



Common Threads Farm and School Garden Collective

WORK PARTY GUIDE

STEP 1: PLANNING (6 weeks out)

- Setting the Date:** Set a time and a date as soon as possible. Things to consider: avoid conflicting with school and sports events; find a date when building and bathroom access will be easily coordinated. Pick a date 5+ weeks out so you have time to prepare and publicize. When setting work party hours keep in mind that you want your work party long enough that you can get substantial work done, but short enough that people leave feeling accomplished and happy, not exhausted. In our experience 2-4 hours makes for a very successful work party. Any longer and you start to lose the great energy of your volunteers.
- Setting Goals:** Successful work parties will be narrowly focused, in terms of time and tasks. Knowing exactly what you want to accomplish and keeping your goals realistic and clear will keep the organizing process smooth and volunteers happily engaged. Identify your goals and priorities for the day so everyone can articulate them clearly.

STEP 2: PROCURING MATERIALS & SOLICITING DONATIONS (5 weeks out)

- Soil:** You will likely want to budget money to purchase soil. Many of our school gardens have purchased soil from local businesses, including GrowSource and Smith's. Inquire with your garden educator about possible discounts or free soil sources.
- Wood chips:** Your garden educator may be able to coordinate free wood chip delivery to your garden, but this often takes notice well in advance. We can also direct willing volunteers with trucks to community wood chip sources free for pickup. For a reliably high quality product, purchase wood chips from local businesses such as Northwest Chip and Grind and Bakerview Nursery.
- Compost:** Finding compost sources close to your garden site will save you trouble in transporting, so check locally first. Many livestock owners happily give away manure. Keep in mind that when applying un-aged manure you need to allow 120 days between the time the manure is laid and the time you hope to harvest the first food from your garden. Sourcing compost may require mobilizing volunteers with trucks. Ask your garden educator about the possibility of getting a load of horse manure delivered via dump-truck from one of our free manure sources. Fully-aged compost may also be purchased. Our gardens have sourced compost from local businesses including GrowSource, Smiths, and DeWilde's.
- Fencing:** The cheapest fencing route is sourcing discarded fish net from the marina and stringing it between metal t-posts. If you want something fancier, make sure your budget includes money for the appropriate materials. Check with your garden educator about possible discounts. Don't forget to look at the assets in your school community – parent volunteers who work in construction or landscaping often have materials to share.

- Cardboard:** Often you can save what you need onsite by holding onto the school's recycling a couple weeks in advance. However, larger sheets are preferable so it may be worth having volunteers gather slip sheets from warehouses (ideal because they do not have tape) or large boxes from furniture and appliance stores. Find a dry place to store cardboard until the work party and remember that in sheet-mulching, 3-4 layers of cardboard adds up fast! This seems to be the most frequently under-estimated resource. We have successfully sourced cardboard from Costco and PetSmart.
- Coffee and Treats:** Local coffee shops are often happy to support your work, just remember they need advance notice for donations; local bakeries or grocery stores are also good places to solicit. Organizing a few parent volunteers to bring potluck items can also be a great way to rally your resources! Past supporters have included: Starbucks, Woods, LaFeen's, Community Food Co-Op.

STEP 3: GETTING THE WORD OUT (4 weeks out)

Identify the best places to promote your work party well in advance. Decide if this is going to be a school or community-wide event and advertise accordingly. Here are some common ways of getting the word out:

- Blurb in your school newsletter
- Flier sent home with students
- Direct e-mails to teachers and parents
- Fliers posted around the school
- Postings on the school's website
- Postings on the school's reader board
- Postings in Common Threads volunteer newsletter
- Contact neighborhood association or other local groups
- Postings in the Bellingham Herald events section, the Cascadia Weekly, or other local newspapers
- Postings on Transition Whatcom website, Whatcom Volunteer Center website, and other community networks

STEP 4: PREPARING FOR THE BIG DAY (1 week out)

- Project Leaders:** Assign a project leader to each task. This is the person who will keep things moving on the day of the work party. If there are any specific tasks you know need to get done, identify a person for these ahead of time. Example:

Task/Project	Leader
Greeter Table, Volunteer Sign-in and Food	Designate one person who will greet volunteers as they arrive, make sure people sign in and know the goals for the day, orient folks to the space and facilities, and help shuffle people to the appropriate project leaders
Sheet Mulching the Garden	Your garden educator will lead folks in the sheet-mulching process; in many cases it will be helpful to have a second leader on hand to assist – and be prepared to delegate tasks to other volunteers as well
Woodchip and Compost Runs	This is a task that you need to identify volunteers for ahead of time as it requires equipment and skills (trucks, tools and lots of shoveling). Be sure to provide volunteers with proper directions to pick-up sites.
Photography	Documenting the progress of your garden is key – find someone who has a good camera and would be willing to capture the progress throughout the work party
Kids Activity Station – painting garden flags	If you want to make this a family friendly environment you may choose to offer some kids activities

STEP 5: THE BIG DAY

Needs	Who	✓ Got it!
Copies of Garden Design		
Volunteer Sign-in Sheet		
Name Tags (at least for leaders)		
2-4 Tables (welcome table, food table, crafts table, etc.)		
Tablecloths		
Posters or Sandwich boards at front of school and street corners		
Informational board or poster about the collective or the garden (goals, etc)		
Thank You cards		
Pens/Markers		
Coordinate access to bathrooms		
Coffee and treats		
Cups		
Drinking water		
Volunteers w/trucks to pick-up compost		
Soil delivery or pickup		
Cardboard		
Landscape spray paint (for marking beds on cardboard)		

Tape measure		
Stakes and construction tape		
Wheel barrows - 4		
Shovels - 6		
Pitchforks - 4		
Rakes - 4		
Digging Forks - 4		
Kids tools		
Gloves		
Hose		
Water Access		

STEP 6: CELEBRATING ACCOMPLISHMENTS (following week)

- Send out Thank You cards (donations, materials, etc)
- Send out a newsletter to your garden mailing list, including folks who signed up at the work party, detailing what was accomplished and including any great photos
- Post updates to school garden website or blog