Gardening Tips

Gardening can increase available produce for programs of any size, even those with few resources to spare. More information about the following garden types can be found in the Growing Connections Farm-to-Food Bank Toolkit.

Grow-a-Row and Community Gardens
Under the Grow-a-Row program, gardeners and farmers dedicate a row in their garden or a tree in their orchard to providing produce for a food bank. Here are the steps to establishing a Grow-a-Row:

i. Learn more about the program at the Garden Writers Association website.
ii. Market your Grow-a-Row initiative on social media, local radio and news, and at places frequented by gardeners, such as gardening stores.
iii. In late winter, network with local gardening and farming communities and explain the difference they can make by investing in the initiative. Make sure to give signs and row sticks to participants so they can advertise that part of their produce supports a local emergency food program.
iv. Keep track of donated produce amounts, and publicly announce the figures at the end of the season to show its success. Thank the growers for their participation as well.

Similar to fostering a Grow-a-row program, here are the steps to setting up a community garden:

i. Network with a local community garden in mid to late winter, explaining the benefits such a connection would have on your clients. If gardeners are interested, meet with them and discuss logistics. If there are multiple food programs and a large community garden in an area, those programs can create flyers including open hours, when they accept produce, and what kinds of produce they are looking for the most.
ii. It is best if the group chooses a food bank garden coordinator to be a point of contact, who can organize the growing and distribution for the food bank.
iii. Keep track of donated produce amounts, and publicly announce the figures at the end of the season to show its success. Thank the growers for their participation as well.

Food Bank Gardens
Food banks can garden on-site or at an approved location, and allow for easy distribution and a produce variety tailored to the specific needs of clients. Volunteers can come from schools or garden supply store volunteer events. The steps to making a food bank garden include:

i. Locate volunteers to assist in gardening.
ii. Plan a garden that balances client needs/wants with plants not too difficult to grow.
iii. Gather or purchase gardening materials. See if any stores might donate.
iv. Plant the garden. If it proves successful, consider partnering with organizations to offer classes in gardening, food preservation and cooking for clients.

Seed Distribution
Provide seeds for your clients to grow food at home!

i. Research seed companies in the state. Contact them to see if they would be willing to donate seed packets.
ii. Distribute seeds to clients.
iii. Work with Washington State University Master Gardeners to create a tip sheet on growing seeds that you are distributing. Make sure to include container and yard gardening.

For more information about starting or developing your farm-to-food bank initiative, please email growingconnections@northwestharvest.org, or contact Laura Titzer at 206.923.7423.