

Fayette County Land Access Guide

For folks who want land to grow food in Lexington / Fayette County, Kentucky

➡ Step 1: Define your purpose in accessing land.

Community garden: To grow food for your household and/or community and share resources with neighbors

Market garden: To produce food or other crops for sale

➡ Step 2: Identify your land needs and requirements.

Some questions to consider:

How much land do you need? Are you looking for a small plot or a quarter acre, half acre or more? Do you need access to tools or will you purchase or bring your own? What kind of water access will you need?

There are different land requirements for different growing methods/products, so what you want to grow will impact the best land option.

➡ Step 3: Finding farmland.

Farming is often intergenerational, with land passing down through families. For new farmers, finding land can be a significant barrier. There is no single, formal support for helping new farmers find land. This section contains a patchwork of resources that can help you in this process.

There are multiple avenues for finding land in Fayette County, and your options vary, depending on if you want to have a community garden or a market garden.

If there is a particular property you are interested in:

Many properties are never listed for sale or rent and many property owners have probably never considered their property as potential urban farmland or garden space. You know what you are looking for and you can give a property owner a vision of what is possible for their property.

When you have a property of interest, first, find out who owns the property. You can look up the property owner by searching the address at <https://fayettepva.com/> You can then contact the property owner by mailing a letter of inquiry. This blog post contains a sample letter of intent for approaching a land owner with your farming plans:

<https://newfarmerproject.wordpress.com/2012/09/19/leasing-from-non-farming-landowners-part-i/>

Some property owners with parcels of more than 10 acres in size may be able to qualify for reduced property taxes when partnering with a farmer to farm their land.

If you have *not* identified a site, here are some resources for finding land based on what kind of garden you want to start.

For market gardens:

If you are prepared to purchase land, you may start with a real estate agent who specializes in farms. You may find that neighboring counties have more options and more affordable land. More options may be available to you if you are willing to lease land. Established farms may have some land that could be utilized by a second party. Could that second party be you? Asking around to organizations that have relationships with local farms may turn up some opportunities. It can't hurt to ask, if you ask nicely. It will help to be prepared with a solid idea of what your plans are and how much money you are willing to put into a lease or purchase. Prepare a brief profile of your plans and your contact information to share when you make inquiries.

- Fayette Agricultural Development Council
<https://www.kyagr.com/agpolicy/County-Agricultural-Development-Councils.html#>
- Fayette County Farm Bureau Office
<https://fayettecofarmbureau.com/>
1316 Versailles Road, Lexington, KY 40504
859-253-0023
- Farm Credit Office
<https://farmcredit.com/location/lexington-office>
1051 D Newton Pike (859) 254-2741
- School Ag teachers & local FFA chapter
- Check listings at <https://sharedearth.com/> and Craigslist
- Seedleaf has a Market Garden Program:
<https://www.seedleaf.org/seedleaves-market-garden-program>

If you are interested in adopting a school garden, follow this link to an interest form for adopting a school garden: <https://bit.ly/2TE2zNO>. If you have any questions about this program, reach out to Tresine.Logsdon@fayette.kyschools.us or 859-619-6472.

Some more resources on finding farmland:

<https://www.youngfarmers.org/finding-farmland-course/>
<https://attra.ncat.org/product/Finding-Land-to-Farm-Six-Ways-to-Secure-Farmland/>

For community gardens:

Depending on your skill level and the amount of time you can commit, you can either join or start a community garden. Joining an existing garden can allow you to support and network with people and organizations in our local food community. Starting a community garden is beneficial if there isn't one near you, or if you have a particular goal in mind.

If you would like to join an existing community garden, [Seedleaf](#) and [Peace Meal Gardens](#) have community garden plots available.

If you want to start a community garden:

Steps and applications are here:

<https://www.lexingtonky.gov/community-gardens>.

Create a Land Interest Profile

Put together and print copies of a flyer, telling about yourself and your farming plans. Include contact information. Consider including a photo of yourself. Leave a copy or copies with everyone you approach. Word of mouth is often the most effective way to find an opportunity.

Step 4 - Research your site

Learn the site history - how has the land been used in the past? Urban land and land near highways can have various levels of contamination from toxins that persist in the soil. Those toxins present some danger and may require some adaptation, but the benefits of urban gardening generally outweigh the difficulties. One simple strategy is to build raised beds and fill them with clean soil to grow in. For more on assessing and mitigating potentially contaminated sites, see this EPA guide: https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2014-03/documents/urban_gardening_fina_fact_sheet.pdf

Regardless of contamination, a soil test can tell you a lot about how to achieve growing success at your site. Follow the instructions from the county extension office to collect and submit soil samples. <https://fayette.ca.uky.edu/content/submitting-soil-samples> . Residents of Fayette County may apply for vouchers to pay for up to 25 soil tests: <https://sites.google.com/view/kyfccd/website/cost-share-programs/soil-sample-voucher-program> Heavy metal tests cost \$21 to test for Cd, Cr, Ni, Pb, Zn, and Cu in addition to the basic standard soil test. <http://www.rs.uky.edu/soil/forms/pricelist.pdf> .

The LFUCG Code of Ordinances governs what activities are allowed to happen on land within the county. There are different places that community gardens and market gardens are allowed, and different rules for each type of garden. You can view the ordinances for gardens here: <https://bit.ly/3gshljJ>

Some key things to know from the Lexington Fayette Code of Ordinances and Zoning Ordinance:

- Community gardens are permitted on *any* parcel in Fayette County but must comply with the regulations linked above.
- Market gardens in Fayette County, which may include on-site and/or off-site sales, and/or distribution of food crops and horticultural products (non-food crops such as flowers and plants), are regulated through the LFUCG Zoning Ordinance as described in [Ordinance No. 22-2017](#).
- Market gardens are permitted in zones: B-1, B-2A&B, B-3, B-6P, P-2, CC, and MU1 through 3, or allowed as a conditional use in several residential, industrial and other zones. For more details, see *Urban Agriculture in Lexington-Fayette County, an appendix to this guide*. For a list of zone definitions see [Article 8 of the zoning ordinance](#).
- To identify the zone that a parcel is in, see [Lexington Map It](#)

If you need to apply for a conditional use permit, you will need to work with the Board of Adjustments [BOA Steps 6.30.2020.pdf](#)

Step 5: Community Engagement

Any change in a neighborhood is an opportunity for growth, but change can be scary for some. Here are some suggestions on why it's important to engage your community before and as you establish your garden. <https://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/make-it-happen/why-you-need-engage-your-community>

Here are some suggestions on how to connect with people about your garden <https://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/make-it-happen/how-connect-people>

➔ Step 6: Develop a Land Use Agreement

Land use agreements should address water access, mowing expectations and other maintenance, structures & equipment, public access, parking, disposal of waste, use and storage of fertilizers and pesticides, and any exchange of money. For more planning, see the Urban Farm Business Plan Handbook https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/1.urban_farm_business_plan_handbook_091511_508.pdf
Here are some considerations for leasing land as a farmer: <https://bit.ly/3wvBieS>

➔ Step 7: Plan your Production

UK Extension has a very thorough guide to [home gardening in Kentucky](#)
For commercial growers, “What to think about before you plant”: <https://bit.ly/34JOYGS>

➔ Step 8: Finding start-up funds

Fayette County Conservation District has a cost share for backyard conservation projects, including raised bed gardens, rain barrels, tools and materials:
<https://sites.google.com/view/kyfccd/website/cost-share-programs/backyard-conservation?authuser=0>

There are various opportunities to get funding for community garden supplies, tools and materials. Some are related to specific project objectives, like educational plans, fostering pollinators, preserving heirloom plants or serving community members with disabilities. Search for garden grants that line up with your plans. You might also look for sponsorship from a neighborhood business. Running a crowdfunding campaign could bring in support from the community.

For a market garden, crowdfunding may also be an option. You will need to think about what rewards you will offer to your investors. Low interest loans, technical assistance and some grants are available for business startups. Check this list of resources:
<https://www.kcard.info/beginning-farmer-resources>. Before taking on debt, you should create a solid business plan and figure up your expected expenses and revenue. The Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development has staff available to help with business planning and development. <https://www.kcard.info/>

Fill out and submit essential paperwork

If you will sell what your farm produces, you will need a business license
<https://www.lexingtonky.gov/how-to-start-a-business-lexington>
Get a USDA farm number (optional, but required for USDA funding)
<https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/USDA-service-centers>

This guide is a project of the Local Food and Sustainable Agriculture Action Team of Bluegrass Green Source <https://bggreensource.org/sustainable-ag-local-food-team/> with support from Community Farm Alliance <https://cfaky.org/>.
Feedback on this guide may be sent to foodteam@bggreensource.org.

