

The "Share the Harvest" Training Guide:

How to connect the produce from your community garden with those who need it the most



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THE PAUL G. ALLEN FAMILY *foundation*

Many thanks to our fabulous partners who make Harvest Pierce County's work possible:



Introduction

Harvest Pierce County:

Welcome to a rich world of community food projects in the City of Destiny and surrounding Pierce County! Pierce County has a thriving Community Garden culture that brings people and neighborhoods together through gardening and food to share, grow and celebrate secure, healthy and happy communities. We are so pleased to have you be a part of this great network of gardeners, social activists, community organizers, and dedicated individuals working to share garden fresh produce with those who need it the most. With support from the Paul G.

***Mission Statement:** Investing in people to foster and sustain an equitable and healthy community-based food system throughout Pierce County.*

Allen Family Foundation, Harvest Pierce County implemented the “Share the Harvest” Program to foster a culture of generosity within our network of over 80 community gardens and food projects. The program works to strengthen garden to food bank networks, increase communication between gardeners and the greater Tacoma community, increase access to resources and materials, and provide ample educational opportunities.

Harvest Pierce County launched initially in August of 2010, after a collaborative process stewarded by the ACHIEVE Coalition. This process brought to the table an extraordinary diversity of organizations – representing a wide variety of health, environmental, and community interests. What originally began as a two-year pilot project has since become an established program of the Pierce Conservation District. Harvest Pierce County continues to believe in the value of community-based collaboration and partnership and receives guidance from a steering committee representing the following organizations: City of Tacoma, Metro Parks Tacoma, Pierce County, WSU Extension Master Gardeners, St. Leo’s Food Connection, and interested community members.

Hunger in Pierce County

Hunger is a serious concern for many people throughout the United States and within our local communities. The World Health Organization defines food security as having access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. In 2017, approximately 1 in 8 people in the US were food insecure, or about 40 million people. Unfortunately, Pierce County is not exempt from this problem.

In 2017 alone, Pierce County residents made over 1.3 million visits to food banks, meal sites, and shelters. 55% of these visits were made by children and seniors. This lack of access to consistent and nutritious food can compound financial burdens by leading to illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes or affecting children's ability to learn in school. In a land of plenty, it is disheartening to see so many individuals struggle to access the basic human need to be fed.

Since its inception, Harvest Pierce County has been working hard to find ways to combat the issue of food insecurity in our county. Emergency food systems often struggle to obtain quality, nutritious options and lack fresh fruits and vegetables. The Share the Harvest program is one way in which Harvest Pierce County has addressed this need, and was responsible for donating 21,476 pounds of produce in 2018 alone.

Pierce County is fortunate to have an abundance of communities who are working to improve their neighborhoods through community gardens. The hope is to see communities across Pierce County take more responsibility for equitable distribution of healthy foods, and working with food banks is an ideal place to start. Many of these community gardens are already connected with food banks in their neighborhood and grow produce specifically for the food insecure in their neighborhood. If neighborhoods and community gardens throughout the county can band together and grow more produce with their local food banks in mind, we may be able to make a tangible dent in hunger as well as strengthen the communities in Pierce County.

-2017: 1 in 8 Americans experienced food insecurity

-2017: Over 1.3 million visits to Pierce County food programs

-2018: 21,476 pounds of produce donated through Share the Harvest

Starting Your Food Bank Plot

Organize the Community

Throughout this process, it is important to remind yourself that the most important word in “Community Garden” is Community. Building a strong network and management system is essential for the long-term success of your giving garden. We hope these tips will be useful as you organize and manage this unique space.

- 1. Identify the Leadership Team:** Coordinating the food bank plot is difficult job for one person, so having as much garden support will make this job much easier. Having a team of at least two people will be necessary to coordinate a strong food bank plot. Ideally, one individual can plant and harvest while another one delivers. Then engage as many other gardeners to help volunteer their time and skills.
- 2. Connect with Your Food Bank:** Start your food bank gardening endeavors out on a good foot by building a strong relationship with those whom you’re giving your produce to. The best way to make that connection is to have the leadership team and anyone else involved in the garden plot to volunteer at the food bank. Your work will be that much more rewarding when you connect with those receiving your produce.
- 3. Connect with the Gleaning Program:** The Pierce County Gleaners work to harvest fruiting trees throughout the county for local food banks. By involving the garden community with the gleaning community, you can both support each other with food bank deliveries, volunteers, and neighborhood engagement.
- 4. Build Volunteer Capacity:** A successful volunteer program at your garden depends on designating specific tasks and roles. This is also a great opportunity to involve members of the community besides gardeners, especially interested individuals on your garden plot wait list. Do not be afraid to ask for help! Many gardeners want to help, but don’t know how to include themselves. We suggest creating mini job descriptions and handing them out to gardeners who show enthusiasm and dedication. Here are some examples of jobs you might find helpful for your Share the Harvest Team:

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- a. **Planting Coordinator:** Head of plant selection and coordination with food banks as to specific vegetables/fruit they would benefit the most from.
 - b. **Plant Starter:** In charge of starting plants from seed, the most cost-effective option for stocking your Giving Garden.
 - c. **Gleaning Coordinator:** Head of harvesting of the food bank plot as well as helping avoid produce waste from other plots within the garden and neighborhood. This individual should also be in communication with the Gleaning Program, which works to harvest fruit trees throughout Pierce County for food banks. Inform gardeners of how to donate and the time of food bank delivery.
 - d. **Delivery:** Be the liaison between the food bank and the garden to coordinate consistent deliveries from the garden.
 - e. **Outreach:** Help engage and inform gardeners and the neighborhood about the food bank plot and the gleaning program through signage, e-mail/newsletter updates, and other opportunities.
 - f. **Education:** Conduct workshops and trainings on successful planting and harvesting for food bank plots. See if there are any WSU Master Gardeners who work with your garden already or live in your neighborhood who would be interested in helping the garden.
5. **Clear Signage on the plot:** Marketing your Food Bank plot or various “Rows for the Hungry” will be important to boost enthusiasm and support.
- a. Clear signage for your Food Bank Plot so that other gardeners, neighbors, and community members are informed and may become inspired to help or build their own.
 - b. Consider including signage and information about the food program the produce is delivered to. Make sure to include information for volunteering and donation drop-off at the food program.
 - c. Include contact information of the food bank coordinator for gardeners to get in touch with if they have any questions or want to volunteer to help with the Food Bank plot.
 - d. Create signs to serve as gentle reminders to other gardeners to avoid food waste—Signs could say, “Looks like this needs to be picked—Would you like us to harvest this for the Food Bank?” and have tags with a yes/no for gardeners to respond. However, proceed with caution since gardeners are often protective of their produce.

- 6. Consistent Work and Donation Days:** Providing ample and consistent opportunities to help out in the garden will strengthen the community around your giving garden.
- a. **“Glean-Out” days** are when everyone in the garden donates something from their garden plot. Try to plan at least four per-season.
 - b. **Delivery Days** should be as consistent as possible so gardeners know ahead of time to they can donate excess crops to be given to food banks.
 - c. **Work Parties** should always include food bank plots so the whole garden takes more responsibility for these sites. This will be important to spread the word to the rest of the gardeners as to the importance and value of this plot.
 - d. **Pierce County Gleaning Days** should be coordinated with the Pierce County Gleaning program to include harvest from fruit trees in and around the neighborhood.
 - e. **Celebrations** should not be forgotten! Reward yourself for your hard work and make sure participants are appreciated for the time and resources they’ve donated.

Finding Materials on a Budget

Your “Giving Garden” should cost next to nothing to establish if you and your garden mates are resourceful. This list of materials is specifically geared towards “Giving Gardens.” The assumption is that your garden is already established with soil, tools, compost pile/yard waste bins, etc. However, there are certain items that will be essential for this particular type of garden plot.

Seeds/Plant Starts

You will read later in the packet a list of ideal plants for food bank gardens and how to plant these in succession. Seeds and plant starts can be acquired at little to no cost in a number of ways.

-Many nurseries and green-houses try to get rid of their previous season’s seeds in November/December and will often give them to you at little to no cost.

-Our program hosts an annual Seed Swap and potluck in February where you can go home with an assortment of seeds donated by nurseries and local gardeners.

-You can also write to various seed distributors such as Territorial, madaboutgardening.org as well as local green-houses and nurseries to ask for donations for your food bank garden. Many seed distributors have a donation request form available on their website.

Signage

Marketing for your “Food Bank” garden is also especially important. Hardware and paint stores often have cheap or free miscellaneous paint as well as scrap wood pieces. Have signs for your actual garden, signs indicating when and where to drop off produce, and signs asking other gardeners if they want their produce gleaned for the food bank.

Cool storage area

You will need to find a shady space in your garden so gardeners can drop-off their produce to be delivered. A gazebo or tool shed is ideal. However, if your garden lacks a tool-shed or a gazebo, look around on craigslist.org or secondhand stores and online groups for low-cost pop-up canopies or umbrellas you can use in the mean-time.

Washing area

Food banks will be so grateful if the produce you bring them is already washed and free of dirt and debris. This will also help reduce risk of disease and bacteria on your produce. Washing stations are ideal, however many gardens don’t have sinks on site. In that case, we recommend have a three bucket system: one bucket for the first rinse, second bucket for a final clean, and the third bucket for storing. Restaurants often have excess 5-gallon buckets they are happy to get rid of. Please see the “Food Safety in the Garden” section for further information.

Crates/ buckets

Having the proper materials to collect produce will be incredibly helpful to both you and the food bank. The most ideal crates are the hard plastic ones with the lids that snap to keep produce cool and safe. However, stackable milk crates will work and some buckets will, too. Restaurants often have a plethora of buckets and crates which they are willing to donate. Also, ask the food bank you work with or St. Leo’s to see if they have any extra crates. When you bring your produce to the food banks, remember to take your crate back with you.

What to Grow

There are a wide variety of growing and planting styles, and each garden bed is going to look vastly different from everyone else’s. However, there are some particular vegetables and planting techniques that work best for “Giving Gardens” who are donating produce to Food Banks.

Planting in Succession

Ideally, the “Giving Garden” works best if it grows a high volume of a single crop grown in succession. This requires a bit of planning and research of plant seasonality. By planting one crop at a time, it’s much easier to coordinate work days where everything is planted and harvested on the same day. Furthermore, Food Banks are appreciative of produce that is donated in bulk so they can offer consistency to their clients. The table to right contains some ideas of ways to plan your planting season.

Plant/Harvest	Produce	
February/April	Radishes	Chard
April/June	Beets	Turnips
June/September	Squash	Carrots
September/October	Lettuce	Lettuce
October/November	Garlic	Garlic

Easy, Quick, and High-Yielding

Easy to Grow Plants	# of Days to Harvest
Arugula	40-55
Beets	55/75
Chard	55+
Chinese Choy	45-60
Collards	55+
Joi Choi	55
Kale	50+
Lettuce	40-60
Mustard	30-56
Spinach	30-55
Radish	35-45
Tah Tsai	40-55
Turnips	30-65

Steve Solomon, author of Gardening When it Counts and Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades, compiled a list of vegetables by their care needed. You are certainly encouraged to grow whatever vegetables best suit your resources and food bank needs. However, this should be a good guide for a low-maintenance garden bed.

Lower Maintenance: Jerusalem Artichoke, beans, peas, beet, burdock, carrot, chicories, collard greens, endive, escarole, fava beans, most herbs, kale, parsnips, southern peas, arugula, turnips

Higher Maintenance: basil, cilantro, sprouting broccoli, cabbage, cutting celery, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, garlic, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard greens, okra, onions, parsley, potatoes, radish, rutabaga, scallions, spinach, squash, tomatoes, turnips

Culturally Appropriate

Pierce County is one of the most culturally dynamic areas in the country. Connect with your local food bank to see if there is a predominant ethnic group in the neighborhood that would appreciate certain varieties of produce more than others. For example, in the north-end, there is a large Ukrainian and Russian population who are particularly appreciative of vegetables such as cabbage, potatoes, and beets.

Herbs

Fresh herbs are especially appreciated at food banks. Herbs help drastically improve the flavor and richness of food while still keeping it healthy. Herbs such as rosemary, thyme, oregano, and dill can be stored in small baggies and given out at donation sites.

Further Resources

Further Reading:

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