

Where to Donate

Developing strong partnerships with community members and food recipient agencies is a key first step in donation gardening. When considering where to donate, your community may offer a wide range of opportunities. The three recommendations below are not meant to be sequential. Rather, they provide an iterative process of partnership development.

Recommendation #1: Consider possible models for the garden.

The preferred model of food donation is the indirect model, in which food is grown at one site and then transported for delivery, often to a local food recipient agency such as a food pantry. There may be situations in which a direct model of donation is more feasible for some locations/recipients. In this model, the individual recipients would pick up their produce directly from the garden site. If you plan on doing any direct donations, please discuss this with the project coordinator to ensure that there is a plan for weighing produce, practicing food safety, tracking reach, etc. Some community donation gardens may opt for a hybrid of the direct and indirect models, or they may allocate a portion of the garden or the produce grown for donation purposes.

Recommendation #2: Create a list of potential partners.

Recipient sites may include food pantries, food banks, meal programs, soup kitchens, senior centers, schools, daycare and after school centers, faith-based organizations, drop-off sites collecting food for delivery to pantries, and more.

If you are unsure where to donate in your community, begin by having a conversation among the garden volunteers and neighborhood members, contact your [County Extension office](#), and reach out to your network of community members to discuss ideas. Other community gardening organizations may recommend potential partners and may share other important insights and information.

Recommendation #3: Develop Partnerships.

Set up an in-person meeting and/or phone call between the garden coordinators and potential partners. Make sure to include the gardeners who will primarily be responsible for produce donation. When you have conversations with the neighborhood organizations, members and/or food recipient agencies in your community, be prepared to ask questions about the partner's needs, interests, and expectations.



Example questions include:

- What are the partner's needs related to food and/or gardening?
- Is this partner interested in receiving fresh produce from this community garden?
- What is the partner's experience with fresh produce and produce donations?
- What concerns might they have in partnering with the garden, or in receiving produce from the garden?
- What types of produce are most needed?
- Does the recipient site have refrigeration? How much produce do they have the capacity to store (both unrefrigerated and refrigerated produce)?
- Does the recipient site have a scale to weigh all of the donated produce?
- How else might they be interested in partnering?
- How can the garden best meet the needs and expectations of the community members?
- What would the partner like the gardeners to know or understand about it (and for agencies, about the community members it serves)?
- What level of involvement and partnership are the neighborhood members/agencies and the garden volunteers interested in? Produce donation only, or other opportunities for collaboration?
- Are the garden volunteers able to meet the needs of this partnership?

Before committing to partnership, it is also important to discuss the logistics of produce donation and delivery. See the “What to Grow” section of the toolkit. Once you have developed a partnership, plan to regularly check-in with your partners and recipient agencies. Plan one or more conversations mid-growing season and at the end of the growing season.

Finally, remember that your partners, whether neighborhood members or food recipient agencies, are often constrained for resources, including time, financial, and other resources. It is important to develop partnerships that serve their needs. But you also need to be realistic about the level of commitment you can expect from garden volunteers.

Resources

[Montana Food Bank Network](#) is a statewide network of food banks, follow the link to locate and learn more about emergency food resources in your community.

[Ample Harvest](#) is an online directory of food banks and pantries. Note that the directory only contains food recipient agencies that have registered with Ample Harvest.

[MEANS](#) is an online resource that helps connect growers with organizations receiving and distributing food.

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