (see Other Useful Information - Useful Contacts and Publications- for details of the evaluation carried out for the first Growing In Confidence projects)
- External evaluation: you could get someone else to do the work for you. This would involve either budgeting money for it (see Budget section above) or making contact with Universities/ Further Education Colleges to see if they will help for free.

You may wish to consider some different techniques for gathering 'evidence'. Some involve gathering facts and figures (quantitative) while others are based more on stories and experiences (qualitative):

- Filming the key elements of the project that demonstrate the objectives being achieved
- Photographic (still) evidence
- Questionnaires
- Recordings from group work evaluation sessions (flip charts, notes etc.)
- 'Testimonies' from participants (audio or text)

What Next?

What do you do when you have completed a Growing in Confidence Community Food Project?

If you think the project went well and the evaluation shows that it had a positive impact then why not do another one?

The costs will be less the second time around.

Often it may take a new project a while to 'settle in' i.e. lessons will have been learnt, the profile of the project will have hopefully increased, the garden will be in 'full swing' (e.g. fruit will be more productive, the soil will hopefully be improving etc.)



Those past participants that wish to return could do so to assist the gardener and support new participants.

Perhaps, for a variety of reasons, it is not appropriate to continue with a new project. There may be other ways that the newly created garden can continue, e.g.

- Community Garden - perhaps there are a group of committed gardeners in the area who would like to take responsibility for developing the garden along a similar ethos
- Allotments - perhaps a voluntary allotment committee could be set up to establish a number of smaller plots within the garden for individuals to use

Other Useful Information

- Background, Aims and Objectives of Growing in Confidence
- Why Grow Organically?
- Community Food and Gardening Projects
- Benefits of Community Gardening Projects
- Useful Contacts and Publications
- Information Leaflet Sample
- Advertisement Sample
- Application Form Sample
- Community Food Project press release sample and press articles
- Participant Certificate

Background, Aims and Objectives of Growing in Confidence

In 2004 the Health Promotion Department of the (then) North West Health Board (NWHB) in partnership with the Organic Centre* (Rossinver, Co. Leitrim) initiated a project to help people learn to grow, prepare and cook organic fruit and vegetables. This went on to become the Growing in Confidence - A Community Food Project.

The aims and objectives of the project were as follows:

AIM: To increase knowledge, awareness and skills among target groups in relation to fruit and vegetable production, preparation and consumption and to promote positive health and well-being

OBJECTIVES:

Improve participants' knowledge of and skills in vegetable and fruit growing

Enhance participants' skills in preparing and cooking fruit and vegetables

Increase participants' consumption of fruit and vegetables

Increase participants' knowledge of the nutritional value of fruit and vegetables

Develop more positive attitudes towards consumption of fruit and vegetables

Two further objectives were identified after an external evaluation in 2005:

- Provide opportunities for physical activity outdoors
- Provide opportunities for positive social interaction and development

**The Organic Centre was founded in 1995 as a non-profit making company limited by guarantee.*

The Organic Centre aims to "work in harmony with nature to show how healthy organic food can be grown by everyone" (Organic Centre 2005).

Set on 19 acres in North Leitrim it is open to visitors and offers a wide range of training for groups and individuals.

Funding was provided by cardiovascular strategy money (Building Healthier Hearts) through the Health Promotion and Public Health Department (NWHB). Two projects started in 2004: one at St Michael's Family Life Centre, Sligo Town, and the other at the Organic Centre, Rossinver Co. Leitrim. Suitable community gardening plots were available at these sites.

Participants for both projects were recruited through a variety of community and statutory contacts/groups. It was agreed early on that recruitment would be particularly focused towards people managing a tight budget.

The participants would learn through hands-on experience in the garden as well as relevant theory discussion and handouts with the support of a gardener/facilitator. They would also receive workshops on preparing and cooking the food produced during the project. Food produced in the gardens would be harvested and taken home to be eaten by the participants.

TIMESCALE:

- March- October
- Sessions 2-3 hours once a week
- Finish with a harvest event/ celebration

At the end of 2004 an external evaluation was carried out which found that... "the project had moved successfully from theory, to design to implementation. It produced tangible, concrete results that could - literally - be consumed." (Share and Duignan, 2005)

Following the success of the first year both projects continued with new participants in 2005. This guide is based on the experience of the two years so far.

Why Grow Organically?

An extract from an essay produced by The Organic Centre (Rossinver), 2004

We are increasingly aware of the problems associated with intensive agriculture, horticulture and gardening practices. Problems of food quality, pesticide residues, animal health and disease, decline in wildlife, and pollution of the environment have led people to question the development of current systems of food production. From the farmers' and producers' perspective, profit margins are continually decreasing while policies and advice also seem to continually change.

Organic production seeks to resolve many of these problems, whatever the scale.

What is organic gardening?

The following practices apply to Organic gardening, growing and farming

- Treating the soil and growing environment as a resource to be preserved and improved for future generations.
- Providing plants with a balanced food supply by feeding the soil.
- Avoiding pollution of the environment by recycling garden and farm wastes and choosing renewable and local resources, ideally trying to work within a closed system where enough manure and compost is produced on site to maintain the fertility of the gardens.
- Combating pests and diseases without using pesticides that may prove harmful to people and the environment.
- Encouraging and protecting wildlife by creating suitable habitats and by minimising the use of pesticides.
- Using good agricultural and horticultural practices and taking new scientific knowledge into account as well as proven traditional knowledge.
- Recognising the importance of genetic diversity and preserving threatened plant varieties.
- Treating livestock with respect and providing them with conditions of life that conform to their physiological needs.
- Making it possible for producers to earn a living through their work.

"The Health of man, beast, plant and soil is one indivisible whole"

Lady Eve Balfour

Community food and gardening projects

(Extracts from Growing in Confidence, an evaluation of the Organic Centre/NWHB Community Food Project 2004 by Perry Share and Geraldine Duignan, Institute of Technology, Sligo, 2005)

“the products of the vegetable patch or the orchard are so much more than the produce itself. Health, good diet, exercise, food knowledge, biodiversity, that ‘look I made it myself!’ feeling, too often lost from our adult lives”

**(Scottish Community Diet Project, nd- Growing Interest:
A flavour of community growing in Scotland)**

The history of community gardens in Europe can be traced back to the allotments provided for working class families in Britain and Germany in the early nineteenth century...

The 1960s saw a rebirth of interest in community gardening, partly stimulated by the development of counter-cultural movements. Community gardens are now a world-wide phenomenon found, for example, in China, Japan, Russia, Brazil, North America, Canada, Australia and in many parts of Europe...

In Scotland it has been argued that community food projects can address issues related to health and to community, in particular by re-empowering people in relation to the choices they can make about food:

“[through community gardening] communities can take back some control over food and what they eat and through this take away some of the power of the food industry to tell us what we want to eat. However it is not simply about food, it is about supporting and building stronger communities through successful and fun action at local level”

(Ibid)

It is also important to note that community growing projects are only part of the solution to the development of healthier eating patterns... However a large number of positive benefits have been identified...

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GROWING PROJECTS (SCDP, ND: 9)

In looking at proposals for the development of urban agriculture in London, Sustain identified a number of benefits to the City and Community. These covered:

Environmental

- Greater biological diversity of plants and animals
- Less waste, resulting from more composting activity and less food packaging
- Reduced food transportation through greater availability of local produce
- Less pollution and lower pollution-related costs from the greater environmental awareness generated by urban agriculture.

Economic

- Some commercially viable jobs in food growing, processing and marketing, and in composting and related industries
- A boost to the leisure industry through increased sales of gardening inputs
- A stronger sustainable food and agriculture industry (urban and rural).
- Business benefits through greener, more attractive local environments, a better public image and more skilled and motivated workers
- Contributions to the alternative economy through LETS and social enterprises.

Health

- Health and social benefits, so reducing the burden on statutory services
- Increased consumption of fruit and vegetables through greater availability of affordable fresh produce
- Opportunities for physical activity stress relief for everyone and mental health gains for those with specific difficulties.

Community development

- More active participation in community life and a practical focus for working with others across a variety of social divisions
- Opportunities for delivering many of Government's area-based regeneration objectives.

Educational

- Opportunities for school curriculum teaching, vocational training and for lifelong learning, training and employment
- Opportunities particularly for disadvantaged people.

Useful Contacts and Publications

- **The Organic Centre**
Rossinver
Co. Leitrim
Tel: 071 9854338
email: organiccentre@eircom.net
web: www.theorganiccentre.ie
- **Health Promotion Department, Health Service Executive**
Saimer Court, Ballyshannon, Co Donegal
Tel: 071-9852000
Email: emma.ball@mailb.hse.ie
Or contact your local health promotion office
- **Building Healthier Hearts - The report of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy Group,**
Department of Health and Children (1999), Government Stationery Office, Dublin
- **Tools and equipment:**
 - Fruit Hill Farm: Tel. 027 50710 email fhf@eircom.net Fax. 027 51894
 - Organic & Green Guide to Ireland, Edited by Siobhan Morris (2005), Organic Centre Publications
- **Health and Safety Procedures and Policy:**
 - The Essential Health & Safety Guide for Horticulture (2004), HAS and Bord Glas
 - HSA (Health and Safety Authority) 10 Hogan Pl, Dublin, Tel: 1890289389, 01-6147000, www.hsa.ie
 - Bord Glas, Commercial House, West End Commercial Village, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15, Tel: 01 8030398, www.bordglas.ie
- **Employment Procedures and Policies**
 - Irish Congress of Trade Unions 31/32 Parnell Square, Dublin 1, Tel: 0188977777, email congress@ictu.ie web www.ictu.ie
- **Funding (and project identity/structure)**
 - Café Publications/Clann Credo Irish Fundraising Handbook 5th Edition 2003-2004- I Publications, 10/11 Earl Street South, Dublin 8, Tel:01 4736600, email I@connect.ie
 - Combat Poverty Agency
Bridgewater Centre, Conyngham Rd, Islandbridge, Dublin 8, Tel: 01 6706746
www.cpa.ie
 - Office of the Revenue Commissioners (tax and project identity)
Charities Section, Government Offices, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, Tel 1890 254565
 - The Companies Registration Office
Parnell House, 14 Parnell Square, Dublin 1, Tel 01 804 5222 www.cro.ie

- The Department of Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs www.pobail.ie,
www.dormantaccounts.ie
- Area Development Management Ltd. (ADM)
www.adm.ie
- **Evaluation:**
 - Growing in Confidence An evaluation of the Organic Centre/NWHB Community Food Project 2004 by Perry Share and Geraldine Duignan, Institute of Technology, Sligo, 2005 (copies available from The Organic Centre, address above)
 - Making Links: A toolkit for local food projects (A Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming Publication, 2000 ISBN 1 903060 12 5)
- **Organic Growing:**
 - Grow your Own vegetables, Joy Larkcom (2002), Frances Lincoln Limited
- **Recipe Books:**
 - River Café Cookbook: Rose Gray and Ruth Rogers (2000), Green Ebury Press
 - The River Cottage Cookbook: Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall (2001), Harpers Collins
 - The Boxing Clever Cookbook: Jacqui Jones and Joan Wilmot (2002), J&J Publishing
 - Nigel Slater the kitchen diaries: Nigel Slater (2005), Fourth Estate

Information Leaflet Sample

COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECT - GROWING AND COOKING FRESH VEGETABLES

Have you ever wanted to grow your own vegetables and fruit but didn't know how?

A good diet is central to good health and well-being. Good health begins with including as much wholesome fresh produce as possible in our daily diet. Regularly eating fruit and vegetables can reduce the risk of many diseases.

This project will give you the opportunity to learn gardening and cooking skills.

By joining this project you will:

- Learn how to grow organic vegetables & fruit
- Learn how to store and preserve
- Be able to cut cost
- Grow what you (& your family) like to eat
- Get to know your food
- Get to know what is fresh at different times of the year.
- Learn about the health benefits of fruit and vegetables
- Learn how to prepare and cook fresh produce & make interesting and economical meals for family and friends.

WHERE WILL YOU BE LOCATED?

- (1) St Michael's Resource Centre, Sligo OR
(2) The Organic Centre, Leitrim.

You can select one of these locations.

WHEN WILL THE PROJECT START?

The project will run for 10 months. It will start in the second week of March on a weekly basis at first and then fortnightly as the season progresses. Each session will last 2-3 hours.

WHO WILL TEACH YOU?

An experienced gardener from The Organic Centre will guide you in growing the food. A trained tutor for the cooking sessions will be available showing you exciting new ways to cook what you have grown.

WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE?

It will involve developing a garden from scratch, sharing a plot, helping it to grow and watching it develop throughout the seasons. Also included are sessions on the basic principles of organic gardening.

WHO CAN APPLY?

People who are managing on a tight budget are eligible to apply.

WHAT DOES IT COST?

€40 will be charged for the full course. This can be paid in instalments by arrangement.

Places are limited so book early to avoid disappointment. For further enquiries please talk to Hans at the Organic Centre 071 9854338 or visit the web site at www.theorganiccentre.ie

This project is developed by HSE - NWA in partnership with The Organic Centre, Rossinver, Co Leitrim

Advertisement Sample

An Invitation To

COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECT – GROWING AND COOKING FRESH VEGETABLES

The North Western Health Board and The Organic Centre, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim invite you to join in an exciting new project. Learn how to grow and cook fresh vegetables.

The connection between health and the food we eat has come to the forefront in recent years and it is now widely accepted that good health begins with including as much wholesome fresh produce as possible in our daily diet.

Nutritionists recommend, that we eat at least four portions of fresh fruit and vegetables every day.

Increasing our intake of fruit and vegetables can significantly reduce the risk of many diseases, including heart disease, stroke and some cancers

The benefits of organic food are that they are grown in good healthy soil without the use of artificial fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides. Joining the project, you will

- ▶ Learn how to grow organic vegetables and fruit
- ▶ Get to know your food



- ▶ Get to know the seasonality of fresh produce
- ▶ Grow what you and your family like to eat
- ▶ Learn how to prepare and cook fresh produce and make interesting and economical meals for your family
- ▶ Learn how to store and preserve
- ▶ Learn about the nutritional benefits of fruit and vegetables
- ▶ Be able to cut cost

The project will run throughout the year and participants will meet on a regular basis (weekly at the beginning and then fortnightly) for 2-4 hours.

They will develop a garden from scratch and share a dedicated plot. There will also be classroom sessions to learn about the basic principles of organic gardening.

An experienced gardener from The Organic Centre will guide and help the participants in growing food, the NWHB will provide a trained tutor for the cooking sessions.

The project will be coordinated by The Organic Centre.

Participants will be asked for a small fee (€ 40 for the year).

To book a place please on this project please send your name, address and telephone number to:-
Community Food Project,
The Organic Centre,
Rossinver, Co. Leitrim

Application Form Sample

COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECT
The Organic Centre, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim



Name _____

Address: _____

Contact Telephone Number: _____

Date: _____

Email address if you have one: _____

Please tick choice of venue

Sligo Town ☐ Organic Centre ☐ Either would suit ☐

Can you attend this project on week days?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes please state if you would like:-

Morning ☐ Afternoon ☐ Evening ☐

Do you have transport to The Organic Centre?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes would you be willing to share with another course member?

How did you hear about this project?

To book a place please fill in the application form and return by Friday 27th February to:
COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECT,
THE ORGANIC CENTRE,
ROSSINVER,
CO LEITRIM

Please do not include any fee with the application - fees can be paid at the first meeting or arrangements can be made to pay fees in installments.

Press Release Sample

Community Food Project - Growing and Cooking Fresh Vegetables

The Health Service Executive North West and The Organic Centre, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim have embarked on an exciting new project: Learn how to grow and cook fresh vegetables.

Now in its second year the aim is to help people on a tight budget to produce and use organic vegetables. Under the guidance of two gardeners from the Organic Centre two enthusiastic groups recently began to grow vegetables and herbs in Sligo and in Rossinver. The Health Service Executive will provide a tutor for "Eat well - Be well" sessions, when participants will cook what they have grown.

The connection between health and the food we eat has come to the forefront in recent years and it is now widely accepted that good health begins with including as much wholesome fresh produce as possible in our daily diet. Nutritionists recommend that we eat at least five portions of fresh fruit and vegetables every day. Increasing our intake of fruit and vegetables can significantly reduce the risk of many diseases, including heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

This initiative is part of the national cardiovascular strategy Building Healthier Hearts. As well as direct health benefits, eating fruit and vegetables can help to achieve other dietary goals including increasing fibre intake, reducing fat intake, aiding weight management and substituting for high sugar foods.

The benefits of organic food are that it is grown in good healthy soil without the use of artificial fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides.

Participants in the project will

- Learn how to grow organic vegetables and fruit
- Get to know their food
- Get to know the seasonality of fresh produce
- Grow what they and their family like to eat
- Learn how to prepare and cook fresh produce and make interesting and economical meals for their families
- Learn how to store and preserve
- Learn about the nutritional benefits of fruit and vegetables
- Be able to cut cost

The project will run throughout the year and participants at present meet in the gardens of St. Michaels Family Centre in Sligo Town and The Organic Centre in Rossinver once a week for a few hours to garden together.

For more information call Hans Wieland at 071-9854338

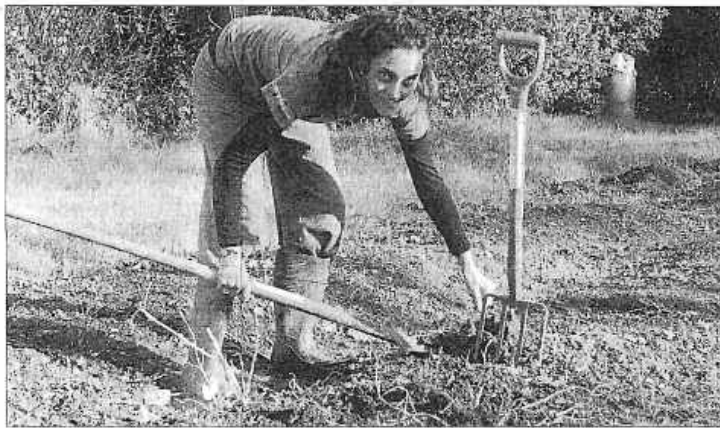
Health



With Sandra Coffey
Email: sandra.coffey@sligoweekender.ie

An innovative food project was set up to look at the intake of fruit and vegetables by Sligo people. It is the first of its kind and its results are being released this week. Sandra Coffey took a closer look at this pilot project, which uncovered some interesting facts.

Boost your health the natural way



AT HOME IN THE GARDEN: Gardener Aisling O'Connor says people need to reap the benefits of fresh fruit and vegetables and they should grow their own. Photo by Noel Kennedy.

THE connection between our health and the food we eat has come to the forefront in recent years. It is now widely accepted that good health begins with including as much wholesome fresh produce as possible in our daily diet.

Sometimes, vegetables in particular can be at best difficult to make an exciting part of a meal, but they are a necessity, even in small amounts. The key is to think of them in terms of their nutritional value, not in terms of taste.

An innovative food project, set up by the Health Promotion Department of the Health Services Executive, North West Area looked into the intake of fruit and vegetables among a group of Sligo people. Twelve Sligo people took part in the project, run in the St Michael's Family Life Centre. It was conducted in conjunction with the Organic Centre in North Leitrim.

The project was a response to evidence that those on a limited income have limited access to fresh fruit and vegetables. Yet dietitians and other health professionals know that inclusion of such foods as part of the daily diet can provide significant protection against ill health and enhance well-being.

The results of this pilot project will be officially launched this coming Thursday. The results are based on the project, which ran from March to October last year.

The goodness in fruit and veg

Potatoes: only a few other foods are as nutritious, delicious and versatile as the potato. Not only does a potato give you an energising supply of carbohydrates, it also provides important vitamins and minerals, including potassium, vitamin C and vitamin B6. For a substantial helping of fibre eat potatoes with the skin.

Peas, broad beans and runner beans: are higher in protein than any other group of vegetables. They contain vitamin C, folic acid, iron and some beta-carotene.

Broccoli: is one of the healthiest foods you can eat with a rich supply of vitamin C. It can help reduce the risk of cancer and is a good source of beta-carotene.

Lettuce, and oriental salads (rocket): most greens are good sources of vitamin C, beta-carotene, folic acid, and dietary fibre as well as some calcium. As a general rule, the darker green the leaves, the more nutritious the salad.

Carrots: are rich sources of beta-carotene, which is used to make vitamin A in the body and also is an antioxidant. They are also high in disease fighting properties and fibre.

Parsnips: are easy to prepare and offer a healthy stand-in for potatoes. Unlike carrots they contain no beta-carotene, but are a good source of Vitamin C.

Beetroot: Beets are notable for their sweetness, they have the highest sugar content of any vegetable, but they are very low in calories. They contain folate (folic acid) and potassium, and are an excellent source of beta-carotene.

Herbs (rosemary, thyme, oregano, and lavender): These offer a useful alternative for seasoning food instead of salt. A high intake of salt can increase your risk of high blood pressure.

Strawberries, raspberries and gooseberries: are full of vitamin C.

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sions on plots provided at St Michael's and backed up by classroom instruction in gardening techniques and knowledge, and by cooking demonstrations.

The participants were in the age range 25-44 and they were managing a tight budget.

One of the more interesting findings from the project showed that those in Sligo town had better access to a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables than those living in rural areas.

This is largely due to the choice provided in the town by a number of supermarkets, fruit and vegetable shops and health food stores.

By contrast those in country areas are more dependent on small local shops that may be more expensive and have a narrower range of fruit and vegetables available. To some extent this is counteracted by the availability of fruit and vegetables at markets and at butchers' shops.

Aisling O'Connor, of Manorhamilton, who was the gardener for the project at St Michael's said: "The course highlighted the importance of having good fruit and vegetables in the diet. And how it is not impossible to grow your own on a plot in your back garden."

The project will be run again this year and the plot at St Michael's Family Life Centre will become a community plot for participants.

Dispelling 5 of the worst food myths

DO YOU fear pasta and avocados will make you fat, and choose brown bread rather than white? We sort out the fact from the fiction.

There are more mistaken myths about food and health than any other topic.

Unfortunately, once established, they are almost impossible to eradicate. Here are five of the worst food myths.

ALL CARBOHYDRATES ARE BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH

THIS IS one of the unhealthiest myths, and more popular than ever since the re-birth of the Atkins Diet and its many imitators. Complex carbohydrates in the form of the wholegrain cereals - oats, rye, barley, wheat, maize, millet, brown rice, along with all the beans and peas, fresh and dried are an essential part of a balanced diet. They supply slow release energy, some protein, B vitamins, vitamin E, essential minerals and the soluble fibre that helps reduce blood cholesterol. They are cheap and nourishing. But refined carbohydrates like white flour and sugar cause a rapid rise in insulin and are a trigger for obesity and diabetes.

BROWN BREAD IS BETTER THAN WHITE BREAD

THIS IS one of the worst myths. The real health benefits come from eating wholemeal bread instead of white bread. Wholemeal is made from flour containing all the goodness of wheat grains. The outer husk has not been removed, so the resulting bread is much richer in fibre, protein and vitamins B1, B2, niacin, B6, folic acid and biotin. Brown bread, by contrast, is made from finely milled wheat, from which the bran has been extracted. It contains less fibre, more calories, less minerals and less vitamins than wholemeal bread, though it does contain a little more of these essential substances than white bread.

PRAWNS GIVE YOU HEART DISEASE

THE TRUTH is the opposite. Prawns, like other shellfish, acquired their bad reputation because they contain quite large amounts of cholesterol. The main factor in heart disease is not the cholesterol in your food, but the cholesterol which the body manufactures from a high intake of saturated animal fats. Prawns are a modest source of calories and an excellent source of protein, B vitamins and minerals.

HEALTH BARS ARE BETTER THAN CHOCOLATE BARS

ONLY IF you read the labels minutely and go shopping with your pocket calculator to find the rare exceptions. Most health bars are quite high in fat, which is responsible for anything between 27 per cent and 48 per cent of the calories in them, while in a Mars bar, 35 per cent of the calories come from fat. Most 'health bars' also contain large amounts of sugar, which also crops up in the guise of honey.

PASTA MAKES YOU FAT

PASTA DOESN'T make you fat. It's what you put with it that makes the difference. Few Italians eat spaghetti smothered in boggy sauce made from fatty mince-meat. A good plateful of pasta provides protein, energy and virtually no fat, it also supplies some vitamins B1 and B2, folic acid and a little iron. Pasta is cheap, filling and healthy, if served in the right way. To conclude, the healthiest diet is the one with the widest selection of foods chosen from all the food groups, so unless you have a sound medical reason, don't cut any out. But don't fall victim to the food myths and don't rely on advice from dubious experts.

A community project is leading the way in promoting more fruit and vegetable consumption for all

Enjoying the organic experience

High Times
25/1/05

Sarah Marriott outlines a new dimension to growing your own fruit and veg



Is urban or rural life better for your health? When it comes to diet, people living in towns and cities afford more healthful than people in rural areas, according to researchers at the first North-West Community Food Pro-

"Traditionally, people in the country areas were eating less fruit and vegetables than those in city towns, because people in town have better access to cheaper fruit and veg in supermarkets," says Dr Perry Sharp, head of Nutrition & Sign Institute of Technology, who co-ordinated the project earlier.

This ground-breaking Community Food Programme set out to reach people in slums, townships and town centres.

Initiated in 2004 by the North Western Health Board (NWHB) and the Organic Centre for Co-Leaders as part of the Government's Cardiovascular Strategy, it is the first of its kind in Ireland.

When the service gardeners first saw their weed-filled, overgrown plots, they had little idea of the "show-off" growing, says gardener Alasing. "Creative gardeners are interested in health."

and nutrition but didn't have enough knowledge about gardening.

"Then someone has discovered the mycops about gardening. They've learnt how to grow plants and harvest vegetables and know how to improve soil fertility and estate crops," says O'Gorman.

After a couple of months of hard work, by mid-summer the



One sign of success is that the new parkers visited the "place outside" class. Singaporean Lin Chuanling became a keen parker and

Although Charon believes it's important to eat well and healthy organic vegetables for her family, she had little idea about growing food before the crisis.

"I like the activity of gathering and I like to see the progress each time I visit," she says.



Cost of unemployment
claims from
around your town.

"People starting the course were cranky and keen to talk about food," says Dr. Mann. "Some had never eaten a margarine or a Jerusalem artichoke, never mind grown one. But most had a strong interest in food intake and felt anxious to learn more."

The group in Rochester had their idea about wanting to increase their consumption of fruit and vegetables while those in Sagos are more driven by safety, the environment, the difficulties of farming and the power that supermarkets have over what they eat.

"A lot of these projects—city farms or allotments—in other countries are urban but the situation seems to be different. People in country areas seem to need them more," he says.

However, as with all projects, there are some caveats. "We have to make sure we're not just focusing on the health of the individual, but the health of the community," says Dr. Bhat. "We have to make sure we're not just focusing on the health of the individual, but the health of the community."

● For details on joining the 100% program, contact Organic Center, Rochester, Co. (800) 833-9283 or (970) 855-4288.



Above and right: participants in the Community Food Programs in the Organic Center in Co. Limerick have worked. Garbner says the course has destroyed the mystique about gardening and it has become "time out" for the busy lives of the participants.



• For details on joining the study program, contact Organic Centre, Rochester, Co. Callers on 071-8854336.

Great enjoyment
cleanse here
standing your own

MAY - OCTOBER 2005

FOOD

ORGANIC TEMPTATIONS

By Hans Wieland



Inclusion of organic foods as part of the daily diet can provide significant protection against ill health and enhance wellbeing.

Learning Practical Gardening Techniques The Community Food Project

From Spring to Summer 2004, the Health Promotion Department of the HSE – North West Area (formerly the North West Health Board), in conjunction with the Organic Centre in Co. Leitrim, ran an innovative and timely project aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of local people.

The initiative was a Community Food Project, and it was funded through the National Strategy for Cardiovascular health. The project was a response to evidence that in Ireland, as in many other western societies, those on a limited income have more limited

access to fresh fruit and vegetables. Yet dietitians and other health professionals know that inclusion of such foods as part of the daily diet can provide significant protection against ill health and can enhance wellbeing. Community gardening projects – usually in cities – have been a response across the world to the challenges of what has been identified as a poverty of food choice for certain groups in society, including those on limited incomes.

This project sought to improve the access of people on a tight budget to fresh fruit and vegetables, by encouraging and helping them to become involved in growing their own organically. In cooperation with local agencies and community groups, participants were recruited in Sligo town and in rural Leitrim, and were given the opportunity to meet regularly with professional and experienced gardeners from The Organic Centre. The project consisted of weekly or fortnightly organic gardening sessions, on plots provided by the centre and by the St Michael's Family Life Centre in Sligo. This was backed up by some classroom instruction in gardening techniques and knowledge, and by cooking demonstrations by HSE – North West Area 'Eat Well, Be Well' tutors. The project as a whole was evaluated independently by a small team from the Institute of Technology, Sligo.

Participants who stayed with the programme expressed strong positive

feelings about the camaraderie and community spirit that it engendered. They expressed enjoyment about spending time in the 'fresh air', and in particular liked the physical nature of the gardening work. All participants felt that the project had been worthwhile, a sentiment echoed by the staff involved in delivering the programme. The involvement of expert gardeners was of key importance, as participants felt they had increased their knowledge of practical gardening techniques, such as sowing seeds.

The participants enjoyed the cooking tuition and there was a strong interest expressed in learning about organic and wholefoods.

The great majority of participants felt that they would 'possibly' or 'probably' increase their consumption of fruit and vegetables in the next year. The single most important way to help achieve this was to find fruit and vegetables that easily fitted into their eating habits. More variety, availability and cheaper fruit and vegetables were also considered important.

The project is now in its second year and participants have started work in the gardens in St. Michael's Family Life Centre and also in the Organic Centre in Rossinver.

For further information on the project contact Dr. Franise Rhatigan Health Promotion Department 087 419 2185 or Hans Wieland The Organic Centre 071 98 54338



The Community Food Project sought to improve the access of people on a tight budget to fresh fruit and vegetables, by encouraging and helping them to become involved in growing their own organically.

Sample Certificate

HEALTH PROMOTION DEPARTMENT,
HSE - NWA AND
THE ORGANIC CENTRE, ROSSINVER, CO LEITRIM

Certificate of Merit

**Growing with Confidence -
Growing and Cooking Fresh Vegetables**

This is to certify that

has participated in

Community Food Project

November 2005

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Photographs: All photographs (not including copies of Press Articles) were taken by Aisling O'Connor and Hans Wieland. Front cover photos by Hans Wieland (bottom) and Aisling O'Connor (top)

There are others not named here who have helped in the production of this guide and I offer them my thanks also.

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