

The Good, the Bad and the Dirty of Community Gardening:

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By **Monica Allen** - Account Executive at Adventist Risk Management, Inc.

Gardening had been a keen interest of mine until I actually tried growing some patio tomatoes. I was given some five gallon buckets, purchased the wonder working soil, tomato seeds and place my new project in a sunny area on my then patio. I watered it often and tremendously enjoyed watching nature do its thing. Unfortunately, for me that is, I became too attached to my beautiful red tomatoes and at their ripest moment; (sigh) I could not consume them. Whew, praise God for the world's farmers or I would most likely starve. However, for those of you who do **not** have this affinity for making produce your pets, having a garden or participating in a community garden project could secure you a variety of rewards.

A community garden could most certainly be another tool for an evangelistic church group that would want to start such a project and better enhance their community outreach. There is a moderate amount of information you should know before getting started. Let's talk about the good, bad, and the dirty of community garden projects (Yes, pun intended).

It has been documented that community garden projects bring neighbors together and empower people to supplement their food supply by growing it themselves. Faith Blair, placement specialist for Adventist Risk Management participates in a community garden, which is close to her community.

"There is nothing bad about a community garden," said Blair. "Even with my early non-knowledge of weeding, the other gardeners generously helped me and it was also great exercise." Faith elaborated a good bit on how much the community benefits from the social interaction, the opportunities to enjoy nature, and how it even served as tool to witness. This is perhaps the reason for the growth in such projects.

How to Start

The first item on your list will be obtaining a gardening site. The next few steps will include organization of the gardeners, procurement of materials, and the recruitment of volunteers. The most effective time of the year to begin gardening plans will be in the months of January, February, and March.

The American Community Garden Association has a website (www.communitygarden.org) with in-depth information on how to start a garden project, form a planning committee, choosing a site and how to manage your community gardens. All of these are essential elements to having a successful garden project.

Remember as part of your planning most projects begin with many eager participants, which dwindle with the changing climate and seasons. Decide if your project will be open to the public and how it will be managed. Most importantly, remember that your project can quickly go from good to bad if you have not established what is covered with insurance. You will need to decide which of the following insurance coverage should be used to protect from any unforeseen circumstances.

- General Liability Coverage
- Product Liability and Completed Operations (if selling produce directly to the public)
- Environmental Impairment Liability (lower risk for organic farming)
- Workers' Compensation – locally hired managers

Practicing Good Risk Control

Your local church board must vote this as an officially sponsored church event. Also inform your local conference of this project and forward the planning details to the appropriate officers.

Keep the following points in mind as you practice good risk management.

- Slips, trips, and falls can be a major concern. Remember to keep equipment stored when not in use and keep walkways clear of debris.
- Respiratory distress is possible if visitors or members come in contact with pesticides or fertilizers. Consider growing organic. If not, follow proper guidelines in the use and storage of these types of materials. Fertilizers and pesticides should be kept in locked buildings, not accessible to young children, and should only be applied by adults per manufacturer's instructions. Where mixing is required, mix and use only as directed. Use all appropriate personal protective equipment (gloves, masks, goggles, etc.) required for the fertilizers or pesticides being applied.
- Remember when using pesticides, they can leave a residue on produce. There is also the risk of insect-infested produce and contamination from improper application of manure that is used as fertilizer. (Note: If you intend to sell produce directly to consumers at a farm stand, then this exposure will be higher and will require an additional premium.)
- Farm equipment and ponds pose an attractive nuisance. This exposure will be higher since many children will be present at such activities. Have guidelines for child supervision when on the premises. Follow state, provincial and local regulations pertaining to minors and jobs they may perform. While youth may not be working for pay, it is prudent to observe the same rules that apply to the employment of minors. Remove keys from farm equipment, if used and ensure it is not accessible to children.
- Environmental impairment can be caused by chemical runoff and could contaminate water supplies. Use of chemicals should always be approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Chemicals could drift while being applied possibly causing damage to nearby gardens, trees, residents, pets, and livestock. (Note: If you operate an organic garden, then this exposure will be lower. However, the misapplication of manure as a fertilizer may still cause an environmental concern.)
- With the changing of seasons, gardeners should be given guidelines on how to deal with the exposure to hot and cold weather.
- Use good safety practices by securing equipment when no one will be on the site. Also, if monetary transactions are taking place, keep all money in a locked box and remove it from the site when you leave.

Remember being safe is a mindset and can be practiced anywhere. Your church participation in a community garden can be a source of celebration with a harvest not just of food but of souls. Wash all fruits and vegetables, set the table and enjoy.



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References:

http://www.acfb.org/projects/community_garden/