



PROTECT THE PLANET

Service & Community Outreach Programme



Grow your own food * Conserve resources * Serve the needy * Divert food away from landfills * Prevent food waste * Recycle wasted food * Protect the environment

Take Action and Inspire

This guidance document suggests service and community outreach activities aimed at: applying environmentally friendly and sustainable gardening practices, preventing food waste, rescuing surplus food, managing unavoidable food waste for beneficial use, and protecting the environment. The underlying five-stage plan is to:

1. Undertake feasible and prudent action(s)
2. Evaluate outcomes
3. Share experience and promote environmental stewardship
4. Continue the same service action(s) into the future
5. Undertake the next service when ready

“The human being is deriving innumerable debts from Nature and enjoying the amenities provided by Nature in various ways. But what is the gratitude the human is showing to Nature? What gratitude is he or she offering to the Divine?” – Sathya Sai Baba (SSS 21.19: July 12, 1988)

Suggested Public Advocacy and Awareness Initiatives	
Public Outreach	Implementation Approach
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote environmental advocacy by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Starting a <u>garden</u> in the community. ○ Establishing a <u>composting programme</u> to help divert organic waste away from landfills. This could be operated: a) at a municipal level with curbside collections for residential, school and food businesses; b) in apartment buildings and housing complexes, c) in the communities by providing organic waste drop-off sites for local farmers, food stores, restaurants, places of worship, farmers’ markets, schools and local residents.¹ ○ Providing <u>technical assistance</u> for local community compost sites.
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop an awareness campaign on: the significance of food; resources consumed in growing, transporting, distributing and preparing food as well as disposing of wasted food; eating healthy and living well; awareness on the need to conserve food; practical ways to reduce food waste; and education on organic waste management. ● Promote environmental stewardship through organising or participating in a public event such as ‘Walk for Values’² or an environmental festival. Invite other centres/groups/neighbourhoods to attend or participate in organised public events. Activities

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	<p>at the public event could include (but are not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Do-it-yourself workshops, exhibitions to raise awareness, and services related to: environmentally-friendly and sustainable gardening practices, including composting and drip irrigation (a water conservation solution for gardening). o Creating plays or skits, talks, panel discussions, games, video presentations, etc. on the significance of food, conserving resources and protecting our environment.
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Potential service and community outreach activities concerning food, including implementation ideas and benefits

Community Gardening

Introduction:

A community garden is a piece of land of varying sizes (and multiple plots) set aside by a public entity, such as a local council or community group, a private/philanthropy group or a not-for-profit organisation, for its members to grow seasonal fruits and vegetables at a common location and enjoy the experience of growing them as if in their own backyards.

Service Component:

Community gardening is a service opportunity allowing a group of people to collectively work together to maintain a garden – or the assigned plot(s) in the garden – for growing seasonal fruits and vegetables, to help people who are unable to afford natural and fresh fruits and vegetables and are deprived of enjoying the benefits thereof. Some of the services associated with community gardening involve:

- Offering harvest collected from the garden to the community to help meet the food needs of low-income families, through available food distribution programmes such as soup kitchens, community food banks/pantry programmes or local food drives.
- Encouraging low-income families to take up plots in the community garden, educating them on environmentally-friendly and sustainable gardening practices, and providing technical assistance in helping them to grow their own fruits, herbs and vegetables.

Benefits:

Community gardening offers numerous benefits, one of the most significant being that it contributes to a healthier diet and sustainable lifestyle. It also saves money and produces better tasting and more nutritious fruits and vegetables. In addition, it:

- Maintains the water quality of the neighbourhood's watershed by absorbing stormwater run-off and reducing water pollution
- Slows down rainwater to prevent flooding in the area
- Functions as a green space providing cooling effects to the surroundings
- Provides habitat for local and migratory birds and other animals
- Recycles garden trimmings, fallen rotten food and other organic waste back into the soil
- Provides locally accessible fresh produce to lessen the individual's and community's impact on the environment, including reducing their carbon footprint

In addition, it promotes community development and aids neighbourhood revitalisation by:

- Making the best use of vacant, barren or under-utilised land/open space
- Protecting and preserving the community's limited open spaces from development, allowing the community and local residents easy and local access to green spaces
- Beautifying the neighbourhood with greenery and bright colours from flowering fruits and vegetables
- Bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and cultures in sharing knowledge and taking action to help tackle local environmental issues
- Fostering environmental and community stewardships
- Educating future generations on the importance of green and healthy living

Implementation:

How can an individual or Sai Centre/Group participate in community gardening?

The perfect time to explore community gardening opportunities in the neighbourhood, is prior to the arrival of the spring season, or at the beginning of the harvest season. Before you get started, you will need to consider the following things:

1. Firstly, determine the need for a community garden by assessing the number of individuals and families on a low income in your neighbourhood and whether or not they would benefit from access to fresh and healthy produce.
2. If it is determined that a community garden can help these individuals, begin by securing garden plots or raised vegetable beds in your local area. Some townships, philanthropy groups, neighbourhood estates or churches provide one or more community gardening plots at no or minimum cost per plot for the season.* After the nearby garden plot is identified, the group representative can contact the garden provider, find out about the availability of plot(s), and if available, complete and submit the registration form and attend the newcomer's/gardener's orientation, prior to carrying out any work on the land.
3. Start planning for and performing various tasks, which may include but are not limited to; forming a team, gathering the skills of the group members, assessing available resources, coordinating volunteers, designing the layout, preparing the soil, planting, regular watering and maintenance of the garden, harvesting, and clean-up.

In the absence of a community garden in the neighbourhood, the interested Sai Centre/Group may

consider the following options. (Note: As mentioned above, firstly, assess if a community garden is required).

- Contact the local government office to inquire about any government-owned, under-utilised or vacant plot, property or even a curbside space (a strip of land between the street and the footpath) where a community garden can be set up.
- Consider the possibility of creating a community garden in the surroundings of any local Sai centres/groups that own the property where devotees meet regularly for devotional activities, and use the produce from the garden to serve the local community (see above on how to create a successful garden). At first, start with a few small plots or raised beds leaving room to expand in future.
- Any Sai centres/groups that rent out local buildings as a place for devotees to meet, such as churches, schools or community centres, could inquire into the possibility of co-leading a designated area for a vegetable garden (see Appendix for pictures of a Sai Centre building a garden).

Notes:

1. Prior to starting any activity, find out about local directives, laws and regulations, and contact appropriate local governing authorities to determine necessary approvals/permissions (if any) that are required to launch a community garden.
2. Further information and example concepts on how to construct a new community garden is available at: <https://communitygarden.org/resources/10-steps-to-starting-a-community-garden/> and https://communitygarden.org.au/category/about_gardens/10-steps-for-starting/

*For instance, in the United States of America, one can find a nearby community garden by visiting the American Community Garden Association website (<http://www.communitygarden.org/>), which lists locations of community gardens by city or state.

Tips for growing an environmentally-friendly community garden:

Consider managing the community garden in an eco-friendly way, to the greatest extent practicable (depending upon feasibility and the resources available), so as not to interfere with the ecological integrity. Avoid mixing the garden soil with chemical laden fertilisers and thereby polluting surface water and groundwater sources with run-offs carrying petrochemical pesticides, herbicides and inorganic fertilisers. Furthermore, food produced in such chemical infused soil creates long-term health consequences. Below are a few suggested healthy and eco-friendly gardening practices:

- Opt for compost, which uses organic material and serves as a natural alternative to chemical fertiliser (e.g. cow dung or horse manure)
- Make your own chemical-free herbicides to treat any plants affected by pests (e.g., a solution of ghost pepper, water, garlic, mint and clove can be used to treat aphid-infected plants)
- Welcome pest-controlling predatory insects such as ladybug and beetle by planting some native plants
- Consider diverse planting and include bright flowering plants, such as marigold and sunflower, to deter pests
- Consider companion planting, such as herbs and vegetables
- Designate a plot in the garden as a pollinator plot by planting wildflowers for bees
- Prepare seedlings indoors before the end of frost season (or as appropriate) by reusing or upcycling pallets/containers/flower pots and organic potting soil. Consider making your own DIY seedling pots from old newspaper or cardboard boxes, reuse yogurt, butter tubs etc., or visit garden stores where they may give away old pallets for free
- Install drip irrigation to transport water directly to the plant, thereby conserving water by not watering the whole bed or plot
- Install a composting pit, bin or bench
- To prevent weed growth and maintain water and air balance in the soil, install breathable fabric weed-block mat to cover the prepared plot prior to planting, or apply 2–4 inches of mulch on top of the garden soil after planting. Compost locally available chipped woods, leaves, a layer of newspaper with grass clippings, or grass clippings alone to make inexpensive mulches
- Remember to apply refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle and upcycle principles

Additional related services:

Below are some sustainable and environmental features that could be incorporated in the community garden, upon consideration and approval by the facility provider:

- Install a rain barrel if the garden is next to the facility building structure (to collect rainwater for the purpose of watering the garden)
- Install a rain garden (to mitigate neighbourhood stormwater run-off/flooding issues and as an aesthetic feature)
- Install a compost bin or pit

Environmental Stewardship and Public Outreach Programme ideas:

- **Employee Workday Programmes:** Organise an event to offer an opportunity to companies or institutions to volunteer at the garden through Employee Workday Programmes. Volunteering activities can entail constructing a (new) community garden, maintaining an existing garden (by seeding, planting, harvesting etc.), installing compost bins, etc. Spread the word about this opportunity at your workplace or through social media.
- **Student or Neighbourhood Youth Educational Programmes:**
 - Organise a tour to the garden, to help students and youth understand:
 - Where food comes from
 - How long it takes for a plant to reach harvest
 - The benefits of growing food organically and eating nutrient-rich, chemical-free produce
 - The resources needed to yield healthy and nutritious fruits, herbs and vegetables
 - How Mother Nature plays her selfless role in supporting lives and the phenomenon of growth
 - Introduce students to the concept of, or provide information on, any Farm-to-Table School Lunch Programmes that are available. Such programmes:³
 - Provide hands-on learning about growing vegetables in the school garden
 - Foster life skills and community leadership, and help bring students and youth closer to Mother Nature
 - Encourage the school cafeteria, parents, teachers and staff to purchase locally grown fresh food, which supports local farmers as well
 - Build community engagement
- **Service and Presentation:**
 - Use Sai centre garden harvest for food service projects such as Narayana Seva, soup kitchens or offer them to a local food bank/pantry
 - Harvest collected from the garden could also occasionally be used at Sai centre events where young adults may take up a lead in demonstrating healthy menu options to centre members, share Sathya Sai Baba's teachings on eating 'Sathwic food', and tell the story of where the food came from and how it was grown emphasising green, healthy and sustainable gardening and living
- **Awareness:** Share information on local food access, sustainable and environmentally-friendly gardening practices, and food and nutrition at any pertinent public programmes (environmental/school/university fair, SSIO 'Walk for Values' walkathon, inter-faith gathering, etc.)

Community Composting

Introduction:

Composting is a biological process which decomposes organic waste such as food scraps, spoiled/rotting foods, yard and garden waste and converts it into a nutrient rich black soil amendment, which is known as compost. Compost can also be made into an excellent mulch and soil conditioner by mixing various types of yard waste such as grass clippings, leaves, and plant tops from vegetables and flowers.

Community composting is a very effective solution to divert organic waste away from landfills. A neighbourhood or community can utilise recycled organic waste for safe and sustainable food production. Compost generated in the neighbourhood can be used as a soil amendment to grow food at local farms and gardens. Community gardens and local farms can also install their own composting pit or bench to utilise organic waste that is generated in the farm and garden from weeds, garden trimmings, grass clippings, stalks, stems, leaves and other plant parts that are not harvested. In this way, no waste is created. saving both energy and fuel in transporting waste.

Benefits:

Community composting:

- Helps to collectively combat climate change and reduces our carbon footprint⁴
- Reduces waste overall and results in less waste going to landfills, thereby also reducing methane emissions from landfills
- Transforms waste into a beneficial, free and organic fertiliser for the soil which aids in the healthy and strong development of plants and better and nutrient-rich harvests
- Supports the community's green spaces by providing compost for local parks, rain gardens, curbside tree lines and flower gardens
- Reduces the need for applying fertilisers and pesticides to the garden, hence preventing chemical toxicity in the soil and contamination of groundwater and surface water, thereby protecting aquatic and terrestrial animals and plants

Compost enriches organic matter in the soil and increases the production of beneficial bacteria and fungi that biodegrades organic matter to create humus, a rich nutrient-filled substance. It also improves water retention requiring less watering, helps to resist drought, promotes soil health and reduces the need for fertilisers and pesticides.⁵

How to compost:

Please visit the websites listed at the end of this document which provide a helpful guide to making and using compost.

Tips for eco-friendly composting:

See below presentation/video (credits: Sathya Sai Center of Dallas, Texas, USA):

Instruction on setting up an outdoor compost bucket (also called the bio-digester): [Compost Bucket](#)

Gleaning

Introduction:

Gleaning is the act of collecting surplus crops from farm fields after the commercial harvesting process. Gleaning is, in fact, an age-old practice that dates back to at least biblical times, where food left over in the farm/field after the harvest would be collected for poor people. The Old Testament of the Bible states, ***“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.”*** – Leviticus 19:9.⁶

As we know, a lot of foods that are not harvested for commercial or profitable needs, go to waste in farms and orchards. However, as an act of kindness many farmers across the globe adhere to the ancient tradition of gleaning, periodically allowing gleaners to glean surplus fruits and vegetables through volunteer network programmes, which operate from mid-growing season through to the end of the harvest season. All the vegetables and fruits collected from the farms are distributed to local food banks, soup kitchens, etc. to feed hungry and low-income families in the area.

Benefits:

Gleaning provides a good hands-on learning opportunity for all. Our engagement in such community service projects helps us to:

- Respect and preserve all the elements, nature and beings who contribute to the creation of food
- Appreciate and understand why food grown on farms, sold in shops, made in restaurants, eaten at events, home or elsewhere should not be needlessly wasted
- Remember to be ever grateful and humble for what we have to eat and drink
- Never forget Sathya Sai Baba’s message of, ***“Food is God. Do not waste food.”***

Service and Implementation:

Gleaning is a wonderful service activity for all age groups. Sai centres/groups can undertake a gleaning service by contacting their local gleaning network. For example, organisations like 'Feedback' in Europe and 'Society of St. Andrews' in USA share information on their websites about ongoing projects and how volunteers can get involved.

Other Services:

Providing technical assistance to centre members or neighbours and/or helping to install a sustainable vegetable garden and/or compost pit/bin in their garden

For ideas, please see below inspiring presentations on building three types of vegetable gardens and setting up a compost digester bin (credits: Sathya Sai Centre of Dallas, Texas, USA):

- ‘Sai garden in every heart and every home’ – [Gardening based on Sathya Sai Baba human values](#)
- Instruction on setting up a raised bed garden – [Raised bed Installation Method](#)
- Instruction on building a Garden Tower (also called the Tower Garden) – [Tower Garden](#)

Note:

Community involvement. Local civic groups, environmental organisations, township, universities, or environmental commissions conduct above-mentioned environmental service activities throughout the year. Centres/groups/individuals may coordinate a group service activity by contacting the pertinent parties for logistical planning and either organise the environmental service event for the group and public, or collaborate with others.

Below is a list of pages on related community involvement by Sai centres around the world:

[Organic Garden for Orphans in Costa Rica](#)

[Sai Garden in Every Heart and Home in Dallas, Texas, USA](#)

[Sai Garden Project in Houston, Texas, USA](#)

[Gleaning Produce to Decrease Hunger in Maryland, USA](#)

Helpful Website Links on Composting	
Extremely Green Gardening Co. – Organic fertilizer and soil amendment guide	http://www.extremelygreen.com/fertilizerguide.cfm
U.S. Department of Agriculture – The National Organic Programme	http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/Consumers/Consumerhome.html
ATTRA Sustainable Agriculture – Article on companion planting and botanical pesticides	http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/complant.html
Benefits of mulching	http://www.gardenstew.com/blog/e3-15-mulching-benefits--organic-and-inorganic-mulch-types.html
Maryland Cooperative Extension – Earth friendly gardening – Composting	http://extension.umd.edu/hgic/soil-basics
Home composting	http://organiclifestyles.tamu.edu/compost/home_composting_faqs.pdf

References:

1. <https://www.biocycle.net/2013/11/18/community-composting-in-new-york-city/>
2. <https://saicouncil.org.my/youth/walk-for-values/>
3. <http://www.farmentoschool.org/about/what-is-farm-to-school>
4. <https://compostpedallers.com/compost/six-reasons-you-should-care-about-community-scale-composting>
5. <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics>
6. <http://www.sailoveinaction.org/project/GLEANING-PRODUCE-TO-DECREASE%20HUNGER>

Appendix:

Illustrations of relevant service activities performed around the world by Sathya Sai International Organisation members:





If you have any questions or need additional information pertaining to the contents in this document, please do not hesitate to contact the Serve The Planet team via servetheplanet.ssio@gmail.com.



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