

Edited text from the American Community Garden Association

[www.communitygarden.org/resources/bba6e480-82a5-4ccf-870e-52af2038d307](http://www.communitygarden.org/resources/bba6e480-82a5-4ccf-870e-52af2038d307)

You've tilled and you've toiled, now the tomatoes are ripe and the squash is just the perfect size. You and your family are all excited about the harvest. Then, overnight, your vegetables disappear before you have a chance to enjoy them. It's discouraging. At best, you can hope your work benefitted some hungry soul and the food didn't go to waste. It's even worse when crops you've watered faithfully, mulched, debugged and watched over are trashed by thoughtless vandals. That's utterly depressing – food wasted, beauty destroyed, and gardeners left sick at heart. Dealing effectively with vandalism and theft poses a real challenge. The best long-term strategy – developing community friendships – takes time; and, even under the best circumstances, both youthful mischief and spiteful nastiness still happen from time to time.

Keeping this reality check in mind, these tips can help your CG garden minimize problems with vandalism and theft.

### Problem solving tips

- Encourage the whole community to take ownership of the garden. Share the pride and satisfaction that comes from tending a bright spot in the neighborhood. (Sharing a few luscious ripe tomatoes doesn't hurt, either.)



- Make friends with people who live nearby. Encourage everyone to keep a watchful eye on the garden. Invite neighborhood kids into the garden with you to see what's growing.
- Report theft or vandalism to gardeners, police, and the neighbourhood watch. Post signs announcing that police and neighbours are watching the site. At locked, fenced gardens, consider a "friendly" sign inviting participation – it's a lot more positive than unadorned chain-link.
- Host public event at the garden, especially if it's fenced and usually locked. Design gathering spaces for all ages to encourage community building and social interaction.
- Cultivate beautiful but unfamiliar plants that are less attractive to looters. Observe what gets taken and replace these varieties with alternatives. Plant odd-colored edibles – yellow tomatoes, strawberries or raspberries are bothered far less than red ("real") ones.
- Gates, locks and fences (from ornate and artsy to plain chain-link) deter mischief. At some gardens, they work well; at others, especially in out-of-the-way areas, locks may be broken or fences breached.
- Harvest produce regularly. Have a clear policy about picking without permission. If a gardener makes off with someone else's harvest, warn the culprit they could lose their place in the community garden. That may be all it takes to stop a problem.
- Grow more than you need. Share the bounty inside and outside the garden.
- Dust plants with flour or wood ashes. Thieves may avoid plants covered with an unknown substance.
- Keep the garden well-attended, discouraging no-one-there times.
- Repair damage quickly. Encourage gardeners to help restore order. Have "graffiti guerillas" clean up scrawls and marks right away.
- Caring counts. Listen supportively and compassionately to gardeners who have suffered damage, and encourage others to share produce with them.
- Sow flowers thickly around beds to make vegetables more difficult to get to.

### Growing Communities Principles

- Engage and empower those affected by the garden at every stage of planning, building and managing the garden project.
- Build on community strengths and assets.
- Embrace and value human differences and diversity. Promote equity.
- Foster relationships among families, neighbours and members of the larger community.
- Honour ecological systems and biodiversity.
- Foster environmental, community, and personal health and transformation.
- Promote active citizenship and political empowerment.
- Promote continuous community and personal learning by sharing experience and knowledge.
- Integrate community gardens with other community development strategies.
- Design for long-term success and the broadest possible impact.

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