Community Garden Security

Though theft and vandalism is a problem that may never be solved, there are efficient ways to help reduce its happening. Actively involving the very people that could do the vandalism and theft is a key strategy. People want to feel connected, not like they are doing wrong. This list is a few ways that you can involve them meaningfully, thus protecting your garden.

**Individual Gardener Strategies**

- Know your fellow gardeners. Introduce yourself and familiarize the people you will be working near so you can identify intruders if needed.
  - Attending neighborhood garden events such as potlucks is a great way to meet these people and even make new friends!
- Greet and thank the police for helping to monitor the garden. They will play an important role in keeping the gardens free from crime.
- Surround your plot with a barrier such as a fence (See your garden rules on fencing guidelines)
- Choose to plant vegetables that are not overly tempting for outsiders. For example, a ripe watermelon may be more of a target.
  - If you do plant produce like this, sprinkle them with white flour, as people may think it is not good, therefore not taking it.
- Harvest all produce, even if you are unable to use it. You can offer it to friends/family and local food pantries.
  - If you are leaving town, arrange for a fellow gardener to monitor your garden and pick ripe produce.
  - If you want to share produce, pick it and give it. Having a friend go in and pick might cause confusion for all people involved.

**Garden-wide Strategies**

- Keep an updated bulletin board for all gardeners to see. Have a volunteer take care of it to engage more people and to keep people informed.
- Go door-to-door in the neighborhood to make sure that neighbors feel welcome at the garden and understand how it works.
  - People who live close will come often and know who doesn't belong.
- Attend your community association meeting to keep them in the loop about this great neighborhood resource.

- Make durable signs to place around the garden.
  - Consider using easy-to-understand pictures or images to communicate, such as the one below. If possible, translate into English, Hmong & Spanish.

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Welcome Visitors!

Enjoy the garden by looking only. Please do not pick flowers, herbs, or vegetables. Do not enter individual garden plots. Thank you!

Emergency? Dial 9-1-1

For non-emergency and garden problems regarding thievery or mischief, contact Capitol Police (608) 266-8789
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- Put out free bins near the entrance to the garden in the shade so that when gardeners have too much produce they can put it there for fellow gardeners or people in the community to use.
  - Post a sign explaining this, and also letting folks know they can get their own affordable plot.
  - Alternately, you can create a pickup schedule to gather and take excess to a food pantry.

- A fence around the garden’s perimeter can help, even if gates are unlocked.
  - Consider a "living" fence which is made up of immediately edible produce like grapes, raspberries, and currants. A living fence is more attractive, neighborly, and is a gift to the community at large.

- Work with local block watches and community police teams.

- Invite local nonprofits, senior centers, schools, summer camps, etc to get a plot. They can also take on tasks to help with ongoing garden maintenance or use the garden to hold meetings, parties, or benefits.
If Vandalism of Theft is Observed

- Confront people who appear to be stealing produce.
  - Ask them how their garden is doing. If they act uncomfortable, they may be attempting to steal.
  - Inform them that the gardens are run by a number of individual families growing their own food. The person may have just been misinformed and confused as to what a “community garden” really is.

- If you feel uncomfortable doing this, call 911 and have a description of the person or vehicle.
  - Get the incident report number and be sure to post information on the bulletin board for other gardeners to see.
  - If you find vandalism and/or theft after the fact you can still report it to the police.