



Shape Up *Your* Workplace

A Monthly Series brought to you by Get Healthy CT

Workplace Wellness Idea #7: Grow your Own Garden

Get Healthy CT aims to provide businesses with ideas that will facilitate healthy behaviors of their employees to improve employee satisfaction, productivity and showcase the employer as a role model for health. To support this, we will provide a “Workplace Wellness Idea” each month that employers can implement at low or no cost.

Grow Your Own Garden: Growing fresh vegetables, herbs and fruits can be an excellent way to improve health and foster healthy eating practices. As an employer, you can encourage your employees to get involved in gardening by sharing this information with them.

Gardens come in all shapes and sizes, from small herb gardens in the kitchen to container gardens on the deck, outdoor gardens in the yard or a shared community garden. Gardening is a healthy and relaxing activity to do and even counts as exercise! Many people find it rewarding to watch a plant grow and produce fruit or vegetables that can be eaten right from the garden. It is also a great family activity to do with children.

Gardening can be easy to do – especially if you start small. See the reverse side for some helpful tips and useful websites.

For more helpful tips and local resources, visit GetHealthyCT.org or e-mail gethealthyct@ghct.org

Let's work together to help make the healthy choice the easy choice in the workplace!



Consider the following when starting your home or community garden:

Home Gardens

Home gardens are a great project to do with your family. Determine whether or not you would like to make an indoor or outdoor container garden or plant a large garden in your yard. You can purchase the products at your local nursery, hardware store or big box store. Here are the steps needed to get your garden going:

Container Gardens:

- Choose your containers for use either indoors or out on the deck/patio.
- Choose a location for your garden in full sun, which means six or more hours of direct sun in the summer.
- Be sure there are holes in the bottom of the container, place a layer of small rocks on the bottom, then fill with new bagged soil.
- Either plant seeds (ideal to start these indoors) or buy small seedling plants at the store.
- Water the plants well and regularly and give them fertilizer.
- Weed frequently. Get a trowel and loosen up the soil every couple of weeks.
- In a few short weeks, you should see progress and growth on your plants.

Yard Gardens:

- Choose your location for your garden in full sun, which means six or more hours of direct sun in the summer.
- Check your soil—much of the soil in CT is laden with unhealthy metals or chemicals. You can have your soil tested by UConn at <http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu/factsheets/SoilTestingforLawnsGardens.html>.
- If you are concerned about your soil, build a box (untreated lumber is recommended) on top of the ground, place a layer of landscape fabric on the ground, then fill the box with new bagged soil.
- Either plant seeds (ideal to start these indoors) or buy small seedling plants at the store.
- Start small because too much garden may begin to feel like work. You can raise plenty of vegetables in even a 10-by-10-foot plot of land.
- Fence your garden from hungry animals.
- Water the plants well and regularly and give them fertilizer.
- Weed frequently. Get a trowel and loosen up the soil every couple of weeks.
- In a few short weeks, you should see progress and growth on your plants.

Visit these websites for specific instructions on how to start your garden:

- Container gardening: <http://www.hgtvgardens.com/container-gardening/container-gardening-tips>
- Vegetable garden: <http://www.helpfulgardener.com/vegetable/2003/vegetable.html>
- Planning your first garden: <http://www.bhg.com/gardening/vegetable/vegetables/planning-your-first-vegetable-garden/>
- Preparing new garden beds: <http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu/NewGardenBeds.htm>

Community Gardens

Community gardens increase a sense of community ownership and stewardship. They bring people together from a diverse variety of backgrounds. They allow families and individuals, without land of their own, the opportunity to produce food. A community garden becomes an outdoor classroom where learning to grow plants is mentally stimulating and working in it develops critical life skills. People who grow their own food have access to a variety of fresh produce that supports nutritional health, increases physical activity, decreases susceptibility to illnesses and overall reduces the burden on the health care system.

- Check with your community to see if they have a community garden/co-op. <http://www.ctnofa.org/CommunityFarms.html>
- Some gardens let you rent your own plot which you then plant and tend all season. Sometimes there is a lower fee if you share your harvest with a local food bank. Some community gardens are shared among many people – if you volunteer your time to tend the garden, you get to share in the produce. You can find local shared community gardens in many cities. <http://gethealthyct.org/he-city-search/>
- If you are interested in starting your own community garden check out: <http://www.letsmove.gov/community-garden-checklist>