

UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL IOWA'S
CORPORATE GIVING GARDENS
TOOLKIT

Your guide to starting and sustaining
a thriving giving garden.

Celebrating 100 Years

**United
Way**



of Central Iowa

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Hungry in
Central Iowa**

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Feeding the Hungry in Central Iowa

“A Giving Garden is a great way to give back to the community. It is a great way to connect with nature, get a little exercise and help others. It’s so rewarding when you start harvesting what you’ve grown and providing fresh food to others,”

— 2015 volunteer gardener

Hunger in central Iowa is real and has increased in recent years. According to the 2014 Hunger in America study, 22 percent more families in Iowa were served in pantries than in the previous year. At the same time, the obesity rate in central Iowa is high and climbing. Nearly 30 percent of central Iowans are obese, up from 27 percent in 2013. Families in poverty often do not have the access or budget to support a healthy diet or regular physical activity. The pantry network and food programs often struggle to obtain quality, nutritious options, including fresh produce. In Iowa, a fertile land of plenty, it seems impossible that so many people are struggling to meet their basic needs.

United Way of Central Iowa is uniting businesses, government, and nonprofits to achieve broad Community Health Goals for 2020. With the Corporate Giving Garden initiative, we are focusing on helping central Iowans adopt healthy lifestyles by increasing the availability of and access to healthy fruits and vegetables in Polk, Dallas, and Warren Counties.

What works? Corporate Giving Gardens

With United Way of Central Iowa’s leadership, central Iowa businesses are hosting Giving Gardens to provide people with fresh fruits and vegetables. In 2016, six companies and four nonprofit partners:

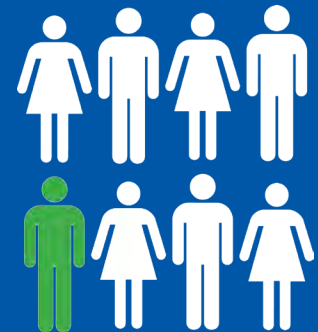
- Donated 8,064 pounds of fresh produce
- Provided 3,226 people one day of fresh produce (five servings per day)
- Recruited 293 volunteers
- Contributed 1,356 hours of volunteer time

FOODforTHOUGHT

1 in 5 central Iowa children do not have enough to eat.



1 in 8 central Iowans are food insecure



Giving Garden Benefits

For the community

- Access to fresh, nutritious, locally produced food for individuals and families in need
- Partnerships with local companies, nonprofits, and governments
- Reduced food insecurity among central Iowans

For the company

- The ultimate onsite volunteer project to engage employees
- Team building
- Physical activity and wellness
- Informal learning about biodiversity and produce
- Green activity for the workplace
- A year-round volunteer activity with planning in winter and growing and harvesting in warmer months

PLANNING BEFORE PLANTING



Easy, step-by-step planning tips

1. Commitment

This is the one key word that makes all of the difference in the success of your Giving Garden. Please take the time to talk with United Way about the scope of the project. It's crucial to have at least one to three (or more) leaders who will take responsibility for volunteer recruitment and project management. Once you have identified them, a brief all-employee [survey](#) will help you better understand what kind of widespread support you have for the project.

2. Key Relationships

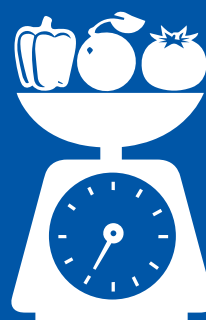
After you have survey results, talk with key stakeholders such as facilities staff, the human resource department, legal, and security. Ultimately, senior leadership needs to support and approve the entire project. Create a broad committee with members from each of these groups at the beginning of the project. Facilities will play an important role in helping to determine the best location for the garden, perhaps assisting in building fencing, a tool shed, water systems, and garden maintenance structures (composting). HR can determine how to manage garden volunteering: Volunteer Time Off and/or personal time off. How will volunteer hours be tracked? Should volunteers work on their own time during the week or on weekends? Decide on the policy for bringing family members to help in the garden. Do you want to invite retirees to take part? Identify any Master Gardeners or garden aficionados to be lead volunteers and/or resources.

1. The success of your Giving Garden depends on having a strong team of core leaders and good volunteer management practices. It's important to have a broad team of volunteers. The more volunteers you have, the easier it is for everyone. Volunteer responsibilities include the key areas of: planning, spring planting, weeding, irrigation, fertilization, harvesting and delivering produce, care of equipment and tool shed, and troubleshooting. Successful Giving Garden teams assign duties in one- or two-week chunks to volunteers so the work doesn't get to be overwhelming.
2. Make sure you enlist HR/Legal in approving the project. Risk management policies to cover include:
 - The national food donation protection law: The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act is a federal law that was created to encourage the donation of food and grocery products to nonprofit charitable organizations for distribution to needy people. This Act protects individuals and businesses like you who donate food or who allow volunteers to harvest produce from their land. The Act protects you by relieving you of all civil and criminal liability. In plain language, this means that if someone should get sick from consuming the food you donated, you are not liable for damages in a lawsuit. For more information, review the [Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act](#).
 - Contact your legal department or HR for approved waivers and photo releases for all volunteers.
 - City restrictions: It's important to have someone from your organization, most likely your property manager, ensure city approval of the garden. The facilities team will need to contact Iowa One Call to prevent damage to underground infrastructure for an in-ground garden. Call **811** or **1-800-292-8989** at least 48 hours in advance of any digging, and they will provide information on the location of all underground lines.

FOODforTHOUGHT

WHAT YOU GROW

1/3 to 1/2 lb. of garden produce equals **1 serving** of nutritious food for a hungry family



“Without our food pantry, there would be times we have nothing. It is an awful feeling to not be able to provide for your family.”

— Food Bank of Iowa client

3. Garden Design

Have fun with the garden design and remember to keep it simple. Here's a handy checklist:

- ✓ What types of produce are needed by your nonprofit partner? What do you want to grow? Some fruits and vegetables require more maintenance than others. What has done well? What hasn't? Talk to representatives from other companies with giving gardens.
- ✓ Consider location, access to water, soil quality, and sun times. Facilities will be a key partner in helping you with this. If you already have a garden, ask your team what steps are needed to improve the watering system or soil quality.
- ✓ If this is your first garden, we recommend just one crop rotation. In subsequent years, it's been quite successful to plant an early spring crop and then a summer crop.
- ✓ Consider types of gardening techniques used: in-ground square-foot gardening, companion gardening, trellis design. (The CGG team at Wells Fargo creatively used cattle panels and fence posts for their trellises.) Do you want to have pollinator or pest-deterrent flowers, a border or edging, or fencing? What tools and equipment will you need? Where will you store them? What types of irrigation will you use? (Hoses with sprayers or irrigation drip most common). Start your research by downloading free, plentiful resources from [Iowa State Extension](#).
- ✓ Decide whether to compost. Compost adds to the soil's fertility and ability to support plant growth. You may wish to dedicate a space of at least four feet in diameter for a bin. The [Mantis ComposT-Twin dual chamber composter](#) is an excellent option. Each chamber holds 10 bushels of materials. The two-compartment feature allows one side to "cook" while you continue to add material to the other side. When ordering, ask for the nonprofit discount to receive 20% off each unit. Another option is to make your own compost bins out of wood pallets. Attach five pallets together and line with galvanized rabbit wire. Again, refer to [Iowa State Extension](#) services for more in-depth advice on how to compost.
- ✓ Fencing: Critter control is key. Fencing will define your garden area and keep pests away. Some companies have built their own wood fences to keep costs down; the majority use chain-link fencing or more sturdy fences to keep in line with corporate exterior design. Work with your facilities team to determine type and costs.
- ✓ The tool shed. A small tool shed to store supplies is recommended. Do you want to provide a table or two and fold-up chairs? A bulletin board with rules, calendars, security's number, and other contact numbers should be posted. Download one company's [recommended supplies and equipment list](#).



4. Budget

Typical needs for start-up costs include ground preparation, water system, fencing, seeds, shed, and tools/equipment. The average start-up cost for an in-ground garden with fence and shed is approximately \$5,000. Weather and critters may affect maintenance costs, but budgets often just include seeds and supplies such as mulch. The [average maintenance budget](#) may run \$500.

5. Scheduling

While the actual gardening season usually runs between April and October, there is some year-round planning involved.

Whether you are planting one or two crop rotations, review a [schedule](#) for typical crop harvest times for central Iowa.

6. Nonprofit Partners

We recommend that, after you have done some initial planning, you reach out again to United Way for help selecting the best nonprofit partner for your garden. United Way will match you with one of these three nonprofit partners:

- 1. Des Moines Area Religious Council (DMARC)** is a nonprofit, interfaith organization focused on a shared belief of helping struggling central Iowans meet basic human needs. They distribute food to 12 food pantries and seven mobile pantries in central Iowa.
- 2. The Food Bank of Iowa** works with 400 nonprofit agencies to gather and distribute nutritious food. They provide vital food to pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, schools, and others. While they have a broad reach throughout the state, the food you grow will be distributed to pantries here in central Iowa.
- 3. Central Iowa Shelter & Services** is located in downtown Des Moines and provides low-barrier shelter, meals and support services at no cost to adults experiencing homelessness.

United Way matches you and a nonprofit partner based on your location and a good understanding about where fresh produce is most needed. You will, in turn, work hand-in-hand with your nonprofit partner to select the most-needed crops.

After United Way connects your company with one of these partners, it's important for you to meet with them to determine what foods are really needed, a delivery schedule, what containers are best for delivery, and whether the produce should be washed.

“Without good nutrition, we can’t grow, change, work, learn or be in good relationships with family and friends.”

*— Rev. Sarai Rice,
director of Des
Moines Area
Religious Council*

“It’s incredibly important to have fresh produce for our clients. So often, fresh food is so much more expensive than shelf-stable foods. Most of our clients are living in poverty and fresh produce provides a much healthier diet for them.”

— Jorie Hidri, Volunteer & Donation Coordinator, Central Iowa Shelter & Services

TIME TO GET GROWING



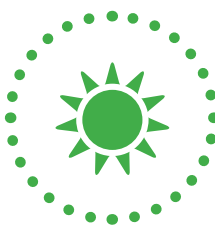
Gardening 101



Step one

Determine the type of garden.

Start your research by downloading free, plentiful [resources](#) from Iowa State Extension. The most common and inexpensive garden is the traditional in-ground garden. Preparing the soil, fertilizing, and weeding is important for all gardens. If you want to start small, one option is to create raised planting beds. Use untreated wood, preferably cedar.



Step two

Find a good location.

In determining the location of your garden, keep these elements in mind:

1. Sunlight: Gardens need at least six to eight hours of daily sunlight.
2. Water source: The garden needs to have the necessary water supply. Work with your facilities department to identify the best type of water system.
3. Tool shed: You will need to store your tools and equipment in close proximity to the garden. Most companies use a combination lock for security.
4. Fencing: An 8-foot fence around the perimeter with an entry gate is recommended. Chicken wire around the bottom will help keep out rabbits and other pesky animals. Planting marigolds around the perimeter is another way to deter hungry bunnies.



Step three

Decide what to grow.

First, ask your nonprofit partner what they need. In general, these foods have had great success in central Iowa: Peppers, onions, cucumbers, radishes, green beans, cabbage, pumpkin, squash, okra, acorn squash, butternut squash, zucchini, kale, beets, carrots, cauliflower. Confer with HR about employees bringing in produce from their personal gardens to donate to the nonprofit partner. **TIP:** Maximize space by having squash and cucumbers climb a fence.

Contact local gardening organizations such as greenhouses, lawn and garden stores, and the [ISU Extension](#) office to see if in-kind donations or discounted prices on seeds, plants, tools, etc., might be available.

We want to pick vegetables that are low maintenance. The green beans and tomatoes either took too long to pick or quickly went bad. Our partner wanted more stable produce and that worked for us."

— 2016 CGG volunteer



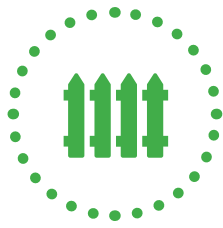
Step four

Test your soil.

Working with facilities, have your soil at the site tested for fertility pH and presence of heavy metals. For information on submitting a soil sample, view [form ST0011](#) on the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach store or call 515-957-5760. See [more forms](#) on soil and other topics from the Iowa State University Extension.

"It's a great on-site volunteer opportunity. I get to do something that's helping others in the community while also getting a little fresh air and exercise."

— Sharon Spoden, FBFS Giving Garden volunteer



Step five

Plan your plot.

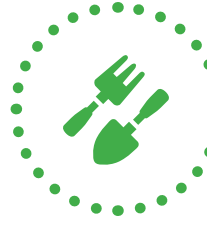
Once you have determined the size of your garden, make a simple to-scale map. In-ground plots often are 10x10 feet or 10x20 feet with pathways at least 3-4 feet wide to allow space for gardeners and wheelbarrows. The soil in both raised beds and in-ground plots should be amended with aged compost or manure to improve its fertility and increase its organic matter content. Raised beds, which are more expensive, should be no more than 4 feet wide (to facilitate access to plants from the sides without stepping in the bed), and between 8 and 12 feet long.



Step six

Just add water.

Work with the facilities staff regarding the best watering system. Options include hoses (one faucet for every few plots) or drip and soaker-hose irrigation that can be used in all areas of the garden.



Step seven

Get your hands dirty!

1. **Fertilizing.** Check with [Iowa State Extension](#) about healthy fertilizing for produce.
2. **Weeding.** All of the experienced gardeners recommend staying on top of weeding! The more volunteers, the merrier the job! You might want to explore purchasing some straw to help with the weeds. **TIP:** Make weeding fun by holding a special after-work weed-pulling event.
3. **Composting.** A number of companies waited until the second or third year of their gardens before exploring options for composting.
4. **Harvesting.** **TIP:** Laminate harvest-ready photos of produce and post them in the gardening shed or by the plots to help motivate your volunteers.

Iowa Harvest Tips:

- Pick often and small. The biggest harvesting sin gardeners commit is waiting until produce is too big or too old. This results in produce that is tough, bitter, or diseased. Check your vegetable garden daily and pick what you can when it's small and tender. (Frequent harvesting also encourages more growth.)
- Harvest when plants are dry. Harvesting when wet can spread disease, especially on green beans.
- Harvest early in the day if you can. Produce tends to be better hydrated in the early morning. And once you've harvested it, try to get it to your food partner as soon as possible.
- Refer to the [Iowa State Extension website](#) for specific produce-harvesting timelines.

“Seven out of 10 of the most common SNAP purchases are protein items like milk, meat, and chicken parts. Fresh fruits and vegetables are too costly for many low-income Iowans.”

— Rebecca Whitlow, DMARC Food Pantry Network Director



Step eight Troubleshooting

Weather, critters, and pests, oh my! Most gardens will experience some sort of problems: too much sun, too much or too little rain. You are at the mercy of central Iowa summers. Check with your master gardeners or the [Iowa State Extension](#) service for specific concerns regarding weather issues. Depending on the weather, some crops may flourish, others not so much. Weeds are part of the garden growing experience. Recent summers we've had an influx of Japanese beetles affecting some crops. Again, research recommendations for any critter issues with Iowa State Extension. **TIP:** Be flexible. Your garden will tell you what needs to be picked when.



Step nine When the season ends...

Plan a special clean-up date. Invite all volunteers to a harvest party and special clean-up gathering. Here is a checklist:

1. Dispose of all plant material in compost bags.
2. Remove the watering system, if appropriate.
3. Make sure all tools and garden gloves are clean.
4. Bring all the seeds inside.
5. Organize your shed.
6. Determine if there are any special tasks to be completed during clean up, such as adding mulch, topsoil, or fertilizer, etc.
7. At the end of the season, visit local gardening stores for deals on seeds that didn't sell. Store inside and use next year.





BEST PRACTICES & RESOURCES

Best Practices for Great Produce Yields

1

Keep it simple. Start with one type of vegetable per plot.

2

Create a positive experience for volunteers. One company held a kick-off party in April with speakers from DMARC and United Way. They offered lemonade and fruit and got everyone excited about gardening. Offer sunscreen and water for volunteers when they are working in the garden.

3

Be creative. Take photos before you begin and throughout the year. Ask volunteers to wear their corporate T-shirts when volunteering and photo opportunities occur. Create intranet stories throughout the season to share. Use the project to educate employees about food insecurity in central Iowa through Lunch & Learns; garden open houses; and tours of DMARC, the Food Bank of Iowa, or Central Iowa Shelter & Services. Visit your nonprofit partner and one of their food pantries to actually meet some of the clients receiving your produce. Share stories with the gardening team and staff.

4

Have a solid volunteer management plan.

Well defined garden roles and responsibilities help ensure success. Assign a leader for each zone. The lead's role is to learn about one crop's health, look for any disease or pest problems, monitor irrigation, and organize the volunteers for the zone for weeding, maintenance, and harvesting. If you have enough volunteers, designate a lead delivery person. He or she arranges for produce delivery to appropriate location and manages the delivery schedule.

5

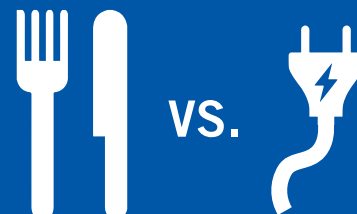
Get the word out.

Use your intranet communications. Have a communication plan at the onset of the project for all employees and for your volunteer group. What electronic tools can you use for tracking volunteers, hours, pounds of food, and gardening tasks? A number of companies recommended using software such as SharePoint to track volunteer work. Don't forget to have fun with the communication. At Telligen, they held trivia contests asking questions like "How many pounds of potatoes will be harvested?" It helped keep enthusiasm high among the gardening team. The winner received a Mr. Potato Head. Send photos from your garden to your nonprofit partners; they will help you share your company's good works.

FOODforTHOUGHT

A TOUGH CHOICE

3 out of 5 food pantry clients have to choose between paying for food or utilities



6

Recognize all volunteers.

Electronic cards, certificates, and/or results are great to share.

Recognize the volunteers with the most hours with special awards. At one company, a food truck came in for a thank-you party. Send the photos from your growing season to your nonprofit partner, and they will help share your good works.

7

Send out an end-of-season survey to all volunteers.

What were the Giving Garden successes this year? What were the challenges? What should we do differently next year? What were your personal successes with the project? Will you volunteer again next year? Why or why not?

"Last year, there was confusion with how we tracked volunteers, hours worked, garden tasks, and harvest dates/totals. This year we used the My Volunteer Time (MVT) event website. This allowed individuals to sign up on MVT and update their own hours. Weekly communications were sent via MVT to provide general updates, ask for volunteers and advise people about any issues the plots are experiencing."

— Brooklyn Davis, Wells Fargo

Resources for Turnkey Gardening Success

To help you and your team with your Corporate Giving Garden, check these out:

- Eat Greater Des Moines is a local nonprofit with a mission to identify, develop and connect resources with the broader community to support the entire food lifecycle in Central Iowa. Download their [Start-Up Gardening Guide](#).
- Garden education from [ISU Extension](#) offers a plethora of information
- See a [sample project timeline](#)
- Garden design samples: [Telligen](#) and [John Deere Financial](#)
- Sample budgets: [Farm Bureau Financial Services](#) and [Telligen](#)
- [Sample staff survey](#)
- [Sample email to recruit volunteers](#)
- [Sample Guidelines & Expectations](#) for CGG volunteers
- [Polk County Master Gardeners](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

What is United Way's role in the Corporate Giving Garden Program?

United Way of Central Iowa is uniting businesses, government, and nonprofits to achieve broad Community Health Goals for 2020. With the Corporate Giving Garden initiative, we are focusing on helping central Iowans adopt healthy lifestyles through increasing the availability and access of healthy fruits and vegetables in Polk, Dallas, and Warren Counties. We provide resources for companies looking to start a giving garden, connect each company with an appropriate nonprofit partner and track total returns to share with the community.

Who are United Way's nonprofit partners in the Corporate Giving Garden Program?

- Des Moines Area Religious Council (DMARC) is a nonprofit, interfaith organization focused on a shared belief of helping struggling central Iowans meet basic human needs. They distribute food to 11 food pantries and one mobile pantry in central Iowa.
- The Food Bank of Iowa works with 400 nonprofit agencies to gather and distribute nutritious food. They provide vital food to pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, schools, and others. While they have a broad reach throughout the state, the food you grow will be distributed to pantries here in central Iowa.
- Central Iowa Shelter & Services is located in downtown Des Moines and provides low-barrier shelter, meals and support services at no cost to adults experiencing homelessness.

What companies are taking part in the Corporate Giving Garden Program?

- Des Moines University
- Farm Bureau Financial Services
- GuideOne
- John Deere Financial
- Telligon
- Wells Fargo