

Creating a Faith Based Community Garden

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“He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field...” (Matthew 13:31).

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Introduction

Vegetable gardening was one of the major responses to the economic recession of 2008. Tough economic times sent people everywhere scurrying for garden books and packets of seed. In 2009 an estimated 9 million Americans started gardens to supplement their diets and the numbers keep climbing. Even the White House planted an organic garden to supplement the presidential salads.

The momentum continues to grow. Urban agriculture has become an integral part of an increasing number of cities. Community gardens are springing up in church parking lots, housing projects, school playgrounds and in some urban areas, on vacant blocks of land that have stood empty for years.

A community garden is not just a place to grow food. It is a way to express our faith and interact with God and God's good creation.

Cultivation of the land and gardening are woven through most faith traditions. In the Christian Bible, Genesis 2 tells us that God's first act after creation was to plant a garden. The language suggests that God literally knelt in the ground and molded it out of the mud and dirt. Is it significant that God planted a garden for humans to live in—a garden that we were commanded to cultivate—instead of a self-sustained wilderness or a prosperous city? Richard Middleton in his inspirational book [A New Heaven and A New Earth](#), suggests that this is indeed of great significance:

Many recent studies of the garden of Eden in Genesis suggest that this garden, in its relationship to the rest of the earth, functions as an analogue of the holy of holies in the tabernacle or the Jerusalem temple. The garden is the initial core location of God's presence on earth; this is where God's presence is first manifest, both in giving instructions to humanity (2:15-17) and in declaring judgment (3:8-19). The garden is thus the link between earth and heaven, at least at the beginning of human history. The implication is that as the human race faithfully tended this garden or cultivated the earth, the garden would spread, until the entire earthly realm was transformed into a fit habitation for humanity. But it would thereby also become a fit habitation for God.¹

Cultivating the earth until it becomes a fitting habitation for humanity, and for God, is a concept that is central to many faith traditions. It is not surprising therefore that people of faith often discover God connections in the garden as we too get our hands into the dirt.

Perhaps one reason God created human beings to tend the garden is because God knew that it is in the midst of a garden that we connect most intimately to the character and ways of our Creator. Edythe Neumann who helped [Highland Community Church](#) in Abbotsford British Columbia establish a garden commented:

The act of gardening can teach us something about ourselves, about our interdependence with the world of nature, about the relationships between work and creativity, and about how we might begin to discern those spiritual facts that elude us in other aspects of life. Gardening can also be an expression of community and conversation - another way to say that God is with us on the earth, a way to picture God's presence with us - through the gifts of nature and gardening together.²

About five years ago I wrote [To Garden With God](#), a book of reflections and resources for those who want to make connections, between gardening and faith, especially from a Christian perspective. It grew out of my concern that many faith communities started gardens but did not help the members of their communities

¹ J Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and A New Earth*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2014,) 164

² Edythe Neumann: A Spiritual Ethos for Community Gardening at Highland, quoted from an email March 25th, 2010

make the connections between what was happening in the garden and their faith. It has been widely used by those who are creating their own backyard vegetable gardens, as well as community gardens and urban farms.

Since I wrote the book, a rich array of resources that connect gardeners to garden techniques and faith principles for gardening, have proliferated. In response, I started to publish several resource lists on [my blog](#) each year to supplement the resources in [To Garden with God](#). However, numbers of people have suggested that a single publication would assist their efforts.

This booklet was created in response to this need and like the resource lists that are updated yearly on [the blog](#), it will be updated each year to reflect the new resources and techniques available to help us. Obviously it is not a comprehensive list. If you know of other resources that you feel should be added please [send us an email](#).

Why Start A Faith Based Community Garden?

There are many reasons to start a faith-based community garden. The commonest motivation is the opportunity to help feed the hungry. Others are concerned for their young and want to provide locally grown organic food and enable them to develop healthy eating habits. Still others are motivated by the desire to heal our earth or want to provide a beautiful green space in which their congregations and neighbors can enjoy God's good creation.

With this growing interest especially amongst faith communities, it seems a perfect time not just to get our hands dirty but to learn more about God in the process. Unfortunately few of the "community" gardens I have visited encourage true community. Sometimes the plots are even surrounded by fences that say in no uncertain terms, "This is mine!" Often the work for tending the plots falls to one or two people who often religiously tend everyone else's space. Sometimes the produce goes bad because people are too busy to harvest it.

Lets Get Organized



Jeff Littleton in the greenhouse at Five Loaves Farm

Church based community gardens require a lot of planning. Bring together a small group of passionate individuals who really want to see this happen. Before getting into discussions about garden logistics, talk about why you feel this is important as a church activity. What are the benefits you hope the congregation and the neighborhood will gain? How will it help people connect more intimately to each other and to God? What are the values and characteristics of God's kingdom that this garden could portray?

Jeff Littleton, who helped establish [Five Loaves Farm](#) which is developing a network of community gardens on church properties in Lynden Washington told me:

*The garden teaches at least two key messages beyond that of vegetables or lady bugs. One is for our church: to share, to cooperate with, to relax, to enjoy each and everybody whatever faith or worldview. The other is for our community: their capturing that these "church people" can be trusted, they do live out what they say, they love us... and 'I want to know why.' Somehow, some way this joint experience will transform lives and transform communities under God's care."*³

For me personally, the garden is a constant unfolding of new revelations about God. Fostering community and generosity are probably the most important kingdom values I have learned from involvement in community gardens.

There are several must-do requirements for a faith-based community garden:

³ Quoted from an email sent by Jeff Littleton, March 25, 2010

Create community.



It takes a community to tend the apple trees

Working together as a church community provides a wonderful sense of accomplishment and offers tremendous opportunity to strengthen ties across race, generations and social strata as young and old, rich and poor, black and white work side by side, weeding, watering and planting. You may even like to designate a special area as a children's garden where children are allowed to choose what grows and when it is harvested.

One church I heard of invited the congregation out into the garden once a month after the morning series to help weed and tend the crops. As produce matured they were invited to take it home. That truly is a community garden.

At our small intentional community in Seattle, called the Mustard Seed House, we grow about 50% of our own vegetables. From the time she was five, Catie Rosario Kilmer, not only helped plan the garden, she was also my best year round helper. She reminded me of when we needed to plant, and made sure I diligently followed the garden plan we had put together. When she learned to write, she practiced her newly developed skills making markers for our tomato seedlings.

For us at the Mustard Seed House, inviting others to our monthly garden days has increased the feel of community and extended it to a broader community as well. Sometimes we can also create a deeper sense of community with our neighbours just by being out in the front yard. When a church plants a garden in its front yard and the neighbours walk past it makes a statement about the congregation's concern for their community too.



Catie Rosario Cruz with her tomato markers

Create a sacred space.

I think that every faith based community garden needs a sacred space and how to incorporate this into your garden should be an essential part of this initial discussion.

At the least this should be a place that invites us to sit and enjoy the beauty of God's creation. I often write about this on my blog and you might like to check out the post [Every Garden Needs a Sacred Space](#).

Sacred spaces should stir all our senses, and there is no better place to imagine how this could be accomplished than in the garden. The Irish poet and mystic John O'Donohue said that our senses are the gateway to the soul. It's true. A beautiful flower not only delights our eyes but also touches something inside our hearts. The fragrance of a rose transports us to a place of divine encounter. Even weeding becomes a contemplative act that invites us to touch, smell and enjoy.

You can read more about this in my blog post [Creating a Sacred Space - Stir the Senses](#).



Walking the labyrinth

Depending on the size of the garden, places for people to sit and meditate, prayer walks, community gathering spaces, even the inclusion of a labyrinth are all possible ways to strengthen peoples' faith beyond the activities associated with food production. Early monastic communities created walled gardens that were rich with biblical imagery, often centered around an apple tree, representing both the tree of Life in Genesis and the Cross of Christ.

Even some secular community gardens recognize the need for a place to reflect, meditate and rest. At the pinnacle of the small hill on which Northgate community garden in Seattle is situated, the organizers created a labyrinth. Others have incorporated gathering places and secluded places for reflection.

Establishing these connections between our faith and the garden are essential. I am concerned that this faith based community garden movement may not be sustainable unless we learn how to connect our new found passions to our understanding of God and God's world.

Create a Plan

One of the important discussions everyone planning a garden should have is what to grow and where to grow it. Important parts of this discussion include:

- How will we use it?
- When will we need it?
- Who will look after it?

As we plan our gardens it is important to remember that there is nothing more frustrating than having a garden full of produce no one likes, or that goes bad because everyone is away on vacation when it matures.

There are some excellent planning tools available on the internet.

[Gardener's Supply Kitchen Garden Planning](#) is a great free tool for planning a garden row or bed based on the square foot garden method. I used it for many years though lately have upgraded to the [Mother Earth News Garden Planner](#). It costs \$25/year but I think the information it provides makes it well worth the investment.

[Smart gardener](#) is another site with a free plan and lots of good information

Provide opportunities to share.



The garden has taught me much about the economic views of our God who provides abundantly far more than we can ever use on our own. This abundance is meant to be shared – with the marginalized in gifts to food banks and community kitchens as well as with our friends and neighbours in harvest celebrations.

So make sure that you plan at least one garden party this year where the garden produce has pride of place in the food on the table.

Recruiting Help

Once the basic garden plan has been moved through the appropriate church organizational process, it is usually fairly easy to recruit additional help, money and in-kind donations. Every Sunday after the 10:30 am service parishioners at St Mary's in Cadillac, Michigan, take turns weeding and tending the community garden⁴. Other churches have recruited their youth groups and retirees as volunteers or asked for donations like soil and building materials from businesses owned by church members. Some create earth keeping groups to take responsibility for the garden.

Those outside the church may be interested in being involved too. Our Mustard Seed House community is often joined on garden days by people who are apartment dwellers that do not have space for gardens, as well as those who are keen on gardening and hope to pick up some advice from the “experts”. [Sonlight Community Christian Reformed Church](#), also in Lynden, went door to door asking neighbors if they would like to participate. The Pumpkin Patch Community Garden at Millwood Presbyterian Church in Spokane Washington intentionally used Facebook and Twitter to help get the word out and had a Twitter inspired flash

⁴ Pat McCaughan, *Urban farming, edible landscaping helps offset rising prices*, Episcopal News June 09, 2008

mob at their first big work day. Or you might like to contact other environmental organizations that work in the area and may be interested in partnering with your efforts. Third Christian Reformed Church in Lynden partnered with [AROCHA](#), to develop a show garden that grows new and different varieties, provide teaching to help establish other community gardens, and hand out food to neighbors.

Just Garden, a program of [Seattle Tilith](#) provides many opportunities each year for faith based organizations to build gardens on their own properties but also to volunteer to help other communities develop gardens. As part of their program they have recently established a [Food and Faith Initiative](#) to resource faith based organizations and help them plan, build and use their gardens effectively



Helpers in the Mustard Seed House garden

You may also like to approach your local Master Gardener's Association. These exist in many countries including [United States](#); [Canada](#) and [United Kingdom](#). In Australia [Gardening Australia](#) provides similar resources, who are usually more than willing to provide expert advice if not labour and skills. Local high school or community college students may also be interested in volunteering as a way to earn their required Service Learning credits.

Sharing the Produce



Another important discussion for your planning group concerns the use of garden produce. Many churches designate all or part of their harvest to local food banks and other organizations that feed the marginalized. For example, Grace Church in Old Saybrook, CT gardens a quarter acre of land and donates its produce to the local [Shoreline Soup Kitchens and Pantries](#) helping to feed 2,000 needy families each month. Last year the garden provided over 20,000 lbs of produce for the season. Other

churches distribute the food amongst church members or invite neighbors to freely harvest from the garden encouraging a sense of community that goes far beyond the church congregation.

Faith based gardens and farms can also form the basis for other faith based related activities. Classes in gardening, cooking and preserving can arise out of garden related activities. Other classes on health and nutrition, healing the earth and other environmental issues and even spiritual formation can have their origins in such endeavors.

My own venture into seminars on [The Spirituality of Gardening](#) grew out of constant prodding from friends who wanted to learn more about not just how to grow vegetables but also about how to connect their experiences to their faith.

Faith based community gardens, like any community project are not without their challenges. People are concerned about safety and liability issues, whether the project is sustainable for the long run, who will do the weeding and harvesting, where the water and electricity will come from. Even what to do with the sometimes overwhelming abundance that explodes over the summer can be a problem. All of these are issues that need to be discussed and planned for.

No matter how many challenges there are, nothing can take away from the deep satisfaction of getting one's hands into the earth, digging, planting and harvesting the bounty of God's good creation. Nor can they detract from the joy that engulfs us as we experience the awe inspiring generosity of a God who wants to provide abundantly for all of humankind. The garden is a place of healing, of wholeness and of deeply spiritual encounters where God restores our bodies and our spirits in a way that is truly miraculous.

[Montgomery Victory Gardens](#) in Silver Spring, MD offers the following great advice for anyone contemplating starting a faith based community garden:

Start with a small group of committed individuals, but work hard to involve the entire congregation in some way; look for ways to make the process educational, and to make connections to your faith tradition; enlist people, especially young people from the community outside the congregation; start small and do realistic planning, especially when it comes to people's crops in the beginning; keep a garden log and update the congregation throughout the process; expect surprises and have fun.

Practicing our Faith Through Gardening.

One of the critical components of community gardens is--you may have guessed it--community! There are many different communities of gardeners out there, many of them faith based, who have a wealth of knowledge to share, and connecting with these resources and people can be not only inspiring, but also provide information that will make your garden more fruitful in the long run!

All of this has meant I am doing a lot of reflecting on creating a faith-based community garden. There are some excellent websites and articles out there to help with this. I update the list on my blog, [GodSpace](#) each year.

A growing number of community farms from a broad array of faith traditions have sprung up in the last few years. Many of them live out the principles of their faith in community with others, not just selling food but caring for creation and their neighbours. They are great places to visit and to learn. Here is a sampling:

Christians Practicing Their Faith

Over the last few years there has been an explosion of church based organizations creating gardens. Food and Faith Initiatives have sprung up across the United States and Canada. Divinity schools like [Wake Forrest School of Divinity](#) and Union Theological Seminary have started programs like [the Edible Churchyard](#) to equip future and existing religious leaders with the knowledge, skills, and pastoral habits necessary to lead their congregations and religious communities around food issues.

I have had the privilege to be a part of the steering committee for the [Seattle based Food and Faith Initiative](#) run by the [Just Garden project](#) of Seattle Tilth. I know of at least 80 churches in the Seattle area that have started gardens, many of them to help provide for congregational meetings or their associated ministries to the homeless or disadvantaged families in the area. [St Luke's Ballard](#), [St Columba's Kent](#), [Epiphany Episcopal](#), and [St James Cathedral](#) are but a few of these.

There are some great associated ministries to help community gardens share their produce. [Lettuce Links](#) creates access to fresh produce, seed and gardens for low income families. They co-ordinate 64 P-patches around Seattle, [harvest backyard fruit](#) and help distribute it to food banks. Check out their great resource on [giving gardens](#).

[Earth Ministry](#), a Seattle based ministry works to educate individuals and congregations about lifestyle change and the need for environmental advocacy.

[Koinonia Farms](#) in Georgia, is one of the oldest Christian community farms in the United States I know of. It started in 1942. Since then it has given birth to Habitat for Humanity, Jubilee Partners, Prison Jail Project, Fuller Center for Housing and other ministries. It still grows pecans and peanuts, welcomes visitors, and lives the "demonstration plot for the Kingdom of God."

[Kanaan](#) community farm was started by the [Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary](#) outside Darmstadt Germany, after World War II in response to a call for repentance and reconciliation. The cultivation of the land and a sharing of its bounty have become an important part of the ministry.

[Anathoth Community Garden & Farm](#) in North Carolina is cultivating peace by using good food and regenerative agriculture to connect people with their neighbors, the land, and God.

[Abundant Table](#) is an Episcopal CSA farm, farm-church and farm-based education center in Santa Paula, CA.

[Eighth Day Farm](#) in Michigan "uses our urban acres as a classroom to cultivate healthy and sustainable communities locally and globally."

[Faith Hope and Love](#) is an inspiring ministry/garden in Indianapolis that is well worth learning about.

A more extensive list of Christian faith based farms in the U.S. can be found [here](#).

Muslims Practicing Their Faith

Zaid and Haifa Kurdieh are [organic farmers](#) in Upstate New York who have worked to create a community supported by their farm and other small businesses. They sell produce at farmers' markets and also run a CSA from their farm. Their Muslim faith and Islamic laws guide food production and consumption as [a recent article](#) in *Gastronomica* explains.

The Qur'an categorically divides human action into acts that are either permissible (halal) or forbidden (haram), with some gray areas in between. At its most basic level, Islam decrees that all foods are permitted for human consumption except for those identified by the Qur'an as haram—namely, pork products, alcohol, illicit drugs, flowing (excess) or congealed blood, carnivorous animals with fangs, birds of prey, and the meat of animals and birds that have not been ritually slaughtered. The Kurdiehs believe that these tenets also encourage responsible steward-ship of the land and animals. Their farming techniques, carried out with considerable effort and soul-searching, are a logical extension of these precepts.

There is an additional, more-complicated Islamic principle that the Kurdiehs and many other devoted Muslims strive to follow. It is called tayyib, a word that translates as “good” or “pure.”

In order for a particular food to be considered tayyib, it must be created in a wholesome manner. Although the concept of tayyib far predates the emergence of industrialized agriculture and factory farms, it is clearly relevant to the present realities of the mainstream American food industry. According to Zaid, produce that has been sprayed with pesticides, for example, or harvested by poorly paid migrant workers, would not be tayyib. Neither would fast-food cheeseburgers or sodas filled with high-fructose corn syrup and preservatives.

Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa, who farm some of the least fertile land on the continent, have developed a training manual [The Islamic Farming toolkit](#), to encourage more sustainable farming practices among millions of African Muslims facing a threat to their food security from climate change. It is well worth reading.

Jews Practicing Their Faith

The [Jewish Community Gardening Collective](#) is a project of the Farm at Pearlstone aimed at bringing together and facilitating the creation of Jewish community gardens around Baltimore. They have published a very helpful guide [Jewish Gardening Resource Manual](#), which explains:

Gardening is a distinctly Jewish act. The echoes of God's command to Adam (Gen. 2:15) “V'shomrah u'lovdab” (to guard/till and work/tend) resound through the generations as a call to remember that adam is inextricably linked to adamah. As Jews, we strive to cultivate an awareness and ultimately a practice that recognizes that “the land is God's; [we are but] strangers and sojourners with God” (Leviticus 25:23). Through gardening, we learn to care for God's planet, to recognize that Creation is a gift to be blessed and shared. Our tradition provides ritual, blessings, liturgy, holidays, and mitzvot that connect us with the sacred rhythms of Creation and its Author.

Jewish community gardening is the marriage of the universal and unique aspects of tending a piece of land. A garden is a gathering-place, a home for community-building, and an expression of our deepest values. A Jewish community garden is a hands-on classroom to teach about Judaism's relationship to Creation. The education may consist of lessons on tzedakah, brachot, t'filah, bal tashchit, or the agricultural roots of the Hebrew calendar. A Jewish community garden is a laboratory, an experimental, experiential testing ground for Jewish engagement, identity building, and relationship forming. Reach out to your neighbor, your students, your family, and dig deeply, for surely you will uncover hidden treasures.

I also recently came across this [Jewish Children's Garden Curriculum](#) developed by the staff of Shalom Children's Center at the Asheville Jewish Community Center. The authors explain:

For young children, the very hands-on activity of gardening is one way to make the quite abstract concepts of the Torah, holidays, and the calendar come alive. Showing them a sheaf of wheat or an etrog⁵, or even growing these in your school garden, will tangibly connect them to Passover and Sukkot.

The curriculum is rich with ideas and projects for children of all faith traditions.

There are a number of Jewish communities across the United States that grow gardens. A few examples include:

[Ekar: Community Urban Farm and Garden](#) in Denver Colorado.

[The Jewish Farm School](#) which teaches about contemporary food and environmental issues through innovative trainings and skill-based Jewish agricultural education.

[Eden Village Camp](#) in New York State, is a living model of a thriving, inspired, sustainable Jewish community, grounded in social responsibility and vibrant spiritual life.

Buddhists and Gardening

The first book I read on spirituality and gardening that inspired me was *Gardening at Dragon's Gate* by Wendy Johnson, who has meditated and gardened for more than 30 years at the Green Gulch Farm Zen Center, located near Muir Beach, California. In addition to its Zen training program, the center also manages an organic farm and gardens. Formal Zen meditation and training is the foundation of community life at Green Gulch Farm, and is an integral part of the Farm and Garden Apprenticeship Programs.

Wendy Johnson explains:

In some many ways meditation practice is like gardening. Every garden comes alive in the mind of the gardener. By investigating your land, and the plants you love and know so well in your garden, you come to know the heart and mind of your place, and your own heart and mind as well. When you select your favourite tools and begin to shape the ground, in this digging and cultivating, the garden shapes you. Eventually, you free your heart and mind from what you think you know and prefer, and in this work you also free the true heart and mind of your garden. (63)

[This video](#) on how to create a Zen style meditation garden is also very interesting, not just for an insight into Zen gardens but for any of us who love creating meditation spaces in our gardens.

⁵ The etrog, a fruit used in the rituals of the festival of Sukkot, is a medium-sized citrus fruit, with a color, scent and taste similar to a lemon. It is also known in English as the citron.

Gardening with Kids



The research is in, gardening, and interacting with nature is good for our health and well being, especially for that of our kids. [Living near nature](#) dramatically impacts our health and interaction with nature [decreases the health gap](#) between rich and poor. Contact with nature helps children to develop cognitive, emotional, and behavioral connections to their nearby social and biophysical environments. Nature experiences are important for encouraging imagination and creativity, cognitive and intellectual development, and social relationships. ([Read the article](#)) Kids in particular who suffer from [nature deficit disorder](#) and attention deficit disorder can have their symptoms alleviated by spending more time outdoors.

There is also [evidence](#) that exposure to soil bacteria could improve our health by boosting our immune system. And believe it or not even [Sniffing Compost Makes You Happy – Literally](#)

Other studies suggest that just looking at nature improves our health and reduces the time it takes to recover from surgery. So imagine what a difference a whole afternoon outside can do.

Getting our kids involved in the garden can have even more benefits. In her article [Go Outside and Play: Four Reasons Why Exposure to Nature is Essential To a Child's Wellbeing](#), Suzy DeYoung talks about the

amazing health benefits of getting kids outside. [According to the EPA](#) indoor air pollution is the US's number one environmental health concern. They encourage kids to get outside and play but I think that working in the garden can be even more beneficial.

So lets get our kids outside. Here are some resources to help:

From organic gardening:

[Tips for starting a school garden.](#)
[Gardening with kids](#)

The [Permaculture Research Institute](#) has a great 4 part series on “Getting Kids into Gardening”:

- [Creating a Butterfly Garden](#)
- [Creating a pizza garden](#)
- [Creating a Resilience Garden](#)
- [Growing Creativity in the Garden](#)

Great curriculum for children and gardening from Presbyterian Church

- [Practice just eating](#)

From National Gardening association

- [Kid's gardening](#)

From [Container Gardening](#) for kids

- [Kids Gardening](#) and “helping young minds grow.”
- [Six Indoor container gardens kids will love](#)

Some Other Ideas for Kids garden crafts

[Painted garden sticks](#)

[Recycled hubcap becomes a mosaic garden](#)

Networking Tools and Tips

Montgomery Victory Gardens has [Tips for Starting a Faith Based Community Garden](#) and links to local food resources and information and provides opportunities for further food education and policy engagement.

A Rocha Canada, a Christian based creation care organization has [free resources](#) for community organizers, churches, and teachers to help facilitate the organization, development and maintenance, community garden.

A planning and resource guide “[Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina: Growing Communities Through Gardens](#)” is available from North Carolina State University for anyone who is considering starting a community garden. This is not specifically for faith based groups but is a great resource.

[Let’s Move!](#) is a blog that was launched by [Michelle Obama](#) as an initiative to help communities begin gardens to raise a next generation of healthy kids. It provides some excellent resources including [this toolkit](#) which contains good basic information on community gardening.

The US Department of Agriculture also has some helpful resources available including this [start up community garden guide](#).

The University of Missouri has an excellent resource in this [Community Gardening Toolkit](#).

Organic Garden planning

[Organic Gardening 101](#) offers a great introduction to organic gardening with a number of articles to read on healthy soil, healthy plants, vegetable gardening, city gardening garden planning, and much more.

[Mother Earth News](#) provides a wealth of information about [organic gardening](#), [homesteading and livestock](#) and much more.

They also provide a wealth of information on garden planning videos available through [Groworganic.com](#)’s YouTube [channel](#). Here are my suggestions on which ones to watch:

How to Plan a Vegetable Garden. Follow these step by step process to create the perfect plan for your garden. [Watch the video here >>](#)

The Best Vegetables for Your Garden: Choosing which vegetables to grow in your garden can be tricky with many different crops and varieties available. Here's a simple 3-step process to help you choose. [Watch the video here >>](#)

3 Common Garden Planning Mistakes: When planning your garden it's easy to ignore problems that can occur when plants are in the ground. Here are some simple solutions to common mistakes gardeners often make. [Watch the video here >>](#)

And if you get itchy fingers in the cold winter months and want to do some garden planning:

Crop Rotation Made Simple: Crop rotation is key to a successful vegetable garden after the first year but can be difficult to organize. Follow our step-by-step approach to make the process easy. [Watch the video here >>](#)

Grow More With Less Effort: With simple and well-defined instructions, Square Foot Gardening is a great way to start growing your own food quickly and with excellent results. [Watch the video here >>](#)

Using Containers in Your Garden: Growing in containers is different to traditional gardening, so it's important to understand the essential steps required for success. [Watch the video here >>](#)

Permaculture

I love the [concept of permaculture](#) and hope that we will be able to implement many of its principles in our garden at the [Mustard Seed Village](#).

Central to permaculture are the **three ethics**: care for the earth, care for people, and fair share. They form the foundation for permaculture design and are also found in most traditional societies. Here are the 12 principles of permaculture as described by David Holmgren.

1. **Observe and Interact** – “Beauty is in the mind of the beholder” By taking the time to engage with nature we can design solutions that suit our particular situation.
2. **Catch and Store Energy** – “Make hay while the sun shines” By developing systems that collect resources when they are abundant, we can use them in times of need.
3. **Obtain a yield** – “You can’t work on an empty stomach” Ensure that you are getting truly useful rewards as part of the working you are doing.
4. **Apply Self Regulation and Accept Feedback** – “The sins of the fathers are visited on the children of the seventh generation” We need to discourage inappropriate activity to ensure that systems can continue to function well. Negative feedback is often slow to emerge.
5. **Use and Value Renewable Resources and Services** – “Let nature take its course” Make the best use of nature’s abundance to reduce our consumptive behavior and dependence on non-renewable resources.
6. **Produce No Waste** – “Waste not, want not” or “A stitch in time saves nine” By valuing and making use of all the resources that are available to us, nothing goes to waste.
7. **Design From Patterns to Details** – “Can’t see the forest for the trees” By stepping back, we can observe patterns in nature and society. These can form the backbone of our designs, with the details filled in as we go.
8. **Integrate Rather Than Segregate** – “Many hands make light work” By putting the right things in the right place, relationships develop between those things and they work together to support each other.
9. **Use Small and Slow Solutions** – “Slow and steady wins the race” or “The bigger they are, the harder they fall” Small and slow systems are easier to maintain than big ones, making better use of local resources and produce more sustainable outcomes.
10. **Use and Value Diversity** – “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket” Diversity reduces vulnerability to a variety of threats and takes advantage of the unique nature of the environment in which it resides.

11. Use Edges and Value the Marginal – “Don’t think you are on the right track just because it’s a well-beaten path” The interface between things is where the most interesting events take place. These are often the most valuable, diverse and productive elements in the system.

12. Creatively Use and Respond to Change – “Vision is not seeing things as they are but as they will be” We can have a positive impact on inevitable change by carefully observing and then intervening at the right time.

For more information on the principles of permaculture and about David Hologram visit permacultureprinciples.com

Harry Wyman from the [Peace Tree Community](#) in Perth, Australia has started a global permaculture network called the [Worldwide Permaculture Network](#). This seeks to connect permaculture practitioners by providing a database to share ideas and advertise projects.

The [Permaculture Research Institute](#) is a great resource that provides forums, courses, information, and news about

A free permaculture course that looks interesting can be found [here](#).

U.S. National and Regional Networks.

For those living in the Pacific NW, [Seattle Tilth](#) is a must contact organization. Their educational classes are superb. And if you are wanting to start a subsidized garden for communities at risk, the Just Garden Project in Seattle is the place to begin. The Seattle Tilth [garden hotline](#) is also an excellent resource, there to answer your questions, and it is not just for those of us who live in this part of the world. Their advice and expertise can help visitors from around the world.

Seattle Public Utilities’ [Natural Lawn and Garden Care](#) website provides a variety of downloadable resources, including:

- [Smart Watering](#),
- [Rainwater Harvesting](#),
- [Growing Healthy Soil](#),
- [Natural Pest Weed and Disease Control](#).

[The American Community Garden Association](#) provides a wealth of resources and is an entrance into a vast network of community gardeners.

The [American Horticultural Society](#) provides many resources, programs, and events by region.

For those interested in food, faith, and gardening in the Twin Cities (Minnesota, US), visit the Facebook page created by the [Faith-based Edible Gardening Collaborative](#).

[City Farmer](#) has a veritable treasure trove of information on all manner of urban agriculture information.

[Greenfaith](#) is an interfaith coalition for the environment that was founded in 1992. It works with houses of worship, religious schools and people of all faiths to help them become better environmental stewards. They provide an excellent booklet [Repairing Eden](#) available for download and resources for various faith traditions to [plan green worship around](#).

And a few U.S. based blogs from a variety of faith perspectives:

On my own blog [Godspace](#) I frequently reflect on the spiritual lessons I learn in my garden.

My colleague Andy Wade also posts regularly on the lessons he is learning from the garden on the [MSA blog](#). I particularly love what he has done [in his own garden](#) to create a sense of the sacredness of God.

[Sustainable traditions](#) posts some excellent articles on Christian faith and gardening/environmentalism.

[churchworks.com](#) has some useful lists of books, blogs and websites on faith and gardening/environmentalism to visit.

[What's Up with Wheat](#) by Episcopal priest Elizabeth DeRuff.

[Presbyterian Food & Faith Blog](#) is a blog of the Presbyterian Hunger Program.

[My sacred garden](#) has some great articles on faith and gardening including suggested designs and sacred spaces to incorporate.

[Fran Sorin](#) also has some very interesting articles on gardening.

[Serenity in the Garden](#) is another excellent site with some great reflections on spirituality and gardening.

[Red dirt rambling](#) is a site I discovered recently but have not had much opportunity to explore.

[Northwest Edible Life](#) written by a very funny woman named Erica who lives in Edmonds WA.

In Canada.

[The Vancouver Community Agriculture Network](#) is an excellent community garden manual available on their website. It is a good, thorough guide to starting and running a community garden.

[The City of Vancouver Community Services Social Planning Department](#) has a website with an extensive list of resources, links, etc. for community gardening.

Alternatives feeding citizenship has several worthwhile pdfs that you can download:

- [A Guide to Setting Up Your Own Rooftop Garden](#)
- [Roots Around the World](#)
- [Ready to Grow for the Future](#)

To learn about A Rocha's Community Garden Network (based out of BC, Canada), click [here](#).

In the U.K

The [BBC garden site](#) is a good place to start with an interactive map of how to find a community garden near you as well as advice on how to get started, garden with kids and much more.

[Garden organic](#) also has information specific to the U.K

And of course we cannot forget the [Royal Horticultural Society](#)

[Grow Zones](#) is a community growing resource started by Earth Abbey in the UK that brings people together locally to help one another grow fruit and vegetables in their own gardens. Participants are supported by the Grow Zones Kit, which is designed to make the prospect of growing fruit and vegetables a less burdensome, more enjoyable prospect and overcome the obstacles to 'growing your own.'

In Australia

[Gardening Australia](#) is the best place to start with lots of good help specific to the country.

[Sustainable Gardening Australia](#) is another great site that I could spend hours exploring and I don't even live in Australia any more.

And here is a list of the [5 most popular gardening blogs](#) in Australia

My Favourite Urban Farming Websites

I recently posted a link on my blog to an inspiring article called "[An Urban Farm in Portland Feeds Local Neighbourhood with Help from the Disabled.](#)" It comes from one of my favourite urban farm sites, City Farmer News. [City Farmer News](#) really is a site worth spending some time on. It is based in Vancouver but shares stories from all round the world.

Here are some other great sites to check out:

[Growing Cities](#) provides a great networking hub for the urban farming movement in the US. In addition to listing urban farms by city, it also features prototypes of new ways of growing food and includes a list of organizations and businesses that support the urban food movement. There is also a blog which includes stories from all over the world.

[Eagle Street Rooftop Farm](#). I love this inspiring example of creativity rooftop farming on the top of an old bagel factor in Brooklyn, NY!

[Urban Beekeeping](#) is a great site for those keen to make their own honey by raising healthy bees and resilient communities.

[Vertical Veg](#) is a great site out of the UK for those who need to grow "up" rather than "out" due to space limitations. Includes "free tips for growing (lots of!) food in containers."

[Backyard Chickens.com](#) is a great site for those wanting to join the current craze for keeping chickens.

Obviously there are many other great sites out there with great resources for the urban farmer. What are your favourites? Please do [email us](#) and let us know so that we can continue to provide the best resources for faith based community gardens.

What Seeds Will You Grow?



This is a great time to curl up by the fire and drool over all those wonderful photos in the seed catalogues that in your saner moments you know won't grow in your climate zone but which you just can't resist when it is too cold to grow anything. This year I have done some research on who owns our seed companies and which we can trust to have organic non GM seed.

Unfortunately I discovered recently that many of my favourite seed companies are owned by Monsanto or Mars. This has meant

[Seeds of Change](#) – I love their seeds but someone told me recently that they are owned by [MARS](#) incorporated, one of the largest food conglomerates in the world. So

though Seeds of Change itself provides ethical seed, non GM products, its parent company has a different philosophy. As Tim Stanton who alerted me to this commented: They present themselves as a warm, inviting, environmentally conscious company, but Seeds of Change has a money-hungry corporate core. Tim goes on to say:

Even though Seeds of Change signed the safe seeds pledge (pledging to not sell genetically modified seed), Mars. Inc. spent almost 400k to defeat Prop 37 (which would have required the simple labeling of GM food so PEOPLE could make informed choices). Seeds of Change had been a New Mexico based company since the beginning (since it started out small and independent) but Mars uprooted it from original place of operations in New Mexico and moved it to Los Angeles, leaving almost their entire faithful New Mexico crew jobless. They even abandoned their warehouse cats in the process -

So if you want to get away from any seed company that is associated with Monsanto, [here is a very helpful list](#) that documents some of the companies owned by Monsanto who may be using GM food. Unfortunately I notice some of my other favourites (including ones listed above) are on the list. It also contains a list of those that sell safe seed even though they have not signed the [safe seed pledge](#).

So you may also want to check out this link to where you can research seed companies that have signed the Safe Seed Pledge,

Look for heritage seeds and organic seeds:

There are a growing number of organizations that specialize in heirloom and organic seeds. Here are a few that I have used and would recommend.

[Seed Savers Exchange](#)

[Bountiful Gardens](#)

[Peaceful Valley Farm Supply](#)

[Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds](#)

For more possibilities check out [this list](#) from Treehugger.com which was put together from reader suggestions.

Look for local companies:

The list of seed companies that have signed the safe seed pledge is a good place to start when looking for locally produced seeds.

Here in the Pacific N.W. my favorites are:

[Territorial Seeds](#)

[Raintree Nursery](#)

[Irish Eyes Nursery.](#)

[High Mowing Seeds](#)

I also cannot resist a couple of big company catalogues like the English classic [Thompson and Morgan](#) and [Burpee](#) which have products I can't seem to find anywhere else.

My favourite Books on spirituality and gardening

- Christine Sine, [To Garden with God](#), (Mustard Seed Associates, 2010). A book of spiritual reflection, recipes and garden advice. Ideal for small groups and those starting community gardens.
- Norman Wirzba, [Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating](#), (Cambridge University Press, 2011) This is my favourite book on theology and eating.
- ed. Michael Schut with Wendell Berry, Thomas Moore, Elizabeth Johnson, John Robbins & others, [Food & Faith: Justice, Joy and Daily Bread](#) (Morehouse Publishing, 2009)
- Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba, [Making Peace with the Land: God's Call to Reconcile with Creation](#) (Intervarsity Press, 2012). A wonderful easy to read introduction to a Christian view of caring for creation.
- [Planted: A Story of Creation, Calling and Community](#) by Leah Kostamo (Wipf and Stock, 2013) a delightful book about Leah's history with A Rocha.
- James Jones, [Jesus and the Earth](#) (SPCK, 2003). This pocket sized book by the Bishop of Liverpool is a beautiful statement of a theology of stewardship of the earth.
- L. Shannon Jung, [Sharing Food: Christian Practices for Enjoyment](#) (Fortress Press, 2006)
- Wendell Berry, [The art of the commonplace: The agrarian essays of Wendell Berry](#) (Counterpoint 2003)
- Craig Goodwin: [Year of Plenty](#) (Sparkhouse Press, 2011) An inspirational account of Craig and his family's endeavour to live locally for a year.
- Brother Victor-Antoine d'Avila-Latourrette, [A Monastic Year: reflections From Monastery](#). (Taylor Trade Publishing 1996) Reflections on the garden year in a monastic setting.
- Vigen Guroian: [Inheriting Paradise: Meditations on Gardening](#) (Eerdmans 1999) Theologian and Armenian Christian Vigen Guroian reflects on the garden.
- Wendy Johnson: [Gardening at the Dragon's Gate: At Work in the Wild and Cultivated World](#), (Bantam, 2008) Delightful reflections, garden wisdom and inspiration from Zen Buddhist Wendy Johnson.
- Michael Pollan, [The Omnivore's Dilemma](#) (Penguin, 2007). This is the "must read" book in thinking about where our food comes from.
- Barbara Kingsolver, [Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life](#) (HarperCollins, 2008). A marvelous writer moves from Arizona to Southwest Virginia and attempts to grow or buy food locally for a year. I loved this book and just wish she had extended her experiment beyond a year.
- HRH The Prince of Wales, [Harmony: A New Way of Looking at our World](#). This is a fascinating book linking environmental concerns with natural patterns found in nature.
- Michael J. Caduto, [Everyday Herbs in Spiritual Life: A Guide to Many Practices](#) (Skylight Paths Publishing, 2007) A fun, informative and engaging guide with a history of religious and spiritual use of herbs in many faith traditions and creative ideas on how to use herbs for spiritual growth.
- **There is also [a great list of books on food and faith](#) from our friends at Hearts and Minds books, including my favorites: [Making Peace with the Land: God's Call to Reconcile with Creation](#) by Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba and [A Year of Plenty](#) by Craig Goodwin.**

Prayers for the Garden

Christian Prayers

God bless this garden,
Through which your glory shines,
May we see in its beauty the wonder of your love.

God bless the soil,
Rich and teeming with life,
May we see in its fertility the promise of new creation.

God bless our toil,
As we dig deep to turn the soil,
May we see in our labour your call to be good stewards.

God bless each seed,
That takes root and grows,
May we see in their flourishing the hope of transformation.

God bless the rains,
That water our efforts to bring forth life,
May we see in their constancy God's faithful care.

God bless the harvest,
Abundant and bountiful in season,
May we see in God's generosity our need to share.

God bless this garden,
As you bless all creation with your love,
**May we see in its glory your awesome majesty,
Amen.**

On the Godspace blog you may also like to check out:

- [A Liturgy for Celebration of Creation](#)
- [Earth Day Liturgy](#)

Creator God, You who are Holy Trinity,
By your spoken Word you created all that is seen and unseen.
That Word is Jesus Christ, through whom and for whom you created this and all worlds.
We thank you for making creation astounding with complexity and variety
And for calling it very good.

We praise you for entrusting us with so great a responsibility, that of caring for creation.
We acknowledge our dependence on your world—
The air we breathe
The water we drink
The food we eat.

We confess our polluting influence we so often have on your world—
The air we breathe

The water we drink
The land we farm.

Open our eyes, O gracious Creator, to see the destruction we cause by our careless consumption.
Open our ears, O merciful God, to hear the groaning of all creation and the cries of those without voice.
Open our hearts, O compassionate Lover, to feel remorse for our unfaithful care of your creation.

And so, enable us to change our ways.
Give us a vision of faithful living on this great globe.
Empower us to make both the simple and complex changes you desire for us. Amen.

Prayer of Confession by Presian Burroughs

A Jewish Prayer for Creation

How wonderful, O Lord, are the works of your hands!
The heavens declare your glory,
the arch of the sky displays your handiwork.
In your love you have given us the power
to behold the beauty of your world in all its splendour.
The sun and the stars, the valleys and the hills,
the rivers and the lakes, all disclose your presence.
The roaring breakers of the sea tell of your awesome might;
the beasts of the field and the birds of the air proclaim your wondrous will.

In your goodness you have made us able to hear the music of the world
the voices of loved ones reveal to us that you are in our midst.
A divine song sings through all creation. (Author unknown)

My friends, let us give thanks for Wonder. Let us give thanks for the Wonder of Life that infuses all things now and forever.
Blessed is the Source of Life, the Fountain of Being the wellspring of goodness, compassion and kindness from which we draw to make for justice and peace.
From the creative power of Life we derive food and harvest, from the bounty of the earth and the yields of the heavens we are sustained and are able to sustain others.
All Life is holy, sacred, worthy of respect and dignity. Let us give thanks for the power of the heart to sense the holy in the midst of the simple.
We eat not to simply satisfy our own appetites, we eat to sustain ourselves in the task we have been given.
Each of us is unique,
Coming into the world with a gift no other can offer: ourselves.
We eat to nourish the vehicle of giving; we eat to sustain our task of world repair, our quest for harmony, peace and justice.
We eat and we are revived, and we give thanks to the lives that were ended to nourish our own.
May we merit their sacrifice, and honor their sparks of holiness through our deeds of loving kindness.
We give thanks to the Power that makes for Meeting, for our table has been a place of dialogue and friendship.
We give thanks to Life. May we never lose touch with the simple joy and wonder of sharing a meal.

Rabbi Rami M. Shapiro

A Native American Prayer for Creation

Earth teach me stillness
as the grasses are stilled with light.
Earth teach me suffering
as old stones suffer with memory.
Earth teach me humility
as blossoms are humble with beginning.
Earth Teach me caring
as the mother who secures her young.
Earth teach me courage
as the tree which stands alone.
Earth teach me limitation
as the ant which crawls on the ground.
Earth teach me freedom
as the eagle which soars in the sky.
Earth teach me resignation
as the leaves which die in the fall.
Earth teach me regeneration
as the seed which rises in the spring.
Earth teach me to forget myself
as melted snow forgets its life.
Earth teach me to remember kindness
as dry fields weep in the rain.

Ute, North American (author unknown)

Acknowledgements

I love gardening and I love helping to resource others who enjoy getting their hands in the dirt. However I could not put a resource like this together on my own I always enjoy getting recommendations of books, websites and communities that I can link too. There are so many good resources out there that we can all benefit from.

A special thank you to all who have helped check links and proofread this booklet, especially Heather Choate Derek Farmer, Marlena Nip and Joy Geertsen. Without your help this would be almost unreadable.

Thank you too to all those who labour in the Mustard Seed garden each year, encouraging me to continue both gardening and helping to resource others who want to garden. Together we can make all cities sustainable and productive.

About the Author

Christine Sine is the Executive Director of Mustard Seed Associates. A small not for profit organization that encourages individuals and communities to pursue sustainable faith and life practices. She is an avid gardener, a member of Seattle Tilth's Food and Faith Initiative Steering Committee and a frequent blogger on faith, gardening and sustainability at [Godspace](#).

Christine calls herself a contemplative activist. She believes that every activity entered into and every experience of life is an opportunity to represent or learn about God. She is passionate about helping individuals and faith communities to connect their everyday life and their faith practices, encouraging them to establish a rhythm of life in which spirituality weaves through all of life. She speaks throughout the U.S. and overseas on spirituality and gardening, and how to reimagine all of life as acts of prayer.

In a former life Christine was a physician, born and trained in Australia she was in general practice in New Zealand for several years. She joined Mercy Ships in 1980 and as their Medical Director, was responsible for developing the medical ministry. She also worked in the refugee camps on the Thai Cambodian border for a short time in the mid 1980s.

Christine, her husband Tom and their golden retriever Bonnie are part of a small intentional community in Seattle called the Mustard Seed House. They grow about 40% of their own food on an urban lot and feed a steady stream of local and international visitors from the produce. If you are coming through Seattle we would love to meet you.

Contact MSA



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For more information about Mustard Seed Associates and links to many more wonderful [resources](#) including Christine's [GodSpace blog](#), Andy's [Lenten Gardening series](#), and other free stuff, please visit our website at [msaimagine.org](#).



To purchase [To Garden with God](#) and other MSA books, cards and other resources visit our [resource center](#).

To find out about how to host a [Spirituality of Gardening seminar](#) contact us at mail@msaimagine.org;

We'd love to hear from you, and let us know how you use this resource.