

# How to Organize a Garden Cleanup Event

Bring together gardeners of all ages from your community to organize a garden or local green space cleanup! Tidying up and beautifying a local park, school garden, community garden, or even a neighbor's garden is a simple but significant way to practice environmental stewardship and foster a sense of connection.



## Planning

Meeting ahead of time to plan out the cleanup day will ensure a successful and enjoyable event for organizers and volunteers alike.

- Convene a group of event leaders and organizers to gather community feedback about the cleanup event. Check out our resources on [Forming a Garden Committee](#) and [Gathering Support](#).
- Decide where it will take place and what areas should be focused on.
- Set a time and date. Consider the demographic of your volunteers to determine the most accessible time for them.
- Brainstorm a list of volunteers who might be available to help. Consider recruiting the participants (and their families) who use the space or look beyond to other adult and youth service organizations in your community (Boy Scouts, Kiwanis Clubs, Master Gardeners, etc.).
- Create a list of projects and tasks that need to be done, in order of priority. Make it a comprehensive “wish list” so there is plenty of work for volunteers, knowing that all tasks might not be completed that day. Be sure to identify the top priorities.
- Think about kid-friendly tasks in addition to those that may require more heavy lifting – it’s always great to utilize the skills of volunteers of all ages and sizes!
- With your budget in mind, think about what you can provide for volunteers, as well as what you want to ask them to bring.
- Consider the ideal number of volunteers needed to get the most important projects done, along with the maximum number your leaders can manage. There is definitely such a thing as having too many volunteers!
- Make a list of the specific tools and supplies that are needed. (See the lists of possible supplies below.)
- Make a list of supplies that you do not already have and must be purchased or sourced for the event.

## Leadership

Decide who will be spearheading the cleanup and, depending on the size of your group, what other roles may be necessary. For example:

- Cleanup leader – This person will send out communications, greet volunteers on the day of the event, answer questions, and help delegate tasks.
- Project leader(s) – It is helpful to have a person to lead each cleanup project and work closely with smaller groups to ensure they have enough support.
- Event support – Have one or two volunteers as “go-tos” for event support such as helping people sign in at the office, filling up drinking water, showing folks where supplies are, or giving out band-aids from the first aid kit if necessary.

## Advertising & Inviting community members

Creating a graphic or flier is a great way to announce your event to the world. [Canva](#) is a free graphic design website where you can create advertisements and promote the work day. Depending on the types of volunteers you would like to invite, you can share your advertisement on your:

- School’s bulletin board
- Local newspaper
- Local library bulletin
- Social media
- Email newsletter
- Peer organization’s media channels
- Local radio
- On a sign in front of the garden space

## RSVPs

Think about how volunteers will sign up or if they can just show up without an RSVP. It is generally a good idea to ask folks to sign up so you have an idea of how many people to expect and so you have a way to contact them for reminders and notification if unexpected changes arise. Ways they can sign up include:

- Through a Google Form
- Emailing cleanup leader(s) directly
- A volunteer website, such as [Givepulse.com](#) or [SignUp Genius](#).

## **Cleaning supplies**

Safety and good sanitary practices are the most important things to consider when thinking about what cleanup supplies you will need. Below are some necessary items to have:

- Gloves
- Trash cans/recycling containers
- Trash bags (large and small)
- Compost/lawn refuse bags and/or compost bin
- Garden tools (shovels, trowels, rakes)
- Vehicle to take away compostables that can not be processed on site or to remove trash if you do not have access to a dumpster

## **Event supplies**

Depending on the format and location of your event, you may want to think about having:

- Sign-in sheet
- Drinking water
- Refreshments/snacks
- Tables/sitting/rest areas
- First aid kit/sunscreen

## **Sourcing supplies/Funding**

Think about what you need for your event and any local resources/organizations that may be able to help or contribute to the cleanup, whether it be for funding or other resources. Some ideas include:

- A local hardware store that donates gloves for the event.
- A grocery store that donates snacks or beverages.
- A nursery that donates flowers/plants or sells them at a discounted rate
- Volunteers willing to bring a dish for a potluck or restaurants willing to donate food for a meal after the cleanup.

## **Communication before the event**

Be sure to send out an email at least a day before the event to confirm the details of the event. Let volunteers know:

- Specific directions/meet up locations and where to park.
- What to expect and the types of tasks that they may be involved in.
- What they should bring to the event (e.g. water bottles, sunscreen, hats, gloves, closed-toe shoes, etc.).

- Whether it will be a rain-or-shine event and how/when volunteers will be notified if it is canceled.
- Contact information for the cleanup event leaders.

## The day of the cleanup

- The cleanup leadership should arrive early to prepare the supplies and greet volunteers.
- Welcome your volunteers as a group and offer a brief introduction. This is a great opportunity to do a [land acknowledgement](#), go over garden agreements/rules, and share more about the space and community members.
- Tell your volunteers about the cleanup projects for the day and work with the event leaders to break the volunteers into the groups.
- Let the volunteers know who to go to for questions and where to find water, restrooms, or other needed supplies.
- Have clear communication about safety information and protocols.

## Cleanup tasks

While you will need to think about cleanup tasks that are specific to your garden space, here is a list of common cleanup tasks you can work on in small teams:

- Litter patrol - go around the garden and pick up all litter. Make it fun by having volunteers share their most interesting finds!
- Garden beds - Remove weeds from old beds, amend soil by adding compost, and apply mulch
- Beautification team - Plant flowers and other ornamentals – especially perennials – to help bring beauty as well as pollinators to your garden year-round.
- Builders – clear out any unused areas and build new garden beds. Other building ideas include shade structures, benches, garden trellises, and bird houses.
- Tree team – If your garden could use extra shade or even fruit, planting a tree is a great way to create everlasting beauty in your garden.
- Art team – work on a community art project to help bring more beauty to your garden. space. This could be a [mural](#), decorative garden signs, sculptures – get creative!
- Out with the old – Sort through and throw away unused or deteriorating garden supplies such as weathered plastic pots, broken tools, or gloves with holes.
- Organize – implement a system to organize your garden shed, classroom, seed storage, or outdoor kitchen.
- Deep clean team – Scrub off the dirt from garden tools, wash dirty gloves, and clean away cobwebs.

## **How to keep outdoor spaces litter-free**

To help ensure that your garden space stays clean for as long as possible, you can implement any of the following:

- Create signs that respectfully guide visitors (e.g. Keep our garden beautiful; do not litter).
- Place trash and recycling cans throughout the garden.
- Utilize a compost system to return organic matter back to the garden.
- Organize regular garden cleanups.

## **Thank your volunteers**

Show your volunteers how much you appreciate their help by sharing:

- A picnic-style lunch after the cleanup is over.
- Seeds, plant materials, or other donated items for them to take home.
- Fresh produce from the garden.
- Recognition for their contributions through some of the same channels you used to recruit (newsletters, social media, bulletin boards)

## **Sustaining Your Efforts**

To build momentum, schedule cleanup days at regular intervals (monthly, seasonally, annually). This will help with volunteer recruitment, and it encourages individuals, families, and organizations to make the cleanup events a tradition they look forward to.