



*The Official Site of Square Foot Gardening and
Mel Bartholomew, Originator and Author*

COMMUNITY GARDENS - THE DOS AND DON'TS - PART 1

In the last 25 years , I have organized, run, visited, filmed and observed community gardens all around the country, I've realized that they all seem to have similar problems and pitfalls. The biggest mistake you can make is to give each individual garden or gardener too much space. Believe me, it will go to weeds and destroy the look of the entire garden area no matter how neatly the other spaces are kept. Keep in mind at the very beginning everyone is enthused, will promise you the moon, they'll be there every week, they'll take care of their garden, they'll weed it, etc., etc., but things happen. Lives get complicated, people move or get involved in other things, children take precedent, family goes on vacation - all kinds of things happen.

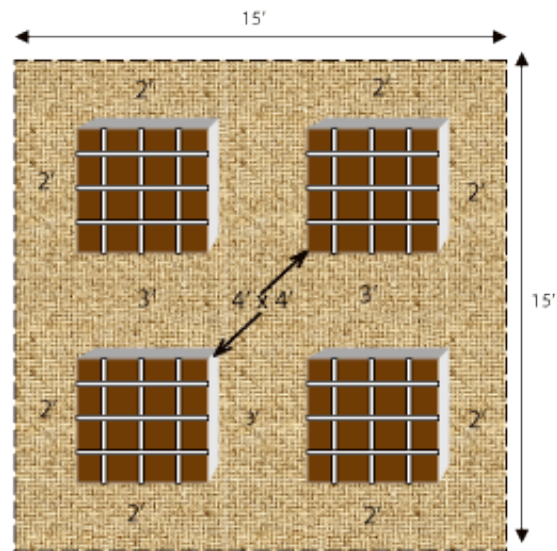
My first community garden was like that before I invented the Square Foot Gardening System. We all planted in rows spaced 3 feet apart like all the gardening experts taught everyone (and in fact, many are still teaching this outdated system). Those 3-foot rows sprouted so many weeds you couldn't even see what was supposed to be growing in each row. The next year, we converted to my newly invented Square Foot Garden system with a 15-foot x 15-foot space for each plot. Those were the individual family plots. Oh, they complained at first "I need more space - we want a big garden - we're gonna grow a lot of things". Yeah, like weeds, I thought. They expressed all of those concerns but I had done my homework and completed my experiments the year before.

I knew how much you could grow in a 4-foot x 4-foot block **IF** you used the Square Foot System by laying down a grid and kept replanting every square foot as it was harvested. As it turned out, a 4-foot x 4-foot area was sufficient for one person to have either a salad or dinner vegetables during the entire growing season. Therefore, a family of four needed just four blocks spaced in a 15-foot x 15-foot area very nicely with 3-foot aisles down the center and 4-foot aisles between their neighbors. To satisfy the ambition of some, we allowed them to sign up for two family spaces but only the second season after they had proved that they could keep their garden neat and tidy, which turned out to be very easy with a Square Foot Garden.



In general , your community garden will need a set of rules (and these should be posted) that everyone will abide by. They are pretty self-explanatory and can quickly be set down by the organizers. Things like hours, accessibility, plants not allowed because they are too messy or space taking, how to settle disputes, tools (where they're kept) and, the really big one, water (how and when it can be used). It really boils down to respecting your neighbor's space and taking care of your own. Sort of like the neighborhood isn't it?

This 15-foot x 15-foot spacing, allows a 2-foot wide path all around the perimeter of each space. If your neighbor has the exact same thing, then you have created a 4-foot wide path or really a buffer zone between neighboring family plots. No one should be able to put up a fence although vertical frames or towers, tripods and beanpoles should be allowed inside each 4 x 4 planting block.



That spacing and layout eliminates the interference of some rapidly growing crops that actually become overgrown like corn, squash, pumpkins, etc. They could shade or invade your neighbors' plots. All plants must be contained within each 4 x 4 planting block. What if someone wants to rototill their entire 15 x 15-foot area and put in row crops ? You're gonna have "Trouble in River City". Don't let them do it. It'll just turn into a weed filled mess and destroy the looks of your entire community garden.

Next column: More tips on how to get started with a Community Garden - Part 2 (when available).