

**HOW TO PREPARE FOR MAINTENANCE MANUAL**

Community gardens, however enthusiastically planned and developed during the first year, often have problems later with their ongoing maintenance. Those persons active in the initial stages can move away or become ill. Then, the group is invariably faced with such questions as, "where is our lease?, how much did we spend last year?, what is left?, who is our insurance agent?" and "whatever happened to our project's history?"

By preparing a Maintenance Manual for your site at its inception and by assigning certain group members specific responsibilities for such areas: yearly lease renewal and insurance, preparing the annual budget, this information can be safely recorded and preserved in one place – the Manual. Thus orderly continuity, regardless of changes in the group's membership, can be maintained.

First, you and your group members should discuss the need for a written record of your project and the functions it should serve. The record that you develop can be as simple or as elaborate as you care to make it. Very complex or overly detailed books rarely get finished and are difficult to update. By covering the essentials – the what, where, why and when of the different components of your projects – you will have a basic document that can always be expanded in the future. Allow adequate time to give necessary attention to detail and to the organization of information. You will find it very helpful to assign different members of your group specific chapters and be sure to give them deadlines.

To begin, you will need to organize the Manual into the following areas: background, site maps, park fixtures or amenities, maintenance calendar, administration, material sources and costs, bibliography.

**Background**

1. Brief history of community organization and events that prompted interest your open-space project and its development.
2. Copies of all relevant documents: lease or license agreement, insurance, and site dimensions, or the raw site and final plan.
3. "Before" pictures in black and white and/or color slides.

**Site Maps**

1. Final plan with usage area overlay on tissue paper.
2. Final plan with landscaping identification – emphasis on acid or other fertilizing and pruning schedule.
3. Final plan of bulb and groundcover for Spring and Summer.
4. Final plan of perennials, rose and herb gardens, if applicable.
5. Final plan of annual beds and cutting or pick-me garden.
6. Final diagram of park fixtures including path, litter cans, compost bins, benches, play or barbecue equipment and birdhouses.

**Maintenance Calendar**

You should divide this section into two areas: first, horticultural; second, park or garden fixtures.

**Horticultural**

1. Plant inventory: date planted, size with space for notes on individual plant's care.
2. General information sheets on soil, fertilization, weeds, bulbs, roses, trees, shrubs, pruning, lawn care, compost, cold frames, perennials, lily pond, herbs, propagation, starting seedlings, winterization, etc. Or preferably you can purchase a few good reference books (see Bibliography).

**Fixtures –**

1. Discuss use and care of tools, fence, all furniture, barbecue, litter cans, lily pond form, cold frame, compost bins, patch, outside garden sidewalk, play equipment and signs.

2. After you have written down all the components of your project and their seasonal maintenance needs, it is a simple matter to divide these chores into the twelve months when either they must be done or when weather permits. Examples of weather deadlines include temperature above 45 degrees for dormant oil spray, applying Thorosel to a wall for a mural, pouring cement, or painting your fence. Tools obviously will rust if left outdoors in the snow all winter. A suggested calendar follows:

*January* – Order catalogs, keep sidewalks and paths free from ice and snow. Repair, sand, repaint all tools, sharpen if necessary, order replacement parts. Make sure sandbox is covered. Purchase Graphite for padlock – do not use oil as it jams the lock. Keep the birdfeeders full and water available. Water evergreens.

*February* – Start seedlings indoors, order fertilizer and seed for the lawn, plan annual flower and vegetable beds, study Spring pruning schedule. Make garden planting lines.

*March* - Prune grapes – read and study about this art. Start seedlings in cold-frame, purchase poly-urethane and brush for benches or, if English bench, turpentine and linseed oil. Get rustoleum paint for wrought iron fence and litter cans, and other metal surfaces. If garden is located in a windy, exposed area, a second spraying of Wilt-proof may be necessary. Put bulb beds signs up; fertilize lawn and re-seed.

*April* – Put up sign with monthly flowering schedule for neighbors to share. Schedule clean-up party. Get more manure for compost system. Check all play equipment for wear and tear, oiling, etc. Re-set paving blocks heaved by frost. Start fertilizing trees and shrubs.

*May* – Remove mulch, prune roses, and other trees and shrubs that must be pruned AFTER Spring flowering. Take pictures of blooming bulb beds so as to have an accurate record. Mark and note all colors of blooming azaleas, rhododendrons; do not attempt to set out annual seedlings until AFTER Mays'. Sow perennials outdoors such as foxglove, hollyhocks, gloriosa daisy. Keep cold-frame watered; begin to harden off seedlings and cuttings. Give cold frame air by opening covers.

*June* - Re-set sundial on June 15<sup>th</sup>; sow annuals; remove seeds from rhododendrons, cultivate and fertilize. Start weeding now before weeds get too large. Set up watering schedule. Plan summer events. Mow lawn.