

C&S Wholesale Grocers

# Workplace Organic Gardens Project

Workplace Garden Guide



**C&S Workplace Gardens  
Plant. Grow. Harvest. Share.**

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## C&S Workplace Gardens Plant. Grow. Harvest. Share.

### C&S Workplace Gardens

The C&S Workplace Organic Gardens Project provides employees and their families with access to garden spaces on company-owned land to grow fresh, local produce for themselves and their communities. In partnership with Antioch University New England and hunger agencies local to C&S workplaces, the project represents a commitment to the four core initiatives of C&S Community Involvement: eliminating hunger, strengthening community, protecting the environment, and encouraging volunteerism.

In addition to local food security, workplace gardening supports employee wellness and satisfaction, healthy eating, connection to nature, and leadership in and beyond the workplace. As employees become more deeply involved, they enhance relationships among people, communities, and food systems.

#### Since 2011, C&S Workplace Organic Gardens have generated:

- Over 4.5 tons of produce donated directly from C&S employee gardeners to alleviate local hunger
- An average of 28 pounds of produce donated per gardener each season
- Over 35 different kinds of fresh vegetables, herbs, and fruits donated to community
- An average of 10 hours/per week engaged in the project by employee gardeners
- 3 AUNE Doctoral Fellows and 15 Master's Internships, representing thousands of hours contributed by graduate students toward professional and organizational development
- Numerous student projects, capstones, and doctoral research
- Hundreds of individual connections made among employee gardeners and community members

Resources on this page are a product of collaboration between C&S Wholesale Grocers and Antioch University New England (AUNE).



A healthy workplace promotes healthy behavior. Employers can achieve multiple objectives through a productive and rewarding project: a workplace garden. Gardening at work supports cooperative relationships within the workplace and wider community; integrates environmental sustainability into the workplace culture; educates and empowers employees to contribute to a cause; and supports wellness through physical activity, healthy eating, and stress reduction.

C&S Wholesale Grocers established organic workplace gardens at its corporate headquarters in Keene, NH in 2011. Each garden location includes a Community Giving plot where employees grow produce for donation directly to local hunger relief organizations. C&S also partners with area educational institutions and providers to support employees' learning and skill development.

Through the C&S Workplace Organic Gardens Project, employees and their families grow healthy, organic, local foods on company land. C&S supports employees to take an active role in their own health and well-being and to work together, sharing their time and talent with the larger community.

The C&S Workplace Organic Gardens Project and the resources available through its website are made possible with the insight and expertise of [Antioch University New England](#) (AUNE) in Keene, NH. AUNE administration, staff, faculty and students provide valuable professional skills, support and leadership. We are especially grateful for the commitment, passion, and hands-on guidance from AUNE's [Environmental Studies](#) Doctoral Fellows and Masters Interns.

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### Business Impact

Research supports the many benefits of gardening and developing community gardens. Workplace gardening is an innovative strategy for employers to offer those benefits while achieving their business mission.

#### Teambuilding and Leadership Development

- Company-owned gardens provide opportunities for employees to develop leadership capacities outside their regular job duties.
- Gardening enables employees to enrich relationships with their coworkers beyond the context of business and see themselves through the lens of a larger community cause.
- Shared garden spaces in particular decrease isolation through sharing of knowledge, ideas, recipes, and culture, as well as seeds, tools, and garden produce.

#### Employee Health and Wellness

- Gardening is great physical exercise, which is important to overall health and reduces risks associated with sedentary lifestyles.
- Gardeners tend to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables as part of their regular diet, which is important in disease prevention.
- On average, Americans spend over 90 percent of their time indoors ([US Environmental Protection Agency](#)). Gardening is one way to enjoy the many benefits of time outdoors.
- Connecting with nature and caring for living things provides multiple psychological benefits: stress relief, mental clarity, mindfulness, creativity, and motivation.

#### Environmental Sustainability

- In the U.S., produce travels an average of over 1500 miles from its source to consumers, adding to an excessive dependence on fossil fuels for transportation ([Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture](#)). Locally-grown produce decreases “food miles” and greenhouse gas emissions from transport, processing, refrigeration, and storage.
- Produce harvested and eaten fresh eliminates waste from plastic packaging.

- Growing organically eliminates harmful pesticides and herbicides known to impact human and ecological health.
- Sustainable gardening practices promote healthy soil, water, and air.

#### Alleviating Hunger

- In 2019, 41.2 million Americans (1 in 8), including 12.9 million children, lived in food-insecure households. Corporate-owned gardens can combat hunger by donating fresh produce to food assistance organizations.

#### Community Benefits

- Workplace gardens can provide space for:
  - job training: orienting new employees to the company’s grounds, resources, and culture; team-building;
  - child care: gardens especially for children or family members at workplaces where childcare is provided;
  - meetings, workshops, and celebrations: picnic tables or gathering places as an alternative to conference rooms; flowers for recognizing employees’ accomplishments
- Gardens are a unique and aesthetically pleasing element that create businesses with an inviting physical presence.
- Employee gardeners who are educated about sustainable gardening practices can apply their skills and knowledge at home and in other community gardens.
- Workplace gardens can be a cost effective way to promote many community-oriented activities and programs.



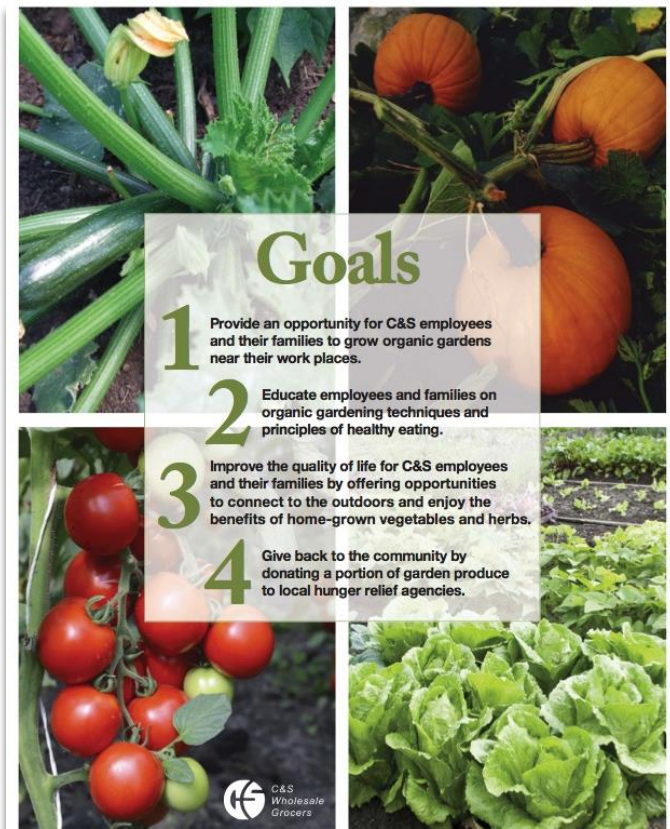
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### Giving More Than Produce

Donating produce grown by employees in workplace gardens is one of a number of ways to alleviate hunger locally and add value to the community. In addition to encouraging direct giving through workplace gardening, employers can consider these national programs:

[Feeding America](#) is the nation's leading domestic hunger relief organization and is C&S's primary nonprofit partner in addressing hunger. The Feeding America network supplies 61,000 charitable agencies that distribute food directly to families through local food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, after-school programs, community kitchens, and Kids' Cafes.

[Plant-A-Row](#) is a national program that encourages gardeners to plant an extra row or percent for people in their communities. Local food banks, soup kitchens and service organizations receive the garden produce to help feed people at risk or experiencing hunger in America. Since its inception, Plant-A-Row has encouraged people to donate millions of pounds of fresh vegetables, herbs, and fruits. An initiative of the Garden Communicators International (formerly Garden Writers' Association), Plant-A-Row provides training, direction, and support to volunteer communities that promote gardening at the local level. They also assist in coordinating local food collection systems and tracking donations provided to agencies.



### C&S Workplace Organic Garden Project Goals

1. Provide a structured opportunity for C&S employees and their families to practice organic gardening near their workplaces.
2. Educate C&S employees and their families on sustainable garden practices and principles of healthy living.
3. Improve the quality of life for C&S employees, their families, and communities by lowering the cost and raising the enjoyment of home-grown vegetables, herbs, and fruits.
4. Give to the community by donating to hunger relief agencies throughout the growing season.



## C&S Workplace Gardens

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### Planning a Workplace Garden

#### Interest & Commitment

- Seek the support of leadership and management. Their committed support is critical for a workplace garden program to move forward.
- With support from management, survey employees about their interests and skills.
- Employee input will help in designing a garden that fits the workplace. Consider size, location, traffic flow, style, existing structures and materials, etc.
- Assess educational opportunities that will help ensure gardeners' success and satisfaction with the project.

#### Physical Features

- Careful attention to site selection and garden infrastructure (water, storage, security) early in the planning process will ensure a garden that best suits your site and gardeners' goals.
- Communication and outreach should include signs or labels for garden beds, bulletin boards, donation logs, and other tools to focus and inform. These belong in the garden and inside the workplace.
- Consider mowing, composting, delivery of materials, fencing, hoses, shade, etc.
- Water systems should consider adequate hose length and diameter, water pressure, above vs. below ground, sprinklers or watering cans.
- Prevent crop damage with fencing, netting, or below-bed barriers to discourage neighboring wildlife.
- Storage structures may include tool shed, compost bins, and food storage containers for donations.
- Relaxation and wellness features will encourage full use of the garden. These may include seating or gathering areas, shade structures or trees, pathways, and environmentally conscious landscaping.

### Resource checklist:

The following resources, personnel, and materials are needed to get started:

- Land that is accessible and appropriate for growing food; or, in places where land is not accessible, space for containers such as raised beds, barrels, or pots (Consulting a local planner or official can help to know the right questions to ask.)
- Budget for materials (may include donations or discounts from local businesses)
- Leadership and staff support
- Facilities support
- Project management skills
- Educational resources (may include partner agencies/institutions)
- Last but not least, employees and volunteer gardeners!

With the above considerations, developing workplace gardens can begin. Check out the Action Plan on the following page.



## **C&S Workplace Gardens** **Plant. Grow. Harvest. Share.**

### **Action Plan**

1. Set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) goals.
2. Prepare garden sites or space for containers.
3. Provide ongoing educational support, including workshops and partner resources.
4. Develop systems for communications, garden maintenance and community donations.
5. Collaborate with hunger relief agencies to determine donation needs and processes.
6. Regularly communicate and promote workplace gardening activities and achievements within the organization and broader community.
7. Have and use an evaluation plan (surveys and other measures).
8. Monitor and document garden management including challenges and successes and how they come about. Share these with newcomers, leadership and the broader business community.



When selecting your garden site, consider site conditions early in your planning process. Even if the following site conditions are less than optimal, consider the site's potential for meeting the needs of garden plants and participants.

- **Growing space:** How much space will you need per employee gardener? Is the space sloped? Is there good drainage? What should be the proximity to working spaces and common areas? What are the soil conditions? Does the site get enough sunlight? Or is a shade garden an option? See Community Garden Connections' [Resource Packet on Garden Planning](#).
- **Garden beds or containers:** Are raised beds, in-ground gardens, or containers preferred? Will they be easily accessible? See Community Garden Connections' [Resource Packet on Container Gardening](#).
- **Pathways:** Will they need to be wide enough for a wheelbarrow or mower? Are corners staked or guarded to prevent hoses from crossing into garden beds?
- **Dimensions:** Does the width of the beds need to be able to accommodate spreading crops like melons, pumpkins, or vine plants? Does there need to be a buffer between spaces?
- **Water:** Is there a safe, adequate, accessible water source? How will the water supply be maintained in cold climates?
- **Damage control:** What is the most appropriate barrier for the site, budget, and type of garden? Consider proximity to other structures such as roads and trees.

**For more resources for planning your workplace garden**, see the Community Garden Connections' [Resource Packet on Garden Planning](#).

**View and download** our workplace garden worksheets and resources below:

[Sample Pre Project Survey](#)

[Internal Communications Plan](#)

[Sample One Year Plan](#)

[Workplace Gardens Logic Model](#)

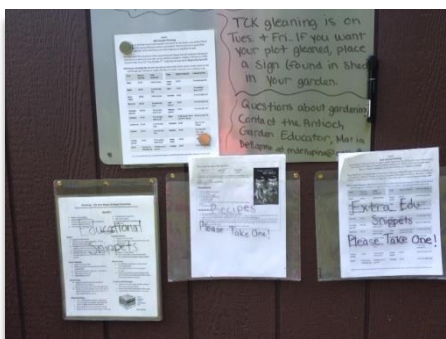
[Site Selection Considerations](#)

### **Site Selection**

Careful thought about garden site selection and infrastructure early in the planning process will ensure a project that best suits the goals of your business and employee gardeners. The following outlines important considerations for designing and setting up a workplace garden. Whenever possible, including employees who will be responsible for site maintenance in the planning process will help ensure that their valuable site and process knowledge is counted.

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- **Garden structures:** What makes sense for the site? Aside from fencing, consider entrances, awnings, sheds, compost bins, washing areas for gardeners, tools, and produce.
- **Compost:** If safe and allowable, compost bins can turn garden waste and plant food scraps into valuable organic material for the garden. Consider what systems fit the site and budget.
- **Enjoyment of space:** Depending on how people will want to use the space, consider benches, picnic tables, pathways, shade trees, benches, or other features to enhance relaxation and enjoyment in the garden.



**Informational Signage**

On-site communication can enhance participation and support the goals of your workplace garden project. Physical features to add community and educational value for employees and other participants include:

### **Bulletin board:**

Best placed in an easily viewed and accessed area of the garden. Protect with a weather-proof case or under a shelter. Use for posting printed garden education materials such as tip sheets and guides, employee participation guidelines, event and activity announcements, seed packets, lost & found, recipes, etc. Effective locations are entrances, shed doors, water spigot, compost bins, demonstration or donation garden plots.

### **Marker board:**

Best placed in an easily viewed and accessed area of the garden, such as a shed door. Protect under a shelter. Good for gardener-to-gardener and/ or garden educator communication, posting announcements or questions, requesting or offering expertise or assistance, and general communication. Good for posting veggie swaps, tallying donations, tracking growth, introducing new gardeners, etc.

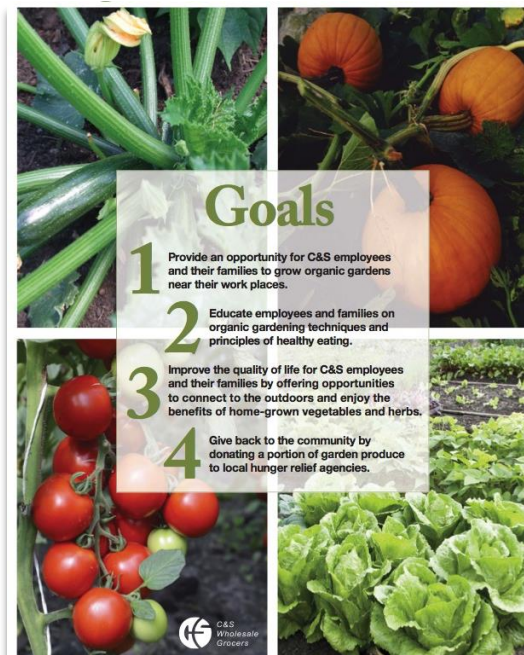
### **Garden Entrance Signage:**

- Position to identify and invite people into the garden. Aim for good visibility while not blocking access to mowers or machinery.
- Signage should be attractive and reflect the character of the garden project. Include the name and/or purpose of the garden (e.g., Working and Learning Garden, Community Giving Garden) and mission statement, if applicable.
- Signage should be readable from a distance.
- Sign material should be as weather-proof as possible, made with durable materials and mounted on a sturdy post at eye level.

### **Educational Signage:**

Depending on how your garden is set up, it may be useful to have educational signage. Suggestions include:

- Adjacent to the compost system, signage to instruct employees on composting procedures, i.e., what can be composted, when and how to turn piles or transfer bins.
- In community giving plots, to remind employees about maintenance, harvest, and donation systems.
- In shared or team plots, to identify crops planted and other relevant information.
- At the garden gate with instructions or warnings for using electric fencing, water pumps, or other mechanical systems, if present.





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### Employee Roles - Workplace Gardens

Following are sample roles that can be adapted according to the management, leadership, scope, and focus of your workplace garden project.

**Project Senior Leadership:** Aligns project with overall company culture and resources; establishes expectations for communication, outreach, and teamwork; supports organizational continuity.

**Garden Educator:** Can be an Outside Contractor, especially for companies with more than one site. Develops and implements skills- and/or topic-based educational programming based on employee gardeners' interests; provides on-site and/or off-site support and materials for gardeners at all levels of experience.

**Project Coordinator:** Can be an Outside Contractor, especially for companies with more than one site. Ensures year-to-year transfer of project knowledge and leadership; develops plans and works with Site Coordinators to implement and evaluate based on site-specific needs and timelines.

**Garden Site Coordinator:** Provides a first point of contact for employee gardeners; helps orient co-workers to garden site procedures and resources; coordinates with Outside Contractors, Facilities Personnel, and Project Senior Leadership; facilitates gardeners' sense of community and teamwork.

**Employee Gardener:** Participates actively in growing food, maintaining garden plots, donating produce as able, and communicating issues and ideas with Site Coordinators.

**Facilities Personnel:** Contributes to the garden site through maintenance of grounds and infrastructure, anticipating and responding to facilities issues, and communicating with Site Coordinators, Outside Contractors, and Senior Leadership as needed.

### Best Practices in Garden Planning

#### Partnerships

- There are likely organizations or institutions local to your workplace that have expertise in gardens, agriculture, or education. Invite them to share their knowledge and resources to get your gardens off to a great start and support your efforts throughout the year.
- Learn from others. Reach out to companies who have established workplace gardens to learn about their strategies, challenges, and successes.

#### Planning

- Form a team of employees from various areas to help shape the garden plan. Start with an organized and cohesive vision and employee gardeners will know what to expect.
- Aim for simplicity. Keep your plans manageable. You can always add more space and features with each season.
- Teamwork will take your project much further than individual efforts. Working in teams increases accountability, encourages people to share knowledge, and develops leadership.
- Set employees up for success. Provide a garden space with good soil, sun exposure, easy access to water, tools, education, and a clear understanding of the organization of the garden and how things get done.



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### Simplicity

- Keep your plans simple and manageable. You can always add more space and features in future seasons.

### Teamwork

- Corporate gardens involve some sort of collective maintenance. Working in teams increases accountability, allows people to share knowledge, and develops leadership skills.

### Set gardeners up for success

- Provide employees with good soil, sun exposure, easy access to water, hand tools, education, and a clear understanding of the organization of the garden and how things get done.

### Serve the community

- By growing food in workplace gardens and donating it to community hunger relief agencies, you will strengthen your local community. Food pantries and community kitchens often don't have much access to fresh produce; your garden surplus can make a real difference in people's ability to access fresh, healthy food.

### Go organic

- Organic gardens offer social, environmental, and economic advantages than gardens where toxic chemicals are used. Using organic techniques to reduce the risk of harm to human health demonstrates responsibility and care for community and the earth.

### Learn from others

- Reach out to other companies who have established workplace gardens to learn about their challenges and successes.

### Employee Gardener Communication

An internal communications plan can be designed to:

- Provide clear and accessible lines of communication between the garden leadership team and employee gardeners.
- Promote employee confidence in the workplace gardens project by providing measures for accountability and problem-solving.
- Foster team-building and sense of community among employee gardeners.
- Clarify the company's expectations of, and support for, employee gardeners.
- Increase and sustain employee gardener participation by amplifying a sense of purpose.
- Share up-to-date info on the project and general gardening resources.
- Provide opportunities for employees to share feedback on the project.

Click [here](#) for a sample communication plan.



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### Evaluation (Ways to Evaluate)

How can you know if your workplace garden project is effectively meeting your employees' and business goals and having an impact in the workplace and in the community? How can you assess what changes might need to be made along the way? The key to a successful evaluation is to gather data that is useful to you and other garden stakeholders, then use that data to improve your garden program.

At the beginning of the season, consider creating a logic model and evaluation plan to guide work and offer evaluation tools at the end of the summer. Use the plan to ask a few short questions based on the project goals, to focus evaluation efforts and ensure the information gathered will be useful to stakeholders.

#### Information can be gathered through:

- Pre-season and post-season surveys
- Workshop and activity evaluations
- Current or potential gardener focus groups
- Leadership surveys or interviews
- Hunger partner and educator interviews
- Informal conversations with gardeners throughout the growing season

#### Information that can be gathered from existing garden sites:

- Participation data (number of gardeners/bed/locations; times of day/week most gardeners visit)
- Number and type of food crops grown
- Gardening techniques used (raised beds, containers, trellising, mulching, companion planting, crop rotation, organic pest management, etc.)
- Weight, frequency, and destination of produce donations
- Photos or maps documenting the physical transformation of the garden over time
- Reasons for gardeners' participation (health, enjoyment, stress relief, skill development, etc.)



A report and recommendations can be compiled based on data gathered from all sources, as well as research and information from other companies with workplace gardens, gardening professionals and educational institutions.

### C&S Workplace Organic Gardens Project



#### The C&S Workplace Organic Gardens Project

represents C&S Wholesale Grocers' commitment to its employees, communities, and the environment. This report highlights key accomplishments, learning, and recommendations from the 2019 garden season. In partnership with Antioch University New England (AUNE) and community partners, and with the continued inspiration and support of the Cohen family, The C&S Workplace Organic Gardens Project continues to positively impact C&S employees and their communities and provide a model for other companies and partners to follow.

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### Additional Resources

Finding the right gardening information can be overwhelming; it can be hard to know where to start. The following resources, which have been developed or recommended through our partnership with Antioch University New England (AUNE) provide targeted, reliable information with employee gardeners' specific interests in mind:

#### [Community Garden Connections \(CGC\) Garden Resource Hub](#)

The CGC Garden Resource Hub offers educational resources for home, community, and workplace gardeners in New England and beyond. It was initially developed as part of a professional internship through the C&S Workplace Organic Gardens Project and continues to provide information and encouragement for employee gardeners and community members.

#### General Gardening Information:

##### [American Community Gardening Association](#)

This website offers helpful tips on how to start a community garden, ways to connect with others involved in community gardening, and ongoing support for garden leaders.

##### [National Gardening Association](#)

This organization provides resources on how to start gardening, the latest garden-related research, and connects gardeners with each other.

##### [American Horticultural Society](#)

This organization offers educational programs, publications, and other resources to raise awareness and leadership in the art and science of horticulture.

#### [List of Master Gardeners by State](#)

#### [List of Cooperative Extensions by State](#)

Cooperative Extension agencies can provide a wealth of information about planting, pests and diseases specific to your area. Cooperative Extension agents can provide on-site education and guidance.

#### Topic Specific

There are many good guides and books out there; contact your local university or bookstore for additional suggestions.

#### [Food Preservation University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension](#)

#### Gardening with Children

##### [HomeAdvisor](#)

#### Community Garden Manuals:

While guidance for community gardens is more general (workplace gardens have different considerations), much of the basic material contained in these guides should be helpful, such as evaluating a garden site, developing infrastructure, forming a vision for your garden, maintaining participation, and managing volunteers.

##### [Community Garden Connections Education Manual](#) (Antioch University New England)

##### [Ground Rules: A Legal Toolkit for Community Gardens](#) (Pennsylvania Land Trust Association)

##### [Community Gardens Handbook](#) (Alberta Health Services)

##### [Community Garden Handbook](#) (Milwaukee Urban Gardens)

#### Workplace Composting:

##### [A Guide to Workplace Composting](#) (US Composting Council)