

### Activities to help build community participation in local food gardens

The best garden activities are often those developed by local community members, that have been developed by linking up with other community programs, resources and people to help raise awareness about the garden/s; and to make the garden/s amenable and attractive places to gather and interact, volunteer or work. What works for each community will vary from place to place.

#### **Some ideas to help build community participation and ownership of gardens that people have told us about through our 2009 surveys:**

##### *Cooking good food*

- Community cook ups that use meat from hunting, bush plants and ‘veggie’ gardens, to demonstrate how different ingredients can be used together to make meat go further.
- Community ‘cook ups’ at or near the garden
- Cook up and cooking classes that use produce from the garden. Primary health care education linked to gardens.
- Cooking classes to produce examples of chutneys. Jams, dried fruits that people might be able to sell locally.

##### *Relationships and resilience*

- School links – link gardens to local schools, school projects, health and physical activity programs and into curricula
- Simple growing competitions, promoted through local stores, schools, clinics and wellbeing centres. Prizes that reward effort, produce, and volunteering.
- After School activity gardens
- School ‘student’ volunteers facilitated by teachers to help establish gardens, drawing on skills they’ve learnt at the school garden
- Gardens as places where women can meet and watch children playing.
- Gardens designed to support and link with Elders and Youth life skills and relationships programs.

##### *Household gardens*

- Link household gardens and local plant supply to ‘showcase’ garden that includes bush foods, fruit and veggies, in a public place – CDEP or other type of garden.

- Imaginative approaches to local ‘volunteering’ projects built around things the community would like to see, such as landscaping, healing plant trails
- Health and physical activity, at a personal level for pleasure and preventative health

#### *Public spaces and the community environment*

- Local Elders who have cultural knowledge take responsibility for bush food plant selection, propagation and local nursery to support other gardens.
- Link with local environmental and bush food gathering projects and activities. Shade and local water catchment plantings to include fruit and food plants.
- Attractive gardens, landscaped in public spaces in a central, secure location, that combine bush foods and other fruit and veggies, and are a social place to meet, sit and hold health and other information sessions.
- Bush food projects and programs that draw on Elders knowledge and leadership, and link with local wellbeing, health, or environmental programs

#### *Traditional knowledge and bush foods*

- Healing gardens and trails in public areas, that involve young and older people in design and plantings
- Landscape using resilient bush food plants – where there are fences (use bush food creepers); fruit bearing shade trees at schools, clinics and public places

#### *Markets – social and economic activities*

- Set up local markets: monthly or weekly market days, perhaps a Friday evening market at which arts, craft, produce and other items are sold.
- Local markets, such as weekly or monthly markets, linked up with local food stores, and held at a central, safe and attractive space.
- Activities built around existing local groups and projects – Local food stores, family (skin groups), health mob, school mothers, CDEP, Ranger groups etc to capitalize on existing networks and collaboration.
- Build in local participation every step of the way – preparation, planting, harvesting, distribution, sale, and consumption.

### Aims of Food gardens? Community ownership and participation

Community consultation to talk about tucker, gardens, health and wellbeing, and what community members might like to see happen can help build local ownership and participation.

If possible, its good to discuss what everyone wants and work toward an agreement about some key common aims and objectives for the garden project or program. While not everyone may agree, if communities can express and agree some key aims and objectives for garden projects, then these aims and objectives can provide a useful reference point for the garden going forward – and to help evaluate the garden’s progress over time.

Ideally, food garden projects should be evaluated using the criteria and outcomes that the community has voiced support for, and agreed, at the gardens inception and hopefully other beneficial outcomes may also show over time.

Evaluation of strategic garden projects (such as ones to improve the affordability of fresh food, health and nutrition, safe communities or physical activity) should if possible, aim to capture quantitative and qualitative data.

This is especially so in relation to food garden projects because gardens can support a range of social, psychic and economic benefits and these need to be thought about and valued in different contexts.

Each garden will have its own goals and objectives and these will inform evaluative approaches.

Evaluation of nutrition education and community projects that may include local food production strategies such as food gardens and bush tucker trails or nurseries should, in addition to looking at changes to eating habits and improvements to health, consider and attempt to measure some of the following sorts of impacts:

- Volumes of produce grown locally
- Volumes of produce grown locally and consumed locally
- School participation rates (where there are school gardens)
- Enhanced local environmental amenity
- Measures of hours spent by community members in respective garden projects – as workers, as visitors to a sociable place
- Measures of the garden as a safe, frequented, public space
- Measures of safety within the community (it is well documented that people on the street/in the garden can contribute to safer places)
- Changes in community volunteering
- Levels and types of physical activity that can be recorded in association with the food garden
- Changes in household gardens and other food garden activity in the community
- Changes in social capital vis healthy relationships between members of different generations.