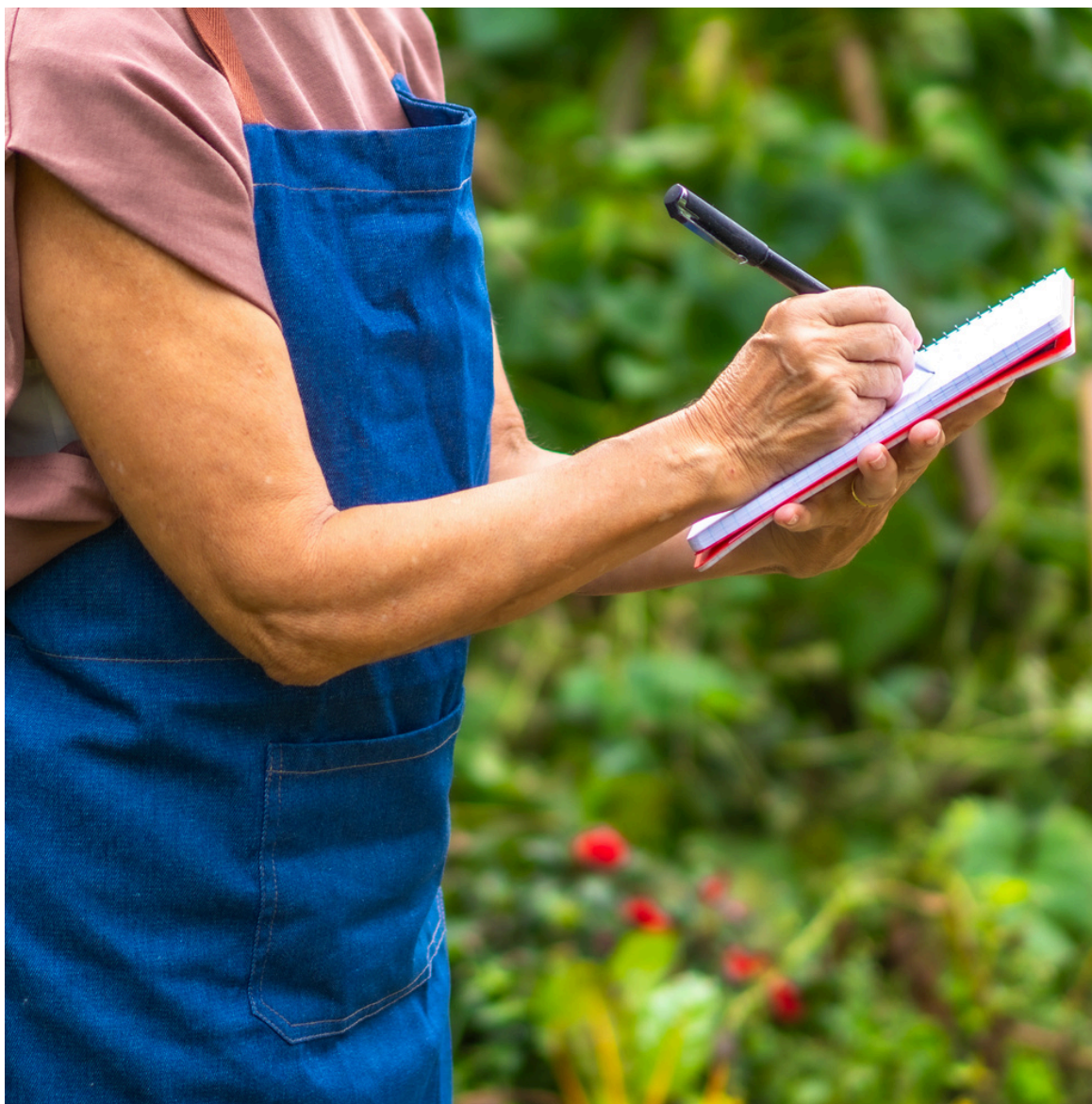




COMMUNITY GARDEN PLANNER & CHECKLIST

A step-by-step guide to starting, maintaining and harvesting your garden.



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STARTING & PRE-PLANNING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

1 Establish Purpose & Goals

- **Define community needs:** food security, cultural foods, youth programs, veteran/senior engagement.
- **Identify priorities:** crop types, educational goals, traditional medicines & foods (berry, sage, sweetgrass, wild onions, etc.).

2 Create Core Planning Team

- Include Elders, gardeners, youth, land managers, water experts, community council.
- **Assign roles:** coordinator, volunteer lead, equipment manager, financial lead.

3 Conduct Site Assessment

- **Location:** Accessible to community members and near a fresh water source.
- **Soil:** Rough soil test for pH & nutrients (N-P-K); identify contamination (e.g., past industrial use). This is best done in the fall, however, spring testing can still share insight into soil amendments needed. See the [NCIAF Soil Testing Toolkit](#).
- **Sunlight:** Ideal location would get 6-8+ hours/day of sunlight.
- **Wind:** Assess need for windbreaks (fencing, shrubs, shelterbelts).
- **Drainage:** Check low spots or waterlogging.



Tip: Work with local agriculture extension or university for soil testing services.



[Water Testing Toolkit Protocol - Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture](#)



[NCIAF Soil Testing Toolkit](#)

4 Land Agreements & Permissions

- Confirm land tenure (lease, band land approval, municipal permissions).
- Confirm water access and rights (community taps, irrigation, rain barrels).

5 Budget & Funding Plan

- **Estimate Costs:**
Soil amendments, tools, fencing, compost, seeds, water systems, garden workers (if applicable).
- **Explore Funding Opportunities**
Government or private funding options, see the [NCIAF Web Hub](#) or reach out to the NCIAF for assistance [here](#).

6 Governance and Policies

- **Develop a Steering Committee and Key Roles Required for the Garden**
Garden Lead/Planner, Seed Starter, Volunteer Coordinator, etc.
- **Plan Irrigation, Access and Maintenance**
Write garden rules: plot use, conduct, conflict resolution, work expectations.
Accessibility & safety (children, Elders, wheelchair access).



SEASONAL TIMELINE

Winter: Foundation Work

Planning & Training

- Plan out Community approvals; Council/Director approvals, budget submission and meeting attendance
- Organize planning meetings with various community members.
- Train volunteers on garden roles and Indigenous plant practices.
- Take inventory of current seeds/supplies and order required seeds/ supplies (e.g., fertilizer, compost).
- Develop a calendar of events for the growing season (e.g., planting date, weeding schedule).



Tip:

If starting from seed and not purchasing seedlings from a nursery, start tomatoes, peppers, rosemary, parsley, sweet potato slips, brassicas, perennials (e.g., asparagus, lavender, mint, chives) indoors January or February as these vegetables take more time to grow.

Early Spring: Prepare for Growing Season

Finalize Garden Layout

- Paths, plots, communal beds, storage.
- Water hosing & irrigation routes.
- Compost & wash stations (if collecting food scraps for creating compost).

Materials & Tool Inventory

- Rakes, shovels, wheelbarrows, hoes, gloves, watering cans.
- Safety equipment: first aid, sun protection, reflective vests for events.

Soil Prep

- Test soil and adjust pH (optimum 6.0–7.0 for most vegetables). See [NCIAF Soil Testing Toolkit](#) for how to interpret soil test results.
- Spread compost/manure; till or double-dig beds.
- Build raised beds if needed (depending on garden zone, perennial vegetables will not overwinter well in raised beds).



[NCIAF Soil Testing Toolkit](#)

Water System Prep

- Check hoses, timers, drip irrigation. Ensure sufficient number of hoses, especially if expanding.
- Prepare rain barrels & collection systems.
- Identify water shutoffs & winter freeze lines.

Seed Starting (Indoors or Hoophouse)

- Start cool season crops: see [NCIAF Seed Starting Planner](#) for crop seasons
- Schedule transplant dates based on last frost.



[NCIAF Seed Starting Planner](#)

Volunteer & Youth Engagement

- Set volunteer schedule.
- Plan spring kickoff event.





SEASONAL TIMELINE

Late Spring: Planting Begins

Transplant Seedlings

- Tomatoes, peppers, rosemary, parsley, sweet potato slips, brassicas, perennials (e.g., asparagus, lavender, mint, chives) from seedlings started indoors or from a nursery.

Direct Seeds Outdoors

- Peas, carrots, beets, radish, beans, squash, cucumber, melons, leafy greens, onion/potato sets, pumpkins, corn.



Tip: Start cool weather varieties earlier in the spring than warm weather varieties.

Install Infrastructure

- Trellises for vines.
- Protective fencing against geese/rabbits.
- Mulch around plants to conserve moisture.

Watering Routines

- Establish watering schedule (morning or evening is often best).
- Train volunteers on watering methods.

Cultural Planting

- Include Indigenous varieties & medicines.
- Invite Elders to share knowledge.

Summer: Planting Begins

Weekly Maintenance

- Weed control (hand-pulling, mulch, or cover crop).
- Monitor soil moisture levels.
- Support plants (staking, trellising) as they continue to grow.

Pest & Disease Management

- Identify common pests: aphids, cutworms, flea beetles.
- Use organic controls: hand removal, row covers, companion planting.
- Inspect weekly; intervene early.

Community Activities

- Garden tours, skill shares (companion planting, seed saving).
- Youth workshops (Indigenous food systems, storytelling in garden, included in planting and harvesting).



Tip: Identify plants for each variety that are yielding early or healthiest to save seeds from. Use ribbon or yarn to tie a bow on their stems to help identify and leave crops to fully mature to save seeds.



SEASONAL TIMELINE

Summer: Planting Begins - Cont'd

Mid-Season Soil Boost

- Side dress with compost tea or organic fertilizer.
- Add mulch to cool soil, maintain moisture, and suppress weeds.

Frost

- In the event for frost (0 degrees Celsius or lower); cover any vegetable with above ground fruit (e) tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins
- Sheets, light blankets are perfect for covering
- Root vegetables can tolerate light frosts.
- Remove covering in the morning when temperature rises to above zero.

Fall: Harvest & Closure

Final Harvest

- Root vegetables, squash, late greens.
- Organize community harvest days.

Seed Saving

- Collect seeds from heirloom varieties you identified in early-mid summer.
- Once fully dried, store seeds in labeled envelopes with year & variety.

Bed Cleanup

- Remove spent plants; compost healthy plant material.
- Chop & drop cover crops (clover, oats) to protect soil.

Compost Management

- Turn compost piles; add browns/greens.
- Ensure good moisture & aeration for winter.

Tool & Equipment Care

- Turn compost piles; add browns/greens.
- Store in dry and secure (locked) storage.
- Complete any required seasonal maintenance on equipment/machinery

Winter Prep

- Mulch beds deeply to protect soil life.
- Before hard frost, drain hoses and irrigation systems and store for the winter.



SEASONAL TIMELINE

Winter: Reflect & Plan

Annual Review

- Ensure to celebrate the successes and what worked well.
- Consider recording what you and your garden team would like to see improve or tried next season. ?
Crop yields, pest challenges, volunteer hours.

Celebration

- Host harvest feast, share stories & knoweledge
- Thank volunteers

Training & Skill Building

- **Indoor workshops:** seed starting, soil biology, Indigenous plant uses. Reach out to the NCI AF for more information on skill-building and capacity-development tools and resources.

Budget & Funding Prep

- Plan next year's budget.
- Apply for grants early (many due in winter).



DETAILED CHECKLIST

Soil & Site

- ☐ Soil test (pH, nutrients, contaminants)
- ☐ Add compost / organic matter
- ☐ Raised beds (if needed)
- ☐ Paths: mulch, wood chips

Water Systems

- ☐ Drip irrigation or soaker hoses
- ☐ Rain barrels
- ☐ Water timers
- ☐ Fill/flush system pre-season

Tools & Storage

- ☐ Shovels, spades, forks, hoes
- ☐ Rakes, wheelbarrows
- ☐ Tool shed/shelter
- ☐ Safety gear

Volunteers & Training

- ☐ Orientation & safety workshop
- ☐ Job descriptions & schedule
- ☐ Youth/Elder integration programming

Pest & Wildlife Control

- ☐ Fencing
- ☐ Row covers/netting
- ☐ Natural pest deterrents (herbal sprays, companion plants)
- ☐ Safety gear

Composting

- ☐ Hot compost piles (greens + browns)
- ☐ Compost thermometer
- ☐ Cover crops in beds

Harvest & Storage

- ☐ Harvest bins/crates
- ☐ Cold storage (cool room or root cellar)
- ☐ Community share & surplus distribution



GARDEN PRODUCTION TRACKING

(Helpful for Reporting & Funding)

Metric	Target / Notes
Number of plots	
Volunteer participation hours	
Pounds of food harvested	
Number of community events	
Seed saved & stored	
Water usage	