

SECTION 4

More than a Place to Live: Good Food & Healthy Living for Residents & Staff

The single greatest lesson the garden teaches is that our relationship to the planet need not be zero-sum, and that as long as the sun still shines and people still can plan and plant, think and do, we can, if we bother to try, find ways to provide for ourselves without diminishing the world.

— Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*



SECTION 4.2

Creating a Successful Community Garden for Residents

The popularity of community gardens has exploded in recent years to over 18,000 community gardens in the U.S. and Canada. Many assisted and public housing sites see the benefits of having community gardening programs for residents and have started these programs at their sites. For example, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) has about 700 gardens at its housing sites, and even has an in-house “Garden & Greening” program that supports NYCHA residents who want to create a community garden at their sites. And HUD has several programs, such as its Neighborhood Networks program, that encourage assisted sites to start community gardens for residents.

We’ll give you the basics about community gardens, describe the benefits you’ll reap, and explain the steps to take to start and manage a community garden program at your assisted site.



What Are Resident Community Gardens?

Resident community gardens are shared spaces at assisted sites where residents gather to garden and grow food. They can range in size from one communal raised bed, to hundreds or thousands of square feet of individual plots, to several acres. They can serve just a few residents or as many as 50 or more, and can serve special populations of residents, such as seniors, youth, or residents with disabilities. Some sites have gardens that generate income to benefit the garden program or for residents themselves, and grow a diverse array of vegetables, flowers, and herbs for sale. Many sites use their gardens to teach classes, empower disabled residents, and train residents for employment.



Benefits of Community Gardens

Community gardens provide numerous benefits to residents and to assisted sites. Among the reasons our experts gave for creating a community garden at an assisted site, community gardens:

- Give residents access to fresh, healthy food
- Reduce residents' monthly food costs
- Improve resident health
- Create social activities for isolated seniors
- Reduce crime and drug activity
- Teach residents basic vocational skills
- Empower youth and disabled residents
- Encourage resident self-reliance
- Create income opportunities for residents
- Encourage water conservation, waste reduction, and recycling

- Beautify site grounds
- Increase site and overall area property values

As noted previously, many new construction sites include green features like community gardens in the site's design, because owners often get incentives through financing, zoning, and green design programs, as well as state or federal tax credits under programs such as the Low-Income Housing and New Market Tax Credit programs, says Shaina Burkett, Human Services Program Specialist at the Denver Housing Authority.

10 STEPS FOR STARTING & MANAGING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

Experts around the country who have started and managed resident community gardens at assisted sites have suggested a list of 10 steps to take to start and manage a successful community garden program at your site:

Step #1: Assign Staff Member to Lead Program

Assign a point person from site staff to lead the planning process and oversee the gardening program. Many assisted sites have specific positions, such as “sustainability coordinator,” which include gardening as part of the positions’ sustainability and energy conservation duties. Other sites use their service coordinator office or HUD Neighborhood Networks program staff to oversee gardening programs, or even recruit AmeriCorps or Vista volunteers to do the major legwork. These volunteers often live at the site as part of their stipend and also become resident garden leaders.

The staff member’s involvement can range from direct planning and supervision of the garden to being a point of contact for residents and partner organizations who will actually plan and run the garden program. Make sure the staffer you’ve assigned knows he or she must stay involved throughout the planning process and the gardening season, regularly visit the garden, and communicate directly and regularly with residents, says Emma Starkman, environmental

education coordinator at Foundation Communities in Austin, Texas.

Step #2: Determine Resident Interest

Success of your site’s gardening program begins and ends with resident engagement and participation in the planning process, says Beth Keel, sustainability initiatives liaison for the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA), who oversees 12 community gardens for residents of SAHA sites. It’s important to involve them from the beginning.

“Community gardens are 99 percent community, and 1 percent gardening,” says Starkman. She recommends you survey your residents to gauge their interest in gardening and their desired level of participation. You can also use the survey to recruit resident garden leaders who will help you plan and manage the garden through the season and ensure important garden duties like watering and weeding are completed throughout the season.

Depending on the type and size of your garden, you’ll need to recruit at least 10 active gardeners and two resident garden leaders to make your garden a success, says Burkett. For an example of a survey you can use, see our model form below, prepared with the help of Emma Starkman of Foundation Communities in Austin, Texas, to determine if residents support a garden program. You can also use the survey to recruit resident garden leaders to help you plan and manage the garden through the season.

PRACTICAL POINTER: Survey and involve maintenance and other site staff, as well as residents, even if they aren’t assigned to manage the program, says Harris. Doing this helps get buy-in from maintenance and other site staff for the project and prevent problems from arising that affect general site operations and maintenance. It also builds employee morale and creates working relationships among staff members who would otherwise not interact, says Bethany Bender, affordable housing sustainability coordinator in Philadelphia.

MODEL FORM

RESIDENT SURVEY — COMMUNITY GARDEN

We are considering creating a community garden here at ABC Apartments. Your input is valuable to this process. Please return this completed survey to the management office.

1 Do you think a community garden would improve the site?

Yes Maybe No

2. Would you like to participate at the garden?

Yes Maybe No

If yes, how often? *Once or twice*

per week per month per year

3. Do you have any prior gardening experience?

Yes No

4. Would you like to be a garden leader?

Yes No

Resident Name & Unit #: _____

Tel. #: _____

Email: _____

Step #3: Identify Community Partners

Many sites with community gardens don't plan and manage the garden program entirely by themselves. Instead, they partner with experienced community organizations to work with the site staff and residents to plan, fund, install, and/or manage the garden.

It's important to partner with organizations that are truly based in the community and have existing relationships with other organizations that can support your garden program, says Mac Levine, founder and executive director of Concrete Safaris, an organization

that runs gardening programs at NYCHA sites involving thousands of residents and tens of thousands of square feet of growing space. You may want to partner with several organizations that can contribute to different aspects of the program, such as gardening supplies, soil and other resources, funding, technical assistance, access to volunteers, educational opportunities, and potential income or vocational training opportunities for residents. At least one of your partners should have local experience and expertise in gardening, soil health, and growing food in small spaces, says Levine.

Here are the types of organizations you may want to consider contacting and recruiting as potential partners:

- Food access organizations
- Urban farming organizations
- City departments of parks and recreation
- Community development organizations
- Botanic gardens
- Horticulture societies
- Green building councils
- Open lands organizations
- Mayors' initiatives for food and fitness
- Churches
- Foundations
- Volunteer service organizations
- Housing authorities' garden or greening programs

The degree of involvement of your partner organization is up to you, depending on the size and needs of your garden program. But choose partners that have the time and capacity to help manage the program and will stay involved along with your site's staff, says Starkman.

Step #4: Select Appropriate Location

The location and type of garden depends on a number of factors. Not all locations on your site are suitable for gardens, says Lee Trotman, NYCHA's Director of Energy and Sustainability. Walk your site with landscape or other maintenance staff and knowledgeable partner organizations to assess the site for the following features:

Sunlight. Most vegetables need at least six hours of sun per day. Visit the site location at different times of day to see how many total hours of sun it gets each day.

Space. How large is the site? How many beds can you fit in the space? Is there room for other features, such as a shed, seating, and composting? Will the garden block any paths, doorways, or take away from an existing use?

Water. Water access is vital, and ideally, your site should have access to a spigot or other water source. If not, or as a water supplement and conservation measure, consider collecting rainwater from rooftops.

Soil. Plants grow best in soil that drains well and doesn't dry out too quickly. Avoid areas where puddles form when it rains or are too sandy and dry. An ideal soil for direct planting has good fertility and good drainage, with no history of contamination or industrial use. If plants are currently growing in the area, make sure they are healthy.

PRACTICAL POINTER: Consider having your soil tested. Almost all states have an agriculture extension service or soil-testing lab where you can send soil samples for testing for fertility and the presence of contaminants and heavy metals such as lead or arsenic. Soil tests cost between \$15 and \$150, depending on what you request.

Slope. Locate your garden in a flat area with little slope.

Access. Make sure that the site has adequate access to deliver soil and other heavy supplies. If the area doesn't have room for storage, do you have an existing accessible storage area for gardening equipment and tools? And be sure that disabled residents will have access

into and around the garden area to avoid violating HUD rules and the Americans with Disabilities Act standards for accessibility, says Keel.

Existing structures. Assess existing structures, fences, rocks, cement, shrubs, and trees to determine which you'll need to move and which you can keep or reuse for the garden (for example, using a cement area for garden tables, or large trees as a shady area for resident gatherings). Determine if gas lines, water mains, or septic tanks exist below the area.

Step #5: Hold Planning Meeting(s) to Plan & Design Garden

Once you've chosen your garden's location, hold planning meetings with partners, assigned staff, and resident leaders to: (1) spell out the vision and features for the garden; (2) design the space; and (3) assign planning, design, and construction tasks. You'll probably have to hold more than one meeting to make sure everyone understands his role and responsibilities in garden planning, installation, and day-to-day management, says Levine. The garden team should create a plan that addresses the following topics:

Type of garden. The type of garden depends on who will be using the garden, the purpose of the garden, the amount of space you have, how much food you'll want the garden to grow, the soil quality at your site, and resident preferences, says Keel. Two key factors to consider when planning the type of garden are:

Planting beds. You'll want to decide what type of planting beds works best for your garden—for example, planting in raised beds or planting directly into the ground. If your garden is primarily for elderly or disabled residents, for example, you'll want to install raised beds that are wheelchair accessible and high enough so residents can reach from all sides without heavy bending, says Keel. She recommends making at least a portion of any garden accessible for residents with disabilities and to make all of it accessible if you manage sites specifically for or have a large percentage of elderly and disabled residents. Many of SAHA's residents are elderly or

disabled, so Keel uses ADA-compliant raised beds that are 24 inches high, with paths at least 36 inches wide, in all SAHA gardens.

Communal or individual plots. You'll also want to decide if the garden spaces will be communal, meaning the residents share all the space and work on the garden together, or will consist of individual plots or raised beds, says Burkett. Communal gardens work well for smaller garden spaces so more residents can participate and learn together, but they won't necessarily grow that much food for themselves. If your garden's purpose is education, youth empowerment, community building, or therapy for older or disabled residents, you can use shared growing spaces that residents can plant and harvest together, says Sandra Gray of Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation. If the purpose is to give residents access to fresh, healthy food and lower their food budgets, you'll need more space to give residents individual plots to grow their own food.

PRACTICAL POINTER: If you tested your soil, the test results can affect what type of beds you choose. All soil can be improved with compost, but if your soil has poor fertility or has a history of contamination, raised beds with new soil will be a much safer option than planting directly into the ground. Also, you can keep better track of individual plots if they are in raised beds, and gardeners have less risk of plants being trampled or eaten by animals.

Types of plants. Decide what kinds of plants residents will grow in the garden. You don't need to choose the varieties—leave that up to the resident gardeners to decide—just consider the types so you can better plan the overall design. Types of plants residents can grow in community gardens are:

- Vegetables
- Herbs
- Grains
- Fruit and nut trees
- Flowers and flowering bushes
- Berry and other food bushes
- Native and medicinal plants

- Perennials and perimeter landscaping
- Climbing plants for fences, trellises

EDITOR'S NOTE: Some sites also have beehives to help pollinate the garden and create honey, and even animals such as chickens, at their site. But some municipalities bar the raising of bees, poultry, or other farm animals, and you can face fines if you don't follow the law. If you're considering having a beehive or raising chickens for eggs, be sure to consult your site's attorney to find out what local laws govern these practices.

Structures and other features. Determine what structures and other features to your garden you want or need, and whether you'll have to buy them, build them, or if any currently exist at the site that you could reuse in the garden. Common garden structures include:

- Sitting areas with rain/shade shelter
- Fencing with lock to reduce vandalism, theft, and animals
- Shed with lock for storing tools and seeds
- Greenhouse to start plants
- Work table
- Water source
- Irrigation systems
- Rainwater collection tanks
- Compost collection area
- Vermiculture (worm composting) bin
- Educational signage and hands-on learning tools
- Bulletin board for displaying rules and updates
- Fire pit/barbecue
- Children's garden/play area
- Public art

Garden installation process. Decide the timeline for installing the garden and whether you'll pay professionals or use volunteers to do the work, including cleaning the site, turning sod, building raised

beds and structures, ordering soil, filling beds, ordering or starting plants, and setting up the watering system.

Educational and vocational activities. In addition to growing food for residents to use at home, many gardens have educational and vocational activities. For example, Village Gardens in Portland, Ore., creates gardens at public housing and assisted sites for at-risk youth, who help plan, plant, harvest, and sell the garden's vegetables at an area farmers market. The program pays the youth an hourly wage through a local grant, says Jason Skipton, community programs supervisor at Village Gardens. Village Gardens also runs resident gardens for families that includes 15 hens for laying eggs, a kids gardening and cooking program, and a training program for community health workers using the garden to advocate for good resident health, says Skipton.

HUD rules encourage site owners and managers to create educational and vocational opportunities, and a garden is a good way to create these opportunities (*see HUD Handbook 4381.5, Chapter 9: Neighborhood Networks Fact Sheet*). Decide what kind of activities your garden will have throughout the season.

Skills of gardeners and training needs. Make a list of the gardening skills you'll need to install and manage the garden during the season. Ask which of these skills your garden team currently has and find out where to get additional experts, technical assistance, and training for the skills the team doesn't have. Skills you should look for or may want in gardeners include:

- Analyzing and improving soil health
- Making compost
- Installing and operating irrigation
- Managing pests
- Starting plants
- Saving seeds
- Planning planting calendars



- Cooking and preserving

Sustainability. A garden is a great place to grow food, but you can also use the garden as a living classroom for your residents to learn about other sustainability and conservation practices. HUD rules encourage owners and managers to educate residents on energy and other conservation issues, so incorporating these practices into your garden could help reduce water, energy, and waste costs at your site in the long run. Consider whether your garden will:

- Be organic and avoid chemical pesticide and herbicide use
- Create biodiversity through planting native and rare seeds and plants
- Reduce water consumption by using rainwater tanks, mulching, efficient irrigation, and low-water plants
- Reduce waste by composting, mulching, and using recycled materials

Troubleshooting. Discuss ways to prevent problems with:

- Vandalism
- Pests
- Animals
- Cleanliness
- Nonresident access

Step #6: Create Garden Budget

Garden programs can cost tens of thousands of dollars to create, but smaller gardens don't have to be that expensive, says Starkman. Foundation Communities has installed gardens at its assisted sites for as little as \$2,000 to \$4,000 each for gardens with four to eight raised beds. The initial costs of planning and installing can be high, but ongoing maintenance costs are modest, and the cost of starting up each subsequent season is far less than the first year.

Before starting your garden, create a budget to know how much the garden will cost to install and where you'll get the funds to pay for

the garden materials and labor. Grants and donations from partner and other organizations, in-kind donation of materials, and volunteer labor will reduce actual cash outlays to pay for the garden.

Planning and installation costs. These may include labor, such as landscape consultants, designers, and gardening and construction labor, and materials, such as:

- Materials to build raised beds
- Soil
- Soil testing costs
- Machine rentals, such as sod cutter or rototiller
- Mulch
- Compost
- Compost bin
- Fencing
- Storage shed or chests
- Path materials (wood chips, straw, pebbles, flagstone)
- Wheelbarrow
- Hand tools, such as clippers, cultivator, and hammers
- Large tools, such as rakes, shovels, spades, and hoes
- Irrigation supplies
- Water fixtures
- Hoses
- Watering cans
- Buckets
- Trellises and bamboo poles
- Lights
- Tables, chairs, and benches
- Trees, perennial plants, shrubs, and large bushes for shared/perimeter gardens



Annual gardening and maintenance costs. These are the costs to plant and maintain the garden each year. These include:

- Plants, seeds, bulbs, and flowers
- Mulch
- Compost
- Fertilizer
- Replacement tools
- Repair costs
- Training costs
- Additional liability insurance (find out if your current liability insurance covers resident gardening and if not, whether you can put a rider on the policy to cover any potential liability from resident injuries in the garden)

Step #7: Hold Launch Meeting, Create Garden Rules

Present the garden plan to all interested residents before you begin installing the garden to get them excited about the program and to enlist their help in installing the garden. At this meeting, ask the residents to help draft garden rules that will work for your garden and your assisted site. Don't leave residents out of the rule-making process, says Burkett. Having residents create rules will keep them invested in the garden throughout the season and empower them to help prevent problems later.

Rules residents can create. Residents who'll be using the garden should come to an agreement about rules for:

- Garden opening and closing dates and times
- Plot assignment procedure
- Minimum garden use requirements
- Garden bed neglect and abandonment
- Communal vs. individual activities
- Watering instructions
- Composting instructions

- Prohibited plants, pesticides, and fertilizers
- Complaint procedure and communication with management
- Volunteer requirements, such as number of hours and tasks
- Procedures for the storage and use of tools, seeds, and plants

Rules management should create. To make sure that any problems that arise in the garden don't spill over into the rest of your site, create some garden rules of your own and add them to the residents' suggested garden rules. With the help of staff at Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation in Chicago and Foundation Communities in Austin, Texas, we've drafted a set of model rules, below, that you can add to the rules that residents create. Here's what your rules should cover:

Security and keys. Require residents to lock up the garden when they leave. Tell residents that they must not give their key to any other person and that doing so will result in them losing their key privileges [Rules, par. 1].

Damage to garden structures. Require residents to pay for any damage to the garden's structures, fences, and other site property contained within the garden [Rules, par. 2].

Guest policy. Spell out residents' responsibility to supervise the behavior of nonresident guests [Rules, par. 3].

Prohibited behavior. Spell out prohibited behavior, such as use of drugs, alcohol, firearms, tobacco, fireworks, and open fires (other than barbecue) [Rules, par. 4].

Use of major garden equipment. Require that all major garden equipment, such as rototillers, lawn mowers, power trimmers, and saws be used only by maintenance staff or by specified trained individuals over the age of 16 [Rules, par. 5].

Fees. If your garden plan is funded in part by garden membership fees, spell out the fee policy, as well as any additional fees for items

like replacement keys. It's a good idea to run any fees and deposits by your local HUD office before you start charging residents fees [Rules, par. 6].

Warning and termination. State written warning notice and termination procedures for not complying with garden rules. Some sites give residents oral notice first, followed by a written notice with time to remedy the violation, and then terminate residents' gardening privileges if they don't comply or after two written notices [Rules, par. 7].

After you install the garden, laminate and post the complete rules on a bulletin board in the garden so all residents and their guests can see them, says Bender.

MODEL RULES

ABC COMMUNITY GARDEN RULES

- 1. Security and keys.** Residents are responsible for ensuring garden safety and must lock up the garden when they leave. Residents will get one key to the garden and any lost keys are subject to a replacement fee. Residents must not duplicate or give their key to any other person and doing so will result lost key privileges.
- 2. Damage to garden structures.** Residents are responsible for any damage to garden structures, fences, and other site property.
- 3. Guest policy.** Residents are responsible for the behavior of their guests and must ensure that guests abide by garden rules, and do not create excessive noise or disturb the residents of ABC Apartments.
- 4. Prohibited behavior.** Smoking, drinking alcohol, using drugs, fire-arms, or fireworks, or starting fires outside of the barbecue are prohibited.
- 5. Use of major garden equipment.** All major garden equipment and power tools, such as rototillers, lawn mowers, power trimmers, and saws must be used only by maintenance staff or by specified trained individuals over the age of 16.

6. **Fees.** Residents must pay a nonrefundable fee of $\$[insert\ fee\ amt.]$ per year to use the garden. The fee is payable by check or money order. The fee for a replacement garden key is $\$[insert\ fee\ amt.]$.
7. **Warning and termination.** Residents who violate the garden rules will get one oral warning from the garden leader(s). Residents have two weeks to respond and correct the violation. If the resident does not do so, garden leaders will notify management, and the resident will get a written warning notice and two additional weeks to correct the problem. If the resident still doesn't, or if the resident gets two separate complaints resulting in written notices, the resident will get a final notice terminating his or her gardening privileges.

Step #8: Have Participating Residents Sign Garden Agreement

Have each resident who wants to participate in the garden complete and sign a garden agreement before they're assigned a bed or gets a set of keys. Ask for basic resident contact information and gardening experience, and then incorporate your garden rules into the agreement so residents will know what the rules are when they apply and agree to comply. Make sure residents know where to get the agreement and post it on your website with other resident documents, says Levine. Your agreement will vary based on the rules you've created. Sign the agreement and give one copy to the resident, another to the resident garden leader(s), and keep the original in your site's files.

If more residents apply than there are available individual beds, take their agreements anyway, and put their names on a waiting list. Then give the agreements and the waiting list to the resident garden leader(s), and they can monitor garden availability. Depending on the garden program, waitlisted residents still may participate in communal activities. Plus, a few garden spots usually open up during the season if gardeners abandon their site or violate the rules, and the garden leaders can contact the waitlisted residents to see if they're still interested in gardening. It's important that you replace garden members who drop out during the season so that partici-

pation in the garden stays active and the plants don't die off from neglect and lack of water, says Lenny Librizzi, green infrastructure director for GrowNYC, a New York City environmental and local food organization that helps residents manage gardens around the city, including at several public and assisted sites.

Include indemnification clause. Be sure to add an indemnification clause to any garden agreement to avoid liability for injuries and damage caused by residents. Show the clause and the agreement to your site's attorney before using it. Here's a sample clause you can use:

Model Language

To the extent permitted by law, Resident shall indemnify and hold harmless ABC Apartments, its managing agent, and its respective officers, directors, beneficiaries, shareholders, partners, agents, and employees from and against all fines, suits, damages, claims, demands, losses, and actions (including attorney's fees) arising out of, or relating to, all acts, failures, omissions, and negligence of Resident, his or her agents, employees, visitors, guests, invitees, and contractors, arising out of or in any way relating to Resident's use of the garden. This indemnification shall apply to both claims of third parties and claims of the resident or any guest of the resident.

Step #9: Hold Regular Garden Meetings

Holding regular meetings will keep residents involved in the garden and ensure that any problems that arise are solved quickly. Residents with gardening experience can share knowledge of garden practices with inexperienced gardeners. Use meeting times to:

- Fine tune garden rules;
- Troubleshoot problems like pests, noise, and vandalism;
- Hold training and educational programs;
- Conduct group activities, such as soil preparation, communal planting, composting, weeding, and harvesting; and
- Get resident feedback to aid in next season's planning.

Step #10: Document and Publicize Progress and Successes

Document the progress and successes in the garden with photos and updates in site newsletters or on its Web site. Doing this can help create a favorable “buzz” about the garden and enhanced image for the site, while helping to reduce opposition from staff, nongardening residents, or neighbors in the area. Plus, funders love to see photos of gardeners in action and hear about bottom-line successes, like the total pounds of produce grown or the amount of money residents saved in food costs throughout the season, says Bender.

RESOURCES

Most funding for gardening programs comes from relationships with local organizations and businesses, but there are some national organizations that fund gardening programs. Here are examples of sources that you can use to fund the garden:

- Grants from partners, local government, and gardening, educational, and environmental organizations
- Private and corporate donations
- In-kind donations of materials, tools, and volunteer labor
- Membership fees (be sure to check with your HUD office before you charge residents fees to use the garden to avoid violating HUD Handbook rules on extra fees, see, e.g., *Handbook 4350.3, par. 6-25* and *4381.5, par. 4-6*)
- Sales of produce
- HUD funding, including grant funds for service coordinator, residual receipts, owner’s equity, funds borrowed from the reserve for replacement accounts, rent increases, special rent adjustments, and excess income (be sure to follow HUD Handbook rules regarding use of these sources of funds)
- Fundraising events
- HUD grants (the *HUD website* provides a frequently updated list of funding opportunities)

Here's a list of websites with more information about starting your garden program, including where to find funding, technical assistance, volunteers, and supplies:

[American Community Gardening Association](#)

[American Horticulture Society](#)

[Housing Services Corporation](#)

[HUD Community Development Block Grant program](#)

[HUD Neighborhood Networks](#)

[National Gardening Association](#)

State agricultural extension services

[Trust for Public Land](#)



Create & Implement Sustainability Plans

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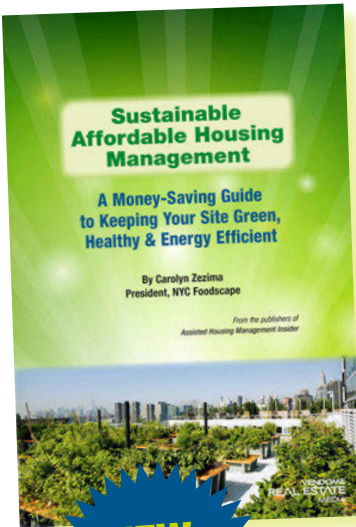
By Carolyn Zezima, President, NYC Foodscape

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