

# LA CROSSE FOOD GROWING GUIDE

Easy to follow instructions on growing food in the City of La Crosse.



## BEST PRACTICES

The City of La Crosse encourages a vibrant and abundant local food system that includes growing food in public and private spaces. This guide reflects City ordinances where they apply, but also will help guide citizens on food growing options, integrating food growing in an urban setting, and the welfare of animals and their human caregivers. These guidelines are for the purpose of raising food for family and sharing with friends and, not for profit.

# RESIDENTIAL FOOD GARDENS

Gardening can be an easy way to begin producing your own food. There are myriad benefits of home gardening which include improved physical and mental health, self-satisfaction, and helping the environment. There are also many different ways to garden, regardless of the space available to you.

During World War II, Victory Gardens enabled people to grow 40% of their vegetables. "People with no yards planted small Victory Gardens in window boxes and watered them through their windows. Some city dwellers who lived in tall apartment buildings planted rooftop gardens and the whole building pitched in and helped."\*

## EASE OF CARE

Plants require healthy soil, sunlight, and water to grow. Ease of care depends on the size of your garden plot and number and type of plants. Maintenance typically involves digging, tilling, or clipping tools and a water source. Plants may go directly in the ground or you may construct raised beds, or use containers to hold your plants.

## NUMBERS

Residents may use any part of their yard for gardening, though care should be taken to not crowd sidewalks, streets, alleys, or neighboring properties.

## BEST PRACTICES

- Research methods and plants that might be best for your goals, lifestyle, and your space.
- Start small; only garden as much space as you can manage.
- Tilled soil with weed barriers is a low cost way to start.
- Raised beds can be a good way to delineate space, control weeds, and easily improve soil quality.
- Limited space doesn't have to limit your options; you could look into straw bale gardening, square foot gardening, or container gardening.

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- Sunshine is very important for growing vegetables. Sunny, unshaded areas may be hard to find and sometimes front yards are the best location. Different types of gardens, such as a food forest, require less sun and may be a good option.
- Composting adds nutrients to your soil and healthy soil makes healthy plants; if you are concerned about contamination, get your soil tested.
- Mulching material like straw, wood chips, cocoa hulls, or compost can keep down weeds and save on watering.
- Weed your garden. Nothing ruins your crop and aesthetics of you garden more than being overrun with weeds.
- Screening with food bearing hedges or trees can help block out unsightly areas.
- Sharing food with your neighbors is a good way to make it up to them if your garden is little less conventional than a lawn with hedges.
- Put your garden to bed for winter by pulling annuals and composting them and by pruning perennials.

## RESOURCES

Mother Earth News' Planting Guides for North Central & Midwest Regions  
[www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/north-central-and-rockies-gardening-region.aspx](http://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/north-central-and-rockies-gardening-region.aspx)

[www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/central-midwest-gardening-region.aspx](http://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/central-midwest-gardening-region.aspx)

Smithsonian Gardens [www.gardens.si.edu](http://www.gardens.si.edu)

Beacon Food Forest [www.beaconfoodforest.org](http://www.beaconfoodforest.org)

Straw bale gardening [strawbalegardens.com](http://strawbalegardens.com)

Square foot gardening [squarefootgardening.org](http://squarefootgardening.org)

Hillview Urban Agriculture Center [www.hillviewuac.org](http://www.hillviewuac.org)

Seed Savers [www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)

The La Crosse Seed Library [lacrosselibrary.org/seed-library](http://lacrosselibrary.org/seed-library)

# COMPOSTING

Some estimates suggest that 40%-60% of all waste that goes to the landfill is compostable food waste. That is a lot of good soil nutrients going unused! Composting not only reduces the amount of waste that is disposed of, but also converts it into a product that is useful for your garden, landscaping, or house plants. Hauling less waste also has a positive effect on the environment. Composting waste has less of an impact than having waste because less energy will be used disposing of the food waste.

## EASE OF CARE

Composting is simply the collection of organic material and waiting for it to break down over the period of weeks or months. Organic materials may include fruit and vegetable scraps, but not meat, eggs, or dairy. Compost can be stored in a bin, barrel, or pile. You can speed up the process by aerating the compost, or by using worms, bugs, or microorganisms to break down the waste. The trick with all forms of composting is to keep a balance of green and brown material and of a moist but not wet environment.

## SCALE

There is no limit to the size of compost system you can set up, so it depends on your space available, food scraps generated, and amount of effort you are looking to put in. Sizes range from a small container indoors to large heaps in your back yard.

## BEST PRACTICES

- Worm bins are nice enclosed systems that can be kept under a sink inside the home; worms should be fed weekly.

- Rolling/ stacking composters are also contained ways of composting in a small space outside without the need for worms.

- Brush piles are good for large volumes of green and brown waste.

- Pests must be prevented from getting into the compost in outdoor systems; keep meat out, cover food with dry material, allow for drainage and sun, and surround with rocks or fencing. Fencing can also help screen unsightly views.



- Moisture levels must be monitored to prevent bad smells and problems with food break down.
- Mixture of food scraps and dry materials should also be balanced to avoid odor.
- Liquid (compost tea) generated from worm compost should be diluted before being used as fertilizer.
- Harvest compost regularly to avoid excess build up.

## RESOURCES

Basics:

[howtocompost.org](http://howtocompost.org)

Visit Hillview Urban Agriculture Center's Vermicompost facility:

[www.hillviewuac.org](http://www.hillviewuac.org)



# NATIVE LAWNS

Lawns of conventional turf grass are associated with excessive water use, health hazards from pesticides and fertilizers, and environmental impacts of fossil fuel-powered lawn equipment. A Native lawn encourages pollinators, is drought resistant, creates biodiversity and preserves native species, helps fight pest bugs by creating a habitat for predator bugs, and can be a beautiful low maintenance alternative to turf grass.

## EASE OF CARE

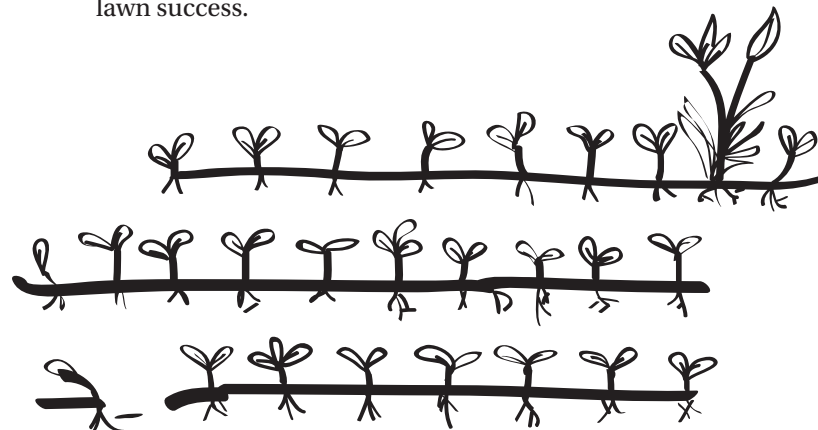
Native lawns are intended to be easy to care for, with less watering, mowing, and weeding. Preparing a native lawn, though, does take work. You will need to research what plants to grow, prepare the soil, sow the seeds, water until established, and mow occasionally.

## SCALE

There is no limit to the area you may use on your property to grow a native lawn. However, it is important to remove noxious weeds over ten inches tall and keep plants in the vision corners of your lot under three feet so drivers can see crossing traffic.

## BEST PRACTICES

- Only use native and non-invasive plants.
- Plan carefully. Research what plants will grow well in your yard or work with a professional.
- Till soil. A well-textured, well-drained soil is essential for long-term lawn success.



- Cover in compost.
- Sow seeds by hand or with a broadcaster and press the garden with a roller or your feet to get good soil contact.
- Water your lawn every day for the first 10 days to keep soil moist while the seeds get established.
- Remove weeds as they appear, before they go to seed or become too established.
- Talk with your neighbors about why you are installing a native lawn.
- Avoid invasive species that will wind sow to neighboring yards.

## RESOURCES

Native lawns how-to guide [www.wildflower.org/howto/show.php?id=11](http://www.wildflower.org/howto/show.php?id=11)

Native plant species

[dnr.wi.gov/topic/ShorelandZoning/documents/nativeplants.pdf](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/ShorelandZoning/documents/nativeplants.pdf)

Invasive plants to avoid: [plants.usda.gov/java/invasiveOne?pubID=WI](http://plants.usda.gov/java/invasiveOne?pubID=WI)

## GUERRILLA GARDENING

Ok, we know that just by putting it in the guide it sort of takes out the fun, but we wanted to give some helpful suggestions so that your guerrilla actions are appreciated rather than seen as a nuisance and removed.

- Boulevards, roundabouts and roadsides are fair game
- No trees or noxious weeds please.
- Plants that will end up being less than 36" are best so that they do not obstruct vision
- Bulbs and native wildflowers are a great choice.

# GARDENS

## Community Gardens, Food Forests, Rooftop Gardens, & Community Farms

Many citizens do not have access to growing food because of living conditions or physical disabilities. Providing community space to grow food in gardens, farms, rooftop gardens, or food forests engages those citizens, improves food access, creates strong social networks, and provides locations for food-related events. They also encourage sharing of food production knowledge with the wider community and create safer living spaces. Active communities experience less crime and vandalism.

## EASE OF CARE

Community gardens require a fair amount of organizations and involvement, and are typically owned by local governments or non-profit organizations. They often rely on volunteers to maintain the plants or have members renting individual plots. Members of the community garden share tools and other resources.

## SCALE

Community gardens range from small plots of vegetables to large farm or forest projects.

## BEST PRACTICES

- Apply for a conditional use permit required for small-scale urban agriculture uses, per Sec. 115-347(5)
- Rooftop gardens must apply for a building permit to ensure the roof can handle excess weight
- Follow Hillview Urban Agriculture Center's Community Garden Tool Kit - [www.hillviewuac.org](http://www.hillviewuac.org)

## RESOURCES

American Community Garden Association

[communitygarden.org](http://communitygarden.org)

Permaculture Research Institute (Food Forest Resources)

[www.permaculturenews.org](http://www.permaculturenews.org)

<sup>1</sup><http://www.new-ag.info/00-5/focuson/focuson8.html>



# ANIMALS

## Hens

Chickens are the perfect animal in the world of permaculture (permanent agriculture). They lay eggs, eat scraps, and their waste can be used for fertilizer. The main benefit of backyard chickens are the eggs they lay, providing a healthy source of protein for the family. In addition, chickens eat food waste diverting it from the landfill – in fact, a city in Belgium is giving out hens to reduce landfill costs. A single chicken can bio-recycle about seven pounds of food scraps in a month.\* Their waste can then be used to fertilize your vegetable garden. With the help of a chicken tractor to contain them over a garden, they can be used for weed control, soil turning, pest removal, and direct fertilizing of garden. You can also use reclaimed materials—such as kids' play structures—to build coops and runs.

### SCALE

Five hens maximum for the purpose of laying; If you live on more than 5 acres, up to 20 birds are allowed.

### BEST PRACTICES

- Fresh water must be accessible to chickens 24 hours a day.
- Feed chickens once or twice daily; chickens prefer a diverse diet of greens and organic grains – most kitchen scraps are good; avoid citrus peels, moldy or rotten food, dried beans, chocolate, and junk food.
- Eggshells should be fed back to the chickens; bake for 10 minutes and crush to avoid encouraging egg eating.
- Grit should be provided to chickens to help in digestion.
- Let out and put in each day; this is not necessary if you build an enclosed chicken run.
- Waste can be harvested every 2 weeks from the coop and aged for the purpose of home garden fertilizer.
- Manure should be aged 120 days before application.

- Manure must be aged 25 ft. away from neighbor's windows and doors.
- Deep litter methods are allowed if great care is paid to maintaining the system.

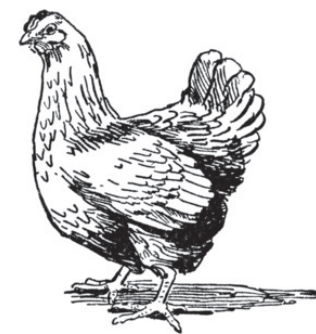
### SHELTER

- Distance from neighbor's windows and doors should be at least 25 ft. for coops and runs.
- Run must have 5 sq. ft. of dirt floor space per chicken; half of that must be covered to protect from sun and rain/snow, preferably corrugated aluminum roofing that is draining away from the shelter or being captured in a rainwater storage system.
- Coop must be 2 sq. ft. per hen and insulated for winter warmth; coop must have a roost for sleeping and keeping the chickens away from waste droppings.
- Laying boxes with bedding refreshed weekly improve ease and cleanliness of egg production.
- Free-range is allowed on property more than 5 acres, as long as measures are taken to prevent disruption of neighbor's property.

### RESOURCES

General Information

*[www.backyardchickens.com](http://www.backyardchickens.com)  
[raising-chickens.org](http://raising-chickens.org)*



\*[www.organicgardening.com/living/5-reasons-raise-chickens](http://www.organicgardening.com/living/5-reasons-raise-chickens)

# Beekeeping

Bees play an important role in food production. Not only do they provide honey, a healthy, natural sweetener that can replace refined sugar and high fructose corn syrup in our diets, but they also play an important role in pollination.

“Just think of a world without beans, tomatoes, onions and carrots, not to mention the hundreds of other vegetables, oilseeds and fruits that are dependent upon bees for pollination. And the livestock that are dependent upon bee-pollinated forage plants, such as clover. No human activity or ingenuity could ever replace the work of bees and yet it is largely taken for granted... To United States agriculture alone, the annual value of honey bee pollination can be counted in billions of dollars... The destructive effects of mites, loss of wild bee nesting habitat, low world honey prices, and the use of pesticides are making conservation of bees more important than ever.”\*

## EASE OF CARE

Start-up can include an investment of time and funds to build or purchase hives, bees, and all the gear needed for safety and beekeeping. Once bees are set up, limited attention is required, regular checking for problems during the summer, honey harvest in the fall, and protection from cold in the winter.

## SCALE

6 hives maximum per residential lot, not to exceed 20 cubic feet in volume; if you live on more than 5 acres, no more than 2 colonies per half acre.

## BEST PRACTICES

- Hives do best in a raised site that receives morning sun and protection from strong afternoon sun.
- Distance from neighbor's property and public sidewalks must be at least 10 feet for hives.
- Flyway should be 25 ft. long and cleared for bees entering and exiting the hive; flyways should be directed away from neighbors and walking paths, but barriers can be constructed to protect them.

## RESOURCES

La Crosse Area Beekeepers Association

[lacrosseareabeekeepers.com](http://lacrosseareabeekeepers.com)

\*[www.new-ag.info/00-5/focuson/focuson8.html](http://www.new-ag.info/00-5/focuson/focuson8.html)

# LIVESTOCK Rabbits

Similar to chickens, but much quieter, rabbits are great animals to raise for backyard reduction of food waste and meat production of protein. They can also shed beautiful fiber and provide a valuable fertilizer. Hutches can be built with reclaimed materials. Rabbits are very procreative and provide a great deal of food, fiber and fertilizer for the family.

## BEST PRACTICES

- Fresh water and food must be provided once or twice daily.
- Rabbits must have 24-hour access to fresh water.
- Rabbits prefer a diverse diet of greens and organic grains.
- Most kitchen scraps are good; it is considered best to avoid citrus peels, moldy or rotten food, dried beans, chocolate, and junk food.
- In a good hutch they do well in winter climates. Rabbits can even be used as a heat source for greenhouses.
- Every 2 weeks the waste should be harvested from the hutch and aged for the purpose of home garden fertilizer.
  - Manure should be aged 120 days before application.
  - Manure must be aged 25 ft. away from neighbor's windows and doors.
- Home slaughter of rabbits must follow all USDA guidelines.



## SCALE

12 rabbits maximum are allowed; if you live on more than 5 acres, up to 30 are allowed.

## SHELTER

- Distance from neighbor's windows and doors should be at least 10 ft. for hutches.
- Hutch should be 3 sq. ft. per rabbit and insulated for winter warmth.
- Mesh flooring and bedding box refreshed weekly can improve health and ease of waste removal.

## RESOURCES

Basic information

[www.motherearthnews.com/homesteading-and-livestock/how-to-raise-backyard-rabbits.asp](http://www.motherearthnews.com/homesteading-and-livestock/how-to-raise-backyard-rabbits.asp)

# Other Livestock

Horses, burros, cows, steers, bulls, pigs, calves, goats, or roosters must be kept further than 200 feet away from other residential dwellings and commercial buildings and the property must be 5 acres or more.

# Roosters

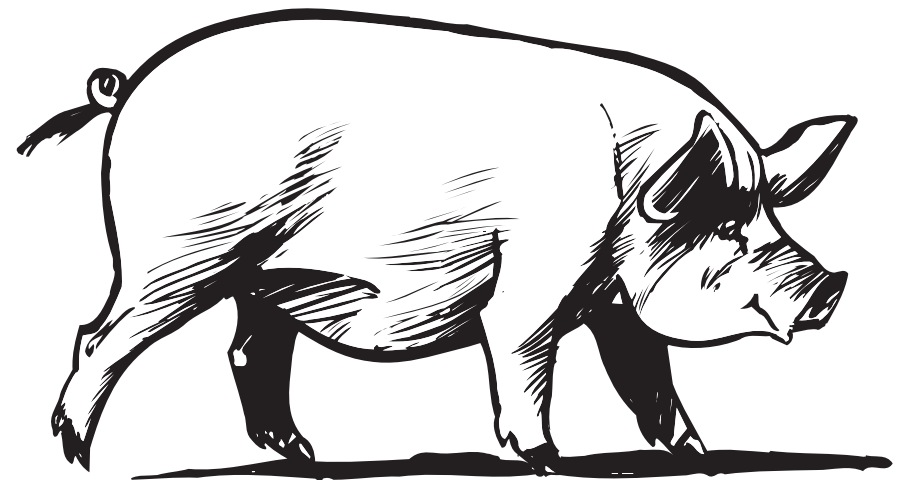
There is no greater bucolic charm than a rooster crowing at sunrise, heck all day for that matter. People around here pay lots of money to go on vacations just to appreciate the swagger of this fine beast. Roosters provide great protection for the small flock from cats and dogs. They keep the hens happy, provide a widely consumed protein and they make for more chickens. Home slaughter of roosters and past their prime hens must follow all USDA guidelines.

## BEST PRACTICES

- Same best practices and shelter requirements as hens.
- Roosters raised for the purpose of home slaughter shall not reach the age of 12 weeks.

## NUMBERS

- 5 roosters maximum for slaughter, or 1 rooster for 5 hens in laying environment.





Funding has been provided by the **Coulee Food System Coalition (CFSC)** via the **Robert & Eleanor Franke Foundation Food For All mini-grant program** for an experienced outside contractor to work with the City of La Crosse to overhaul the existing ordinances and educate the community on the changes. The mission of the CFSC is to build a diverse and sustainable food system. **Hillview Urban Agriculture Center** is the fiscal sponsor of CFSC. Partners include the City of La Crosse, Hillview Urban Agriculture Center, La Crosse Area Family YMCA, Couleecap, Western Technical College, and Great Rivers United Way.

