



ONE OMAHA

**The Neighborhood Project Toolkit is a collection of user-friendly guides on creating neighborhood projects. Information was collected from local neighborhood leaders and non-profit organizations making it an Omaha-specific toolkit. Each guide has an action plan, useful tips, links and resources giving a complete guide for any neighbor looking to implement a project with their neighborhood.**

NEIGHBORHOOD  
PROJECT

TOOLKIT

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# BLOCK PARTY



## WHAT IS A BLOCK PARTY?

A block party is an opportunity for a neighborhood and its neighbors to meet each other, have fun and work together to achieve a common purpose.

### PLANNING

Form a committee of 2-6 dedicated volunteers to help plan the process. Decide what type of party you will be hosting in order to plan who will bring food.

**Barbecue:** organizers purchase all that is needed and neighbors provide the money. Usually neighbors bring their own meat to be cooked and money is used to provide sides, snacks and drinks.

**Catered:** everyone shares the cost and all the food is purchased.

**Picnics:** everyone brings their own meal.

**Potluck:** everyone brings one dish.

Consider doing a combination that neighbors prefer and can manage.



### ACTIVITIES

Encourage neighbors to bring lawn games such as horseshoes, frisbees, ladderball, beanbag toss, etc. Many of these games can be rented for daily use at UNO at reasonable rates: [unomaha.edu/student-life/wellness/campus-recreation/ovc/rentals.php#backyard](http://unomaha.edu/student-life/wellness/campus-recreation/ovc/rentals.php#backyard)

Also, utilize neighbors with talents whether it be musicians, jam groups, comedy, storytelling, etc.

### LOCATION AND TIME

Consider a nearby park or perhaps a street or alley. These public places require a permit. The form to fill out a request with the City of Omaha can be found here: [publicworks.cityofomaha.org/images/PDF/Parade-Permit-App.pdf](http://publicworks.cityofomaha.org/images/PDF/Parade-Permit-App.pdf)

A neighbor's house or backyard is also an option and do not require a permit.

Think about timing and when the best date/time for all neighbors would be. A survey is helpful for feedback on the best timing for your neighbors (such as a Google Form).

### In general, keep in mind:

- May to August and weekends/holidays are the best time.
- Plan a back up (in case of rain, inclement weather).
- Consider the age of your neighbors to determine a time (i.e. start early, end early).

### GET THE WORD OUT

Utilize social media (NextDoor, Facebook) to promote the event. In addition, hand out flyers to neighbors to get to know them before the event. At neighborhood meetings, assign people or groups to different sections of your neighborhood to spread the word.

### A few reminders:

- Gently remind neighbors to move their vehicles and to clear the way if using the road.
- RSVPs are useful to know how much food and help to have.

### THE EVENT

#### Plan in advance:

- Set up tables, garbage cans, games, etc.
- Decide who has what available (barbecues, tables, chairs) or perhaps ask your neighbors to bring their own chair.
- Consider the bathroom policy - ask to use the closest house or require everyone to use their own bathroom if uncertain.
- Decide if the event will be pet friendly.

### AT THE BLOCK PARTY

- Bring name tags to write names and addresses/general area to get to know each other better.
- Do introductions including where everyone lives, occupation, hobbies and/or interests.
- Do a brief icebreaker before commencing events.
- This could be an introduction game to get to know each other further (two truths and a lie, go in a circle and repeat each person who stated their name) or a team building game (human knot).

### RESOURCES

[police.cityofomaha.org/block-party-parades](http://police.cityofomaha.org/block-party-parades)

- This link provides the forms and contact information for the Street Closure and Special Events Permit through Omaha's Public Works Department.

[sdsynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Block-Party-Kit.pdf](http://sdsynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Block-Party-Kit.pdf)

- This is an in-depth, general guide to planning your block party!



# COMMUNITY GARDEN

## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY GARDEN?

A piece of land shared by neighbors for growing produce and flowers and for providing opportunities for positive social interactions, recreation and education.

## PLAN THE GARDEN

Define a group of core members with definite objectives and garden goals. It is also important to identify a main purpose in the form of a garden mission. This clearly defines who, what, where, when and how.

## CHOOSE THE SITE

Test potential garden sites.

- A good resource to use is the Omaha Lead Registry to investigate the status of the land: [omahalead.org](http://omahalead.org)

Other things to consider when picking a location include; the size of the plot, history of the site, length of occupancy, water access, ease of access for community members, parking and restroom access. Consider:

- Utilizing the Vacant Lot Toolkit made by the Verdis Group to learn how to and make use of vacant properties: [ecomaha.cityofomaha.org/urban-gardens](http://ecomaha.cityofomaha.org/urban-gardens)

Other important logistical items to consider:

- Getting the necessary lease or rental agreement for the land
- Obtaining insurance
- Opening a bank account

## ORGANIZE THE SITE AND RESOURCES

Prep the soil and clean the garden. This is dependent on the time of year, so plan accordingly. Begin working on the garden once the soil thaws in the spring. Construct bins, stake plots, build garden beds and garden signs. Plant plants and vegetables that are in season.

- Here is a Nebraska planting calendar: [ufseeds.com/Nebraska-Vegetable-Planting-Calendar.html](http://ufseeds.com/Nebraska-Vegetable-Planting-Calendar.html)

Decide where you will acquire resources for the garden. Consider:

- Volunteered material
- Required dues for members
- Grants

## MAINTAIN THE GARDEN

Maintain the garden site. Tidiness benefits both garden yield and neighbor relations. Consider beginning garden programs. Garden education programs are an essential aspect for all community gardens. Throughout the growing season remember to:

- Document garden success and community activities with pictures and written accounts.
- Celebrate throughout the season with special events such as garden potlucks, picnics, barbecues, watermelon/other grown fruit feeds and small concerts.
- Start garden programs to educate your neighbors.

## WRAPPING UP THE GROWING SEASON

- Celebrate the garden harvest as a community with a harvest party!
- Invite community members to help cover plants, amend the soil, repair, clean and store tools.
- Evaluate program success and challenges.

## RESOURCES

[douglascounty-ne.gov/gardens/start-a-community-garden](http://douglascounty-ne.gov/gardens/start-a-community-garden)

- This is Douglas County's guide to starting a local community garden.
- It also provides documents for agreements, applications, land use, lease agreement, etc.

[biggarden.org/community-gardens](http://biggarden.org/community-gardens)

- The Big Garden is an organization that helps groups start community gardens and offers resources through their garden plan.

[omahasprouts.org/get\\_involved](http://omahasprouts.org/get_involved)

- Omaha Sprouts offers a network of urban gardeners and access to plots.

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

- Omaha Permaculture utilizes unused or unwanted vacant lots and elevates the property's value through urban agriculture. They are always looking for groups to partner with.



# LITTLE FREE LIBRARY

## WHAT IS THE MISSION FOR LITTLE FREE LIBRARY?

To promote literacy and the love of reading by building free book exchanges worldwide and to build a sense of community as we share skills, creativity and wisdom across generations.

### IDENTIFY A LOCATION

Decide a location that is legal and safe for the library. It is recommended to build on private property out of the way of high traffic areas or items. Omaha zoning laws have certain requirements if considering building on public property, such as a park.

- Contact the City of Omaha Parks and Recreation Department to get approval *Call 402-444-5900*
- Also contact OPPD for approval on location *Call 402-536-4131*

The location should be a high foot traffic area and easily visible. Be considerate of other people. Choose someone to be the steward, or caretaker, who up-keeps and ensures the library is functioning at its best without adding responsibility to city authorities.

### GET A LIBRARY

- Build your own library
- This website gives advice on how to build: [littlefreelibrary.org/build](http://littlefreelibrary.org/build)
  - If resources are limited, try repurposing old furniture and electronics, more information and examples here: [littlefreelibrary.org/little-free-libraries-shoestring-budget](http://littlefreelibrary.org/little-free-libraries-shoestring-budget)
- Find someone locally to build one
- Purchase a Little Library online

### REGISTER LIBRARY

Follow this link to register and purchase an official charter to become a Little Free Library member with included benefits. [littlefreelibrary.org/international-charter-signs/](http://littlefreelibrary.org/international-charter-signs/)

### BUILD AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Notify neighbors, family, friends and neighborhood associations. Use social media such as Facebook and NextDoor to add interactive pictures and maps to get the community involved.

Add your registered Little Free Library to the World Map so community members can easily find your Library: [littlefreelibrary.org/mapyourlibrary](http://littlefreelibrary.org/mapyourlibrary)

### RESOURCES

- [littlefreelibrary.org/start](http://littlefreelibrary.org/start)
- Use this guide for in-depth directions on starting a Little Free Library. [ohmyomaha.com/2014/05/little-free-library-metcalf-park/](http://ohmyomaha.com/2014/05/little-free-library-metcalf-park/)
  - Learn from an Omaha blogger and the process on how she began her Little Free Library!

# FOOD DRIVE

## WHAT IS A FOOD DRIVE?

Food drives are a great way to raise supplies and get your neighbors to work together to accomplish a common purpose.



### TYPE

Decide what kind of drive you want to have. These can include:

- Food
- Clothing
- Donations

### CHOOSE AN ORGANIZATION

Decide if this drive will benefit your neighbors, an organization or both. You can benefit both by doing a swap and donating the excess to a local organization.

If working with an outside organization be sure to contact the organization and set up a time to drop off the donations.

### ORGANIZING

- Drop-off and pick-up

If doing a swap, decide on a location. This could be a neighbor's yard, a local community building or the organization you will be donating the supplies to.

### VOLUNTEERS

Assess the need to determine number of volunteers. To get a good number consider:

- Who will pick up items donated.
- The donations that may need sorted/organized.
- Who will drop off items to the swap location or benefiting group.

### ADVERTISE

Consider the following:

- Flyers at local places.
- Social Media (Facebook, NextDoor).
- Word of mouth (at association meetings, local events, etc.).
- Speaking to local businesses and organizations.

### FINAL PREPARATION

Coordinate with volunteers and partner organizations. Assign tasks to each person depending on their strengths for an efficient workday.

### FOLLOW-UP

Send thank you notes to everyone involved!

# LITTER CLEANUP

## WHAT IS THE MISSION FOR A LITTER CLEAN UP?

The mission of a litter cleanup is to make your neighborhood a safer, healthier, and more beautiful place for everyone to enjoy.

### IDENTIFY A LOCATION

- No one knows the needs of your neighborhood better than the people living there.
- Scope out the neighborhood yourself, and get input from neighbors at the neighborhood association meeting or through forums like NextDoor.
- Your cleanup can be at a park, vacant lot, a neighbor's home in need, along a street, or all of the above.
- For recommendations, talk to Keep Omaha Beautiful about priority parks and areas.  
*Call 402-444-7774*

### SET A DATE AND TIME

Try to find a time to do the cleanup that may be optimal for the majority of people, such as during the evenings, weekends or mornings.

### RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS

- Once the date and location have been determined, recruit people to help.
- Contact your neighborhood association, local schools, businesses and churches.
- Talk to your neighbors, and post details on NextDoor or the neighborhood's Facebook page.

### OBTAIN SUPPLIES

- Keep Omaha Beautiful loans out litter collection supplies year-round at no cost.
  - *Call 402-444-7774 or email [helloKOB@cityofomaha.org](mailto:helloKOB@cityofomaha.org) to register your cleanup and make an appointment to pick up trash, recycling bags, gloves, litter collection tools and safety vests.*
- If you want to take your cleanup a step further, Keep Omaha Beautiful can also loan out supplies like yardwaste bags, brooms, shovels, and more.

## DISPOSE OF YOUR LITTER

- Dispose of your litter in a nearby park's garbage can.
  - If there is no room inside the garbage can, place the bags securely around the bin and email a detailed location to [helloKOB@cityofomaha.org](mailto:helloKOB@cityofomaha.org) to ensure the park's caretakers are notified to pick it up. Otherwise, ask area schools or businesses if you can dispose of it in their dumpsters.
- If you sort your litter into recyclables, which is recommended, you can take it to a city recycling drop-off site, listed on [Wasteline.org](http://Wasteline.org), or put it in with your in-home recycling.

### ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Coordinate your cleanup with a social opportunity, such as a picnic, potluck and games at the park after the service event.
- Agree to conduct monthly cleanups through Keep Omaha Beautiful's Adopt-A-Park program.
- Be mindful of storm drains as you are doing your cleanup, and be sure to remove litter and debris in and around them.
  - If you'd like to set up a Stormwater Pollution Prevention project in conjunction with your cleanup, *contact Keep Omaha Beautiful.*

## RESOURCES

- Littering, Illegal Dumping, or Graffiti  
**IN PROGRESS:** *Call 911 (Omaha Police)*
- Litter and Weed Complaints: *Call 402-444-5910 (Parks & Recreation Code Enforcement)*
- Nuisance Vehicles (dead storage on street/lawn):  
*Call 402-444-5555 (Mayor's Hotline)*
- Report an Illegal Dumping Site:  
*Call 402-444-5555 (Mayor's Hotline)*
- Report Graffiti (private and public property):  
*Call 402-444-5555 (Mayor's Hotline)*
- Trash/Recycling/Yardwaste Collection Issues:  
*Call 402-444-5238 (Environmental Services)*

Thank you, Keep Omaha Beautiful for the wonderful tips!  
[keepomahabeautiful.org](http://keepomahabeautiful.org)





# NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER

## WHAT IS A NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER?

A neighborhood newsletter is a great way to communicate with your neighbors and to get people involved in activities in your neighborhood and community.

### IDENTIFY A LOCATION

Assign roles for an editor and someone to gather information who can create the newsletter with a computer. It could be one person or a small group committee.

- It can be as simple as a word document (Microsoft Word, Google Documents)
- It is a good idea to have more than one person so that responsibility does not fall on one individual

Gather a list of emails from your neighbors. This could be from meetings, door-to-door outreach or social media (NextDoor, Facebook). If using an email address, copy and paste addresses in bcc so that no unwanted personal information is spread among neighbors. Consider using a free, online email platform. The top free include (more information on each website):

[mailchimp.com](https://mailchimp.com)  
[benchmarkemail.com](https://benchmarkemail.com)  
[verticalresponse.com](https://verticalresponse.com)

### CREATING THE NEWSLETTER

Know your purpose, these could include:

- Keeping readers up to date on neighborhood events
- Educating readers (articles, recipes, share resources)
- Sense of pride
- Recognizing people in your neighborhood
- Letting people know what non-profits or the city is doing in your community
- Sparking new interests and recognizing your own organization
- Providing previous meeting minutes
- Recognizing historic places or landmarks (old Maple trees, historic district, etc.)

### KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Ask your neighbors what they like. Consider using a Google Form survey or posting on social media. This can include:

- Topics of interest
- What they want to learn more about
- What stories would be interesting

*Determine interest for length of newsletter (1 page v. 10 pages)*

### CONTENT

Make the content relevant and keep information balanced. Organize consistent information, this could look like:

- Keeping the logo in the same place for every newsletter
- Having the contact list at the end of the newsletter
- Dedicating a section for new members/new member applications
- Having consistent sections such as the president's letter and kids corner

Consider picking a theme for each newsletter (education, beautification, an event in your neighborhood) and including articles and topics within that theme. Ask people in your neighborhood to write articles that are meaningful to them.

#### Tips:

- Include relevant and appropriate pictures
- Use two to three columns for easy reading
- Keep the font consistent and display your logo

If you do not have a logo, create one for your neighborhood for better presentation.

[canva.com](https://canva.com) is an easy-to-use website for logos as well as newsletter templates.

Consider using advertisements from local businesses to gain revenue.

Also, decide on a publishing schedule (monthly, quarterly, a few times a year, etc.).

### GETTING THE NEWSLETTER OUT

Email everyone on your list, but keep the list tentative. Remember to respect your neighbor's information and email address. Have someone who keeps track of the email list for new or leaving members. If budget allows, print and deliver hard copies of newsletters, distribute door-to-door, or drop off newsletters at a local place for neighbors to pick up.

- Remember: It is illegal to put newsletters in mailboxes.
- Be sure to include everyone interested.
- Get feedback from neighbors from meetings and through word of mouth.

### RESOURCES

[oneomaha.org/resources/neighborhood-as-sociation-newsletters](https://oneomaha.org/resources/neighborhood-as-sociation-newsletters)

- Here you will find examples of local, successful newsletters from Omaha neighborhoods.

[grassrootsgrantmakers.org/wp-content/uploads/Create\\_a\\_Nhood\\_Newsletter.pdf](https://grassrootsgrantmakers.org/wp-content/uploads/Create_a_Nhood_Newsletter.pdf)

- This is an in-depth, general guide to planning the details of your neighborhood newsletter.



# TREE PLANTING

## WHAT IS TREE PLANTING?

Planting trees in neighborhoods help residents work towards a common goal to build a strong community while also increasing property value and improving the overall wellness of the area.

## IDENTIFY A LOCATION

Schools, churches or community centers are excellent locations to plant locally.

- Be sure to get permission from the owner of the location
- It is recommended to get a written agreement for use of the property

Planting trees near a public street, or in a public area, such as a park requires a permit from the City of Omaha. *Call 402-444-5900.*

## PLANNING

Gather a motivated team of dedicated neighbors.

- Meet regularly and consider inviting local environmental groups or other local groups
- Seek volunteers through engagement opportunities
- Kids can help with tasks too! They can help with recording data, carrying light objects and decorating cards for invitations or thank yous

Research different trees to determine the best for your neighborhood. Consider:

- Amount of sunlight and water required, how large they grow, how much space the roots take up
- Successful Nebraska trees include: Bur Oak, Elm, Pecan, Tulip, Persimmon, Concolor Fir
- A full list with descriptions: [omaha.com/living/the-best-trees-to-plant-in-nebraska-and-the-worst/article\\_c9148524-2dee-5a22-9b40-2627a2c628fe.html](http://omaha.com/living/the-best-trees-to-plant-in-nebraska-and-the-worst/article_c9148524-2dee-5a22-9b40-2627a2c628fe.html)
- Take time to learn about Nebraska's history and Arbor Day

## ASSIGN A CARETAKER

- This person would water the young trees, prune the tree and make sure it does not grow too close to cables or sidewalks
- Also contact OPPD for tree trimming near electrical lines, areas in which trees have been damaged by storms and regular tree trimming
- OPPD Customer Care Services  
*Call 402-536-4131*

## INCORPORATE LEARNING

- Record data
- Share information about issues

## SET GOALS

- This could be a number of trees planted or items supplied/fundraised
- Write these down and make sure all members involved agree on them

## OUTREACH

- Post on neighborhood social media (Facebook, NextDoor)
- Have volunteers go door-to-door to recruit
- Make announcements or post flyers in public places

## RAISE RESOURCES FOR EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

- Ask neighbors for donated tools
- Collect dues for funds from members and neighbors

## PLANTING THE TREES

- Set a to-do list for goals accomplished on the day.
- Have leaders arrive early to set-up.
- Organize volunteers into teams based on skill sets.

## RESOURCES

- [nationalservice.gov/special-initiatives/days-service/martin-luther-king-jr-day-service/toolkits/plant-trees-your](http://nationalservice.gov/special-initiatives/days-service/martin-luther-king-jr-day-service/toolkits/plant-trees-your)*
- This is a general toolkit guide to planting trees in your neighborhood







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