

Toolkit: High-Yield Caja Growing Containers

Concept:

High yield growing containers that enable access to gardening. These containers could be used by any population who faces barriers to gardening, whether it be for accessibility reasons, access to land, access to culturally relevant foods, or otherwise.

Potential benefits:

- ✓ Progress towards food sovereignty by improving access to personal growing opportunities. For example, growing culturally appropriate foods can improve health and wellbeing.
- ✓ Connection to community. Participants who take part in the program can learn from others, make new connections, and share cross-cultural experiences
- ✓ Efficient way to grow food. The containers are cost-effective, allow growing in small spaces, have a high-yield, and can last for approximately 10 years of growing. The planters can also come sub-irrigated, allowing for easy and efficient watering, and low maintenance.

What's required to run a Caja container community project?

- Space for workshops (if needed based on your target population)
- Space for storing the materials prior to distribution
- Distribution support to get containers to participants who don't have access to transportation

Who could run a Caja container community project?

Any service provider who has a knowledge of gardening, can access seedlings, and is connected to a community that would benefit from better access to growing food.

If you're interested in applying, this toolkit will provide information on what implementation would look like, along with advice on how to prepare your application.

Key steps to implement a Caja container community project:

If your application is successful for funding, below is an example process implementation. This toolkit is a guide, not a rule; you know your own community best, so this process can be adjusted as needed to fit your own unique context.

1. Make a project plan by laying out your goals, the steps you'll take to coordinate the project, a timeline, and what data you'll track for evaluation.
2. Purchase materials in line with your budget, including containers, seeds and seedlings, soil, etc.
3. Develop instruction sheets for participants to learn how to use the container.
4. Develop an outreach plan to advertise the project to potential partners and the community.

Case Study: Common Roots Urban Farm received \$26,000 to provide Caja Containers to newcomers in 2023. They purchased almost 100 growing containers and distributed them to newcomers and other support service organizations to provide access to growing for people who were interested in growing their own foods and who were on the waitlist or could not access a community garden plot at Common Roots. The project brought the benefits of a community garden to people's homes in an innovative way, by producing high-yield growing opportunities in small spaces. Participants were able to

5. Plan a registration process for selecting participants.
6. Spread the word about your project, and sign-up participants through your registration process.
 - Be clear about any conditions required for participants: for example, providing the size of the containers and ensuring that they have a space they can put it in with direct access to sunlight.
 - Outline what materials will be provided, and what the participant would need to supply themselves (for example, noting that the containers will last for multiple years but being clear if the seedlings, soil, and amendments will only be offered for one year.
 - When growing in containers, it's important to replace the soil annually, which will be an ongoing annual cost for the participant.
 - The containers can be heavy and bulky, and if participants aren't able to move them on their own, provide support for getting the participant situated with the containers in the location they'll use for growing.
7. Organize workshops and/or learning materials to share instructions on using the containers, and to schedule distribution of the containers and supplies to participants. Conduct these workshops and distribution with interpretation (if required, depending on needs of participants).
 - Keep in mind, if you enroll people who don't speak or read English you will need to be prepared to translate materials, and that might be expensive. Alternatively, you could engage volunteer support for translation. If you do surveys, or any follow-up, be prepared to have both the materials and the responses translated to ensure full involvement for all.
 - Workshops may not be necessary depending on your target population. Consider how best you can offer support and guidance on how to use the containers.
8. Develop a plan to deliver containers, supplies, and written instructions to participants with travel barriers.
9. Follow up with participants to check in and troubleshoot challenges.
10. To support program evaluation and understand impact, do some end-of-project reflection and consider what was done well, and what could be improved. End-of-project survey and/or focus groups are great tools to help with this. In a survey, consider asking participants to share what types of food they grew, and how much food they were able to grow.

Key steps to prepare your application:

If you're interested in moving forward with an application, below is a list of considerations:

1. Identify the community you'll work with. If you are not already connected with the population you're targeting for this program, start by forming some partnerships with local groups that serve your target demographic and determining how your project can best support and complement existing services. This program works best for populations that have limited access to gardening opportunities but have spaces available with direct access to sunlight to house the containers, such as a balcony.
2. Cost out the resources needed for your project and determine how many containers you will get. Keep in mind things like staff time (if required), soil, any soil amendments needed, the cost

of seedlings, and if there are any language barriers for participants, the cost of interpreters for all the project materials that will be communicated to participants in the languages you need.

- Here is an example of where you can source the Caja Containers:
<https://store.youngurbanfarmers.com/products/caja-international>
 - Getting the seedlings:
 - Encourage supporting community seedling sales (eg. in Halifax: Veith House)
 - Get feedback from the community on what seedlings they'd like to see: what cultural foods are they missing? What is hard to get or grow here?
3. Consider what participant involvement will look like. How will you select community members to participate? How will you select participants if more people are interested than you have containers for? How will you distribute supplies to community members? How will you collect data from participants (such as amount of food grown) to measure impact?

Want to learn more about the case study?

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