

Robbins Farm Garden

A Cooperative Learning Project



R o b b i n s F a r m P a r k - A r l i n g t o n M A

Proposal

2011 Project

December 2010

Robbins Farm Garden 2011

The 2010 Pilot Robbins Farm Garden was an experiment for us as and the community. The concept of a cooperative learning garden had at least some aspect that was new--and challenging--for each of us. We think we did a good job in our first try. But we think we can do better next year.

Garden Size

One thing that we learned was that the 1,000 sf garden was too small. We underestimated the walkway space needed to make the garden visitor-friendly. Visitors were comfortable using the wider grassy center walkways, but had to be explicitly encouraged to use the narrow 1ft paths around the garden beds. And when a number of us were working in the garden, many visitors were hesitant even to enter the garden because they didn't want to interfere with our work.

We knew early on that there were crops we didn't have the space to grow in the pilot garden, such as corn and winter squashes. By late summer and through early fall, we routinely had to give this explanation as visitor after visitor asked, "Where are the pumpkins?"

Garden Season

For the first pilot year, we had to choose crops that could be planted in the spring and harvested by the fall. This meant excluding crops like garlic (which has to be started in the fall), and crops like asparagus and strawberries (which take longer than one growing season to mature and would require protection over the winter to prevent trampling). This also meant not starting crops like spinach in the fall, which could winter-over under a layer of hay, to provide an early spring crop as we open the garden.

In addition, the restriction that we terminate the garden mid-fall meant we had to remove half-a-dozen full yard-waste bags of plant matter, rather than compost them. And there's no opportunity to demonstrate that even in the dead of winter, compost piles still work away, are warm to the touch, and will steam if turned.

Conclusions

From these issues, we came to certain conclusions. First, we decided that the right size for the garden is 30ft x 68ft (2,040 sf). We propose moving the front of the garden 5ft closer to the playground, which incorporates the yard hydrant inside the fence (making it less of a hazard for free-running children). We also propose moving the north side of the garden 28 ft further into the park, which puts it in line with the edge of the playground (see diagram on following page).

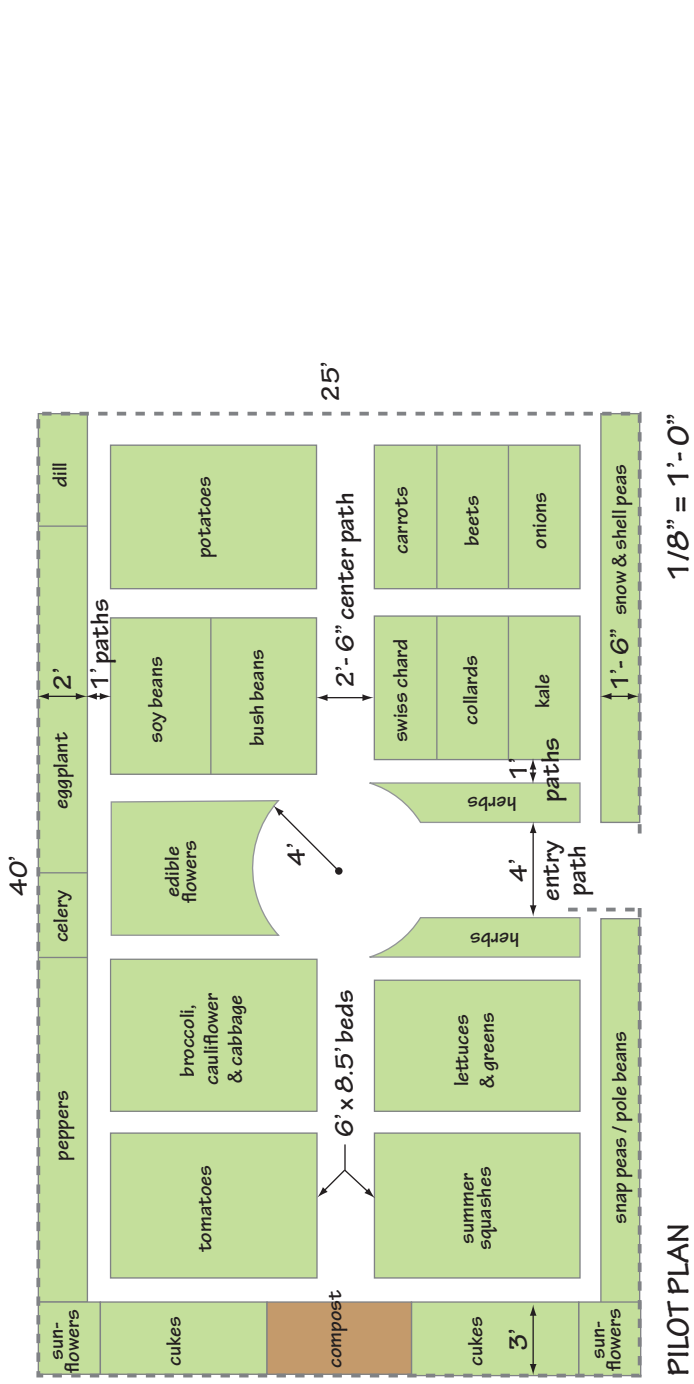
We'd also like continuity in gardening from season to season, rather than abruptly ending in mid-fall and restarting from scratch mid-spring, taking advantage of the year-round aspects of New England gardens. The opportunity for garden education includes these seasonal issues, and overlaps the school year better. However, we feel this garden continuity requires some protection, so we're proposing retaining the fence instead of putting it up and taking it down each year. We're requesting that the year-round question be reviewed in the summer of 2011.

We will be reaching out to the School Committee this winter, with the hope of making some connection with the schools next spring. The time spent installing the fence at the start of the season could be better spent in these activities. Also, while we were grateful for the donation of the snow fence, we felt the supports could have been more substantial, and with a year-round garden we could invest in a better, sturdier fence. In fact, we'd like to use the 2010 season's \$200 surplus towards this end (and other capital improvements consistent with a year-round garden).

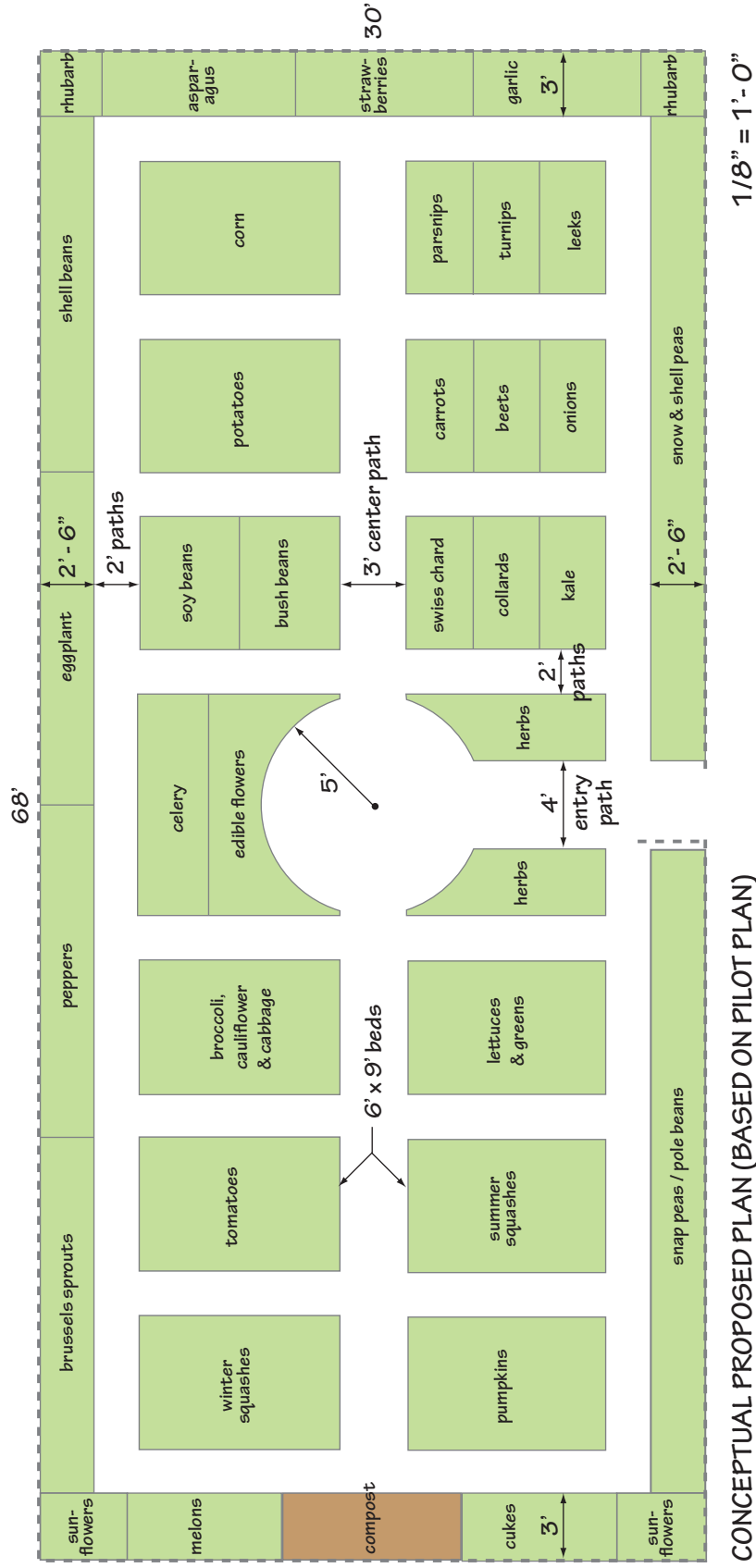
Our proposal for 2011 is otherwise similar to the 2010 pilot. We'd like to keep the maximum number of gardeners to the same limit of 20 people, so that the visitors feel less inhibited to explore while we're working (@ 100 sf per gardener). We'd also like to continue the \$75 fee, again \$10 of which would go to the Arlington Park Beautification Fund. Please refer to the detailed proposal at the end of this document.



PROPOSED GARDEN SIZE & LOCATION



PILOT PLAN



CONCEPTUAL PROPOSED PLAN (BASED ON PILOT PLAN)

1/8" = 1'-0"

2011 Proposal
Robbins Farm Garden: A Cooperative Learning Project
December 2010

1. Proposed Status

- a. Expanded pilot program administered by Recreation Department
- b. Fenced garden with web site, on-line journal and web school
- c. Review of program for year-round use by Parks & Recreation Commission and Friends of Robbins Farm Park Board in summer of 2011

2. Proposed Size and Location

- a. Size: 30' x 68' (2,040 sf), *formerly 25' x 40' (1,000 sf)*
- b. Location: 50' from Eastern Avenue, 60' from playground (*formerly 65'*)

3. Proposed Infrastructure

- a. Fence: snow fence with 2' high metal mesh inside at grade
- b. Fence Support: untreated wood posts at corners and @ 8' intervals
- c. Water: via locked yard hydrant secured inside garden fence
- d. Signage: one decorative informational sign, 24" x 36" max, plus brochure display

4. Proposed Membership and Fees

- a. Program Membership Limit: 20 gardeners
- b. Membership Deadline: February 1 or as set by Recreation Department
- c. Previous year's gardeners offered membership on first-right-of-refusal basis
- d. Lottery for remaining membership openings (if more than program limit)
- e. Annual Fee: \$75 per person (includes \$10 Park Beautification Fund contribution)
- f. Revolving fund for carrying over any surplus (including 2010, if possible)

5. Proposed Organization

- a. Cooperative Garden: decisions made collectively by members
- b. Work Requirement: 15 hrs/month on gardening/education during season
- c. Work Hours: seasonal weekend & weeknight hours to be agreed-upon and posted
- d. Produce: shared among gardeners, and with public

6. Proposed Rules and Policies

Same as 2010 (page 2) with items "a" and "h" to be revised if year-round use is allowed.

Rules and Policies for 2010 Pilot

- a. No gardening before 8AM and after dusk, seven days a week, and only during the gardening season: April 1 through October 31.
- b. No synthetic herbicides and pesticides will be used.
- c. The garden will be maintained sustainably, without damage to soil or surrounding area.
- d. Nothing with offensive odors, such as raw manure, will be used.
- e. No existing trees or shrubs shall be cut or damaged.
- f. No pets will be allowed in garden area.
- g. Children are welcome but must be supervised.
- h. Only annual crops should be planted.
- i. Selling of produce is prohibited.
- j. Care must be taken to avoid waste of water or drainage into neighboring properties.