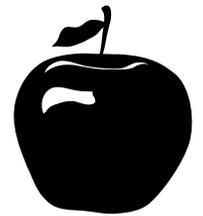
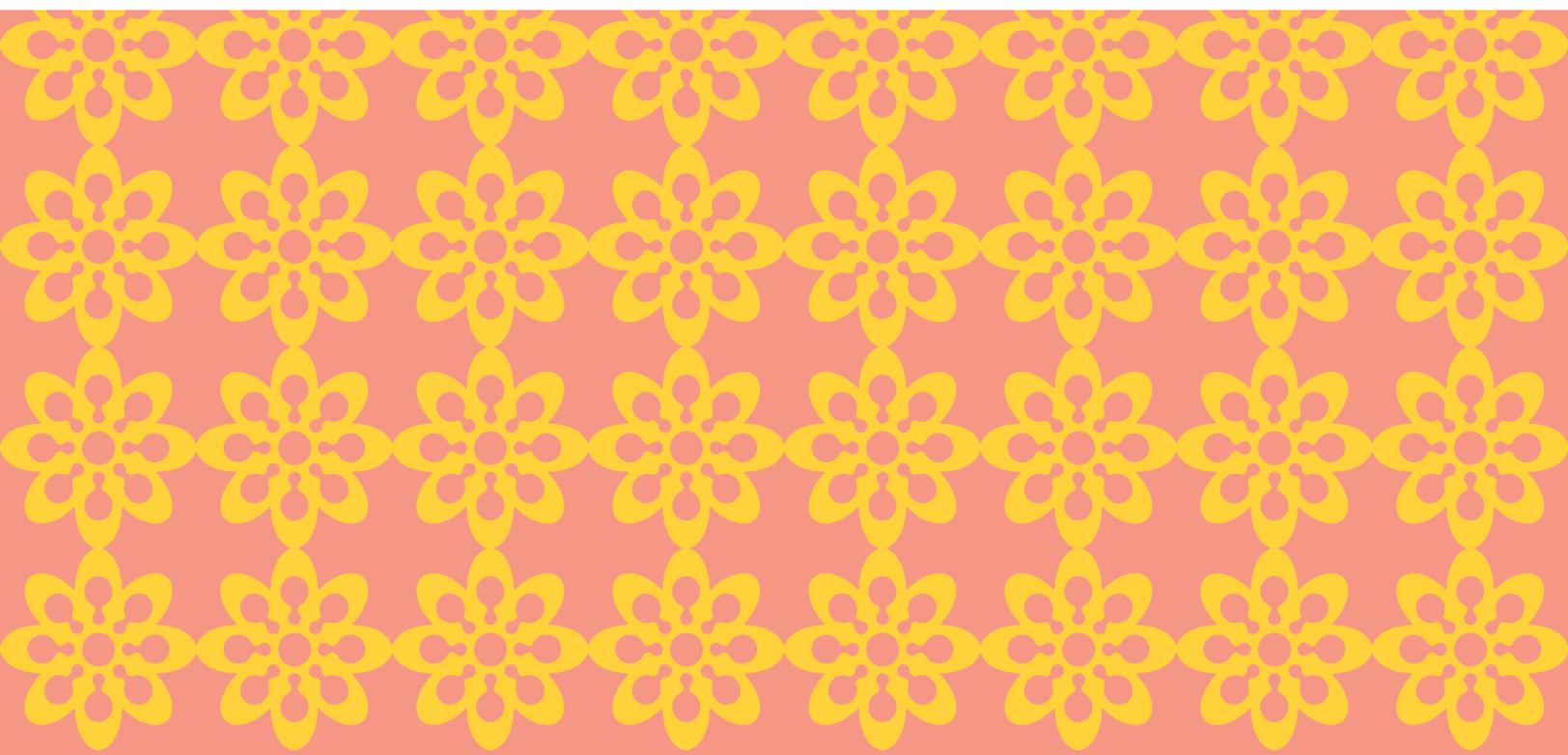


KITCHEN COMMONS



**COLLECTIVE
COOKING GROUP
HANDBOOK**



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INTRODUCTION

This guide was put together by Kitchen Commons in conjunction with our two pilot cooking groups from 2012, King Cooks and Trinity Cooks, both based in Northeast Portland, Oregon. Our programs have been generously funded by a grant from the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhood, part of the City of Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement.

Our cooking groups are modeled off of established and successful cooking group networks in Seattle (Community Kitchens NW) and Vancouver, B.C. (Fresh Choice Kitchens). One of the goals for our first year was to explore and demonstrate this model in order to develop tools like this handbook. We hope that this handbook will aid other individuals, organizations, and congregations in their efforts to start cooking groups and community kitchens. Our cooking group experiences have created lasting friendships and community bonds, while encouraging dialogue about food and culture. We hope you enjoy the lessons shared within this handbook, and that they aid you in your future endeavors.

ABOUT KITCHEN COMMONS

Our mission: Based in Portland, Oregon, Kitchen Commons matches kitchen resources with community need, making it affordable and practical to cook healthy food, putting the dream of a food business in reach of low-income entrepreneurs, and advocating for food justice.

<http://www.kitchencommons.net>



We are building the kitchen commons: a network of community kitchens in every neighborhood. Community kitchens are places where neighbors of all ages and backgrounds come together to make and share meals, learn from each other about cooking and preserving the harvest, and nurture small food businesses. They can be hosted by faith organizations, schools, community and senior centers, businesses and nonprofits. They can be certified for particular purposes, but many activities don't require certification or special equipment. The role of Kitchen Commons is to support, develop, and promote these kitchen spaces. By fostering the development of lots of different kinds of kitchens, we can help meet evolving needs in different communities. We do this by connecting neighborhood kitchen organizers with resources, creating opportunities to network and share ideas, and advocating for policies that facilitate the development and use of community kitchens.

OVERVIEW

WHAT IS A COLLECTIVE COOKING GROUP?

A collective cooking group is fairly self explanatory. It is a group of people who meet on a regular basis to cook food, sit down to eat together, and take home leftovers as well as new skills. Collective cooking groups are not cooking classes, for they require more committed planning and involvement from their members. Cooking groups are also a model for stretching food dollars by preparing large amounts of food together. A typical group meets monthly or weekly, divides into teams to cook large quantities of several recipes, shares a meal together, and then takes home portions of each recipe to freeze or use during the week. Participants learn from each other, sharing tips and tactics for cooking healthy food even with busy schedules. Cooking groups can also be facilitated, perhaps by a host organization, non-profit or church. We've tried to make this guide cover enough ground for both individuals and organizations who want to form their own collective cooking groups.



Prep cooking at Trinity



Laura and Gracie at King Cooks

WHY START A COLLECTIVE COOKING GROUP?

Collective cooking groups can be used as a tool for building cooking skills, discovering new foods, supporting health and nutrition goals, sharing food cultures and generating a sense of community. Not only can participants gain new skills to use in their home kitchen, they can also make new friends. The simple act of crafting a meal with a group of others can create a feeling of accomplishment, enhance social lives and start new conversations about food. Our own cooking groups include members of varying ages, backgrounds and interests. For all of these reasons, we strongly believe that collective cooking groups can play an important role in food justice.

GETTING STARTED

FINDING PARTICIPANTS

Finding participants for your group is one of the most important first steps. You may already have a group of family, friends, coworkers and neighbors who are interested. However, you will likely want to recruit members from your community, particularly if you are working within an organization or host kitchen. Make an announcement at your church or congregation, write up a paragraph for a local neighborhood association newsletter, or place flyers at your local market or community center. Social media is another great tool for recruitment; keep in mind that it could also increase interest beyond your capacity.



It's important to be clear about what your group is from the start, so make sure to include the basic pertinent information. Is there a monetary fee to join? Is your group open to anyone, or are you looking to serve a specific demographic, such as seniors or those with low incomes? Making this distinction will also help to determine your outreach and recruitment efforts.

Starting small or large both have their advantages. Small groups can easily recruit more members along the way. Large groups allow you a varied base of members who may or may not attend every session. Your group size should also be determined by the size of your kitchen space. Our groups tend to have about 10 participants per session, including the facilitators.

Children are another important factor to consider. Do you want to have childcare or kid specific activities available at your cooking groups? If so, you may want to consider finding a person who is willing and able to take on that role. However, quite often kids want to take an active role in the group, so it's important to make sure they are properly supervised by both their parent and the group, especially with sharp kitchen tools.

SAMPLE TEXT FOR A RECRUITMENT ANNOUNCEMENT:

Save money on food, share skills with your neighbors and make food you will love! We will save time and stretch our grocery dollars by cooking a lot of food as a group and taking home meals ready to eat. Each month we'll also share a meal together. During the first session, the group will decide on recipes for the future sessions. In addition to leaving each session with food and a belly full, you'll gain cooking skills, fresh ideas, nutrition awareness, and new friends.

KITCHEN SPACE

Finding a kitchen space can be one of the hardest parts of organizing your collective cooking group. If you are lucky enough to work within a church or organization that has kitchen access, congratulations! Because cooking groups are technically private functions where no food is being sold, it is not necessary to have any special certifications for your kitchen. While it is not necessary for someone in a cooking group to have a Food Handler's Permit, it is a good idea to have at least one person in each cooking group who is familiar with safe food handling practices, outlined on the Multnomah County Health Department's website. It is also a good idea to keep a list of those present whenever food is being cooked for a group. When in doubt, contact your county Health Department with any questions.

If you are an individual or organization searching for kitchen space, or an organization who wants to open their kitchen up as a community space, refer to our [Resource Guide for Kitchens](#). You may also contact us to see which kitchens in Portland we have already inventoried and are potentially available for public use. Some kitchen spaces will require your group to possess some insurance, or pay a fee for liability insurance. Don't forget that home kitchens can also be used for small cooking groups. Through creativity and resourcefulness, a small kitchen can still get the job done. The kitchen we use at Trinity Full Gospel Pentecostal is only slightly larger than many home kitchens, but easily accommodates up to twelve members and multiple cooking stations.



The King Cooking group at our first kitchen space

KITCHEN ASSESSMENT

Your kitchen space does not necessarily need to be commercial grade in order to host a cooking group. With a little ingenuity and the right kitchen tools, less equipped kitchens can still be utilized.

The following is a list of materials and items that your kitchen will *ideally* be stocked with. Along with these items, your water supply must be constant and reliable. At the same time, a hand washing station should be present, with soap and clean towels. Many of the following items can also be provided by yourself or group members when needed.

Commercial Stove	Roasting pans	Hair nets or hats
Commercial Refrigerator	Cookie sheets	Kettle
Triple or Double Sink	Baking pans	Sauce pans
Refrigerator Storage	Stock pots	Blender
Freezer Storage	Frying pans	Measuring spoons
Pantry Storage	Wire cooling racks	Dry measuring cups
Dishwasher	Timer	Rolling pin
Sanitizer	Meat thermometer	Oven mitts
Oven	Oven mitts	Dish cloths
Grill	Aluminum foil	Rubber gloves
Chopping knives	Plastic wrap	First aid kit
Serving spoons	Aprons	Storage totes

FINANCES

Paying for your kitchen space (if a rental payment is required) and ingredients can be a major challenge. There are many options for financially supporting your groups. One of the easiest is a shared responsibility, either in the form of a membership fee or rotating ingredient purchasing. A membership fee can also increase the chance of participants feeling like they have a stake in the group. The fee can be determined by your kitchen rental price, if any, and food budget. It is a good idea to set a dollar amount that you are willing to spend on ingredients for each group meeting. We work with a fifty dollar food budget for each cooking session. Our budget also reflects our goals and resources. The groups are aimed towards cooking on a budget and keeping costs per person relatively low.

If you are working with a non-profit, church, or other organization, additional sources of funding can also be found, particularly in grants. Our groups are funded by a small grant from the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods. Our budget includes fees for kitchen rentals, ingredient purchasing, recipe printing and any additional outreach. The City of Portland holds open applications for small neighborhood grants once a year ([see Resources](#)). Many ingredients can also be gleaned or donated from various sources, including local grocery stores and urban farms. Make sure to hold on to all of your receipts and track donations. This will make record keeping much easier in the future. Kitchen Commons can also help provide you with information on resources and securing donations.

MEET TOGETHER

Before you have your first cooking session, it's good to meet together to discuss your group norms and goals. This is a perfect time to gather everyone's contact information, discuss dietary needs or restrictions and ask general questions. At this time you should also establish who is willing to take the lead on the next steps. Each of our cooking groups have a chosen facilitator, as well as our Cooking Group Coordinator who works with both. As the lead facilitator, you should be prepared to handle the details described in the next section, including: menu planning, choosing recipes, ingredient purchasing and RSVPs. These roles can later be divided between the participants once a schedule and a structure have been decided for the group.

PLAN A TIME FOR FIRST COOKING SESSION

It is important to arrange a time for your cooking session that works for the majority of the group. Quite often the meeting date and time will depend on the availability of the kitchen space you are using. After your first session, you will gain a better sense of how the process works, and can then set a set monthly meeting time and day. Our groups meet on weeknights (the second Wednesday for King and the third Monday for Trinity) from 6-8 pm. Picking a set monthly date, such as the third Monday of each month, means participants will always know when to expect a meeting. However, there may be occasions where the whole group decides to change the date and time of a session, especially due to holidays.

“The King Cooking group has been a wonderful experience to see neighbors come together, folks who have lived in the neighborhood for years, Spanish and Italian speaking parishioners and their children, and seniors. There has been a rich exchange of language, cultures and approaches to healthy food. Over these past five months I have seen real friendships emerge as we learn and share stories, recipes and techniques together. From early on we established the principal that everyone is both a learner and a teacher. When I saw one of our 8 year old participants showing the group how to de-seed a vanilla bean with a chef's knife I just stepped back in awe...this is what the Kitchen Commons is all about!”
Laura Koch, King Neighborhood Lead Facilitator



THE DETAILS

RECIPES

Besides cooking, menu planning and selecting recipes can be one of the most enjoyable aspects of the cooking groups. However, there are many questions that need to be asked when choosing recipes, such as:

Can this be made within a short time window?

Can we easily convert this to feed a large group?

Can we do this within our budget?

Do we have all of the tools required to make this recipe?

Does this recipe conflict with any dietary restrictions within the group?



Making cornmeal biscuits for cobbler

The Internet is full of countless resources for finding recipes based around specific ingredients and diets, as well as conversion tools ([see Resources](#)). Favorite cookbooks, as well as tried and true family recipes, are also great starting points. Our groups usually pick three recipes: a main dish, side and dessert. This should allow everyone in the group the opportunity to get their hands on a dish. It also means that three different cooking stations will be utilized. This is why it is important to double check that your recipes don't conflict with each other.

Do two recipes require baking, but at vastly different temperatures? Can a side dish or salad be quickly prepared while others are working on a more complicated main course? Does the dish require an extensive amount of time to cool? Due to these factors, it might be best to stick with something simple and straightforward for your first session, in order to set a good tone.

Once your members find a rhythm with each other, it gets much easier to work with more ingredients and complicated dishes. Through trial and error, as well as experience, we've learned what our members and kitchens are capable of, which is quite a lot!

RSVPs

Once you have established the members of your groups, a kitchen space, a meeting time and recipes, the next step is to RSVP with participants at least a week beforehand. Once you know exactly how many people will be attending, you can better gauge the quantities of the ingredients to purchase. It is also a good idea at this time to remind participants to bring containers for leftovers as well as any other supplies that might be needed.

INGREDIENTS AND OTHER SUPPLIES

After you know how many participants to expect, you can now purchase ingredients for your cooking session. If you have access to pantry storage, it is a good idea to stock up on staples like salt, pepper, cooking oil, flour and sugar. These ingredients go a long way, and generally don't need to be purchased on a monthly basis. Buying in bulk is another option, for you are able to purchase just the amount you need. This can be much easier on your finances, especially when purchasing cooking spices. Fresh ingredients should be purchased about a day before your cooking session, with some exceptions (such as fruit that needs to ripen).

Donated ingredients are another great possibility to explore. Many grocery stores, food co-ops and urban farms in the Portland area are highly receptive to donating food or gift cards for a good cause. In the Resource section of this guide, we've included links to some Portland organization that can assist with this as well.

Other supplies you will want to have on hand before your group meets are:

- Plates, cups and silverware for meal
- Extra storage containers and ziplock bags for leftovers
- Printed recipes for each participant (plastic sleeves to keep them dry and clean is a plus)
- Generic blank name tags or masking tape to write on
- Large sheets of paper or white board with markers

Once you've double checked that all of these details have been handled, you're ready for your first cooking session!

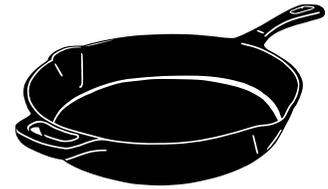
“From a cooking group leader’s perspective, it was amazing to see the growth and the sense of community that was evident at every session. The persons that were initially reluctant about coming now question why are we only meeting once a month to cook together. Persons that were seemingly shy and didn’t desire to be in the forefront literally transformed while they were facilitating their recipes and telling their story that went along with the recipe. Our group doesn’t just come together to cook, but we come together to share stories that cause us to have an even greater respect for one another. In turn, it causes us to want to support and build one another up. Having this cooking group has far exceeded my expectations”

Florence Jenkins, Trinity Lead Facilitator



COOKING SESSION

For your first cooking session, make sure to arrive early for set up. This includes refrigerating ingredients that require it, cooking station set up and any clean up that may need to happen.



It's a great idea to write up an agenda for the night and post it in your kitchen space. This will help keep everyone on track throughout the meeting. Our groups tend to work within the following framework:

Sample Agenda

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| <i>6:00-6:10</i> | <i>Welcome and sign in</i> |
| <i>6:10-6:30</i> | <i>Introductions</i>
<i>Review group norms</i>
<i>Review recipes as a group</i> |
| <i>6:30-6:45</i> | <i>Divide into groups, assign roles</i> |
| <i>6:45-7:15</i> | <i>Cooking</i>
<i>Planning for next month (during down time)</i> |
| <i>7:30 - 8:00</i> | <i>Set table</i>
<i>Eat meal as group</i>
<i>Debrief meal</i> |
| <i>8:00-8:30</i> | <i>Final clean up, organize leftovers to take home</i> |

Welcome and sign in: This is important for keeping track of who attends and receiving additional contact info. You could also hand out name tags at this point.

Introductions: We do introductions or check ins at every group meeting, but it is essential at your first meeting. This gives everyone a chance to say something about themselves and meet the rest of the group.

Review group norms: This is a perfect time to review the rules of the kitchen, give a basic overview on kitchen sanitation, and give a small tour of where kitchen tools are. This will take up more time at your initial cooking group, so subsequent groups should require only a quick overview.

Review recipes as a group: This can be done in an assortment of ways. Our King group prefers to read the recipes out as a group. At Trinity the facilitator is generally in charge of reading and reviewing the recipe.

Divide into groups and assign roles: One of the best methods we've discovered for the cooking process is to divide into groups of about 2-5 people to handle certain recipes and tasks. Those who finish their part early can help with dishes or table setting.

Cooking: Self explanatory. Enjoy! This will take up the largest portion of time, as well as some troubleshooting. As a facilitator, you can serve as a floater, assisting anyone who needs extra help and hands.



Alba and Bill working their knife skills

Debriefing: The debriefing portion of the session is one of the most important. This is where you can ask participants for direct feedback about how the session went, what did and didn't work, and brainstorm new ideas for next time. These are valuable chances for dialogue and conversation within the group. It's also good to ask what new skills or information each individual has learned (see next chapter).

Final Cleanup/Organize Leftovers: Ideally, everyone in the group should help with the cleanup, including washing dishes, wiping down tables, putting away food and portioning out leftovers. It's best to wash dishes as you go, so at the end of the session you aren't left with a huge pile.

GROUP DYNAMICS

How do you keep your kitchen group running smoothly? Different strategies such as breaking into groups, rotating facilitators, and reading recipes together all help to reinforce good communication within the group. Too many cooks in one kitchen can feel chaotic at first. It may take a few sessions to get into the rhythm, so don't panic.

OUR EXAMPLES

There are different organizational styles that can be used for your cooking group. Each of our groups have figured out styles that work best for them, taking into account personalities and cooking styles. Both methods work smoothly and have their own advantages.

Our King cooking group is facilitated by group leader Laura and the cooking group coordinator Rell. They are responsible for most of the menu planning, as well as reminder phone calls and ingredient purchasing. When the group gathers to eat, we also try to plan our menu as a group for the following month. Members can either volunteer to find a recipe, or simply suggest a kind of food they would like on the menu. This group brainstorm helps keep everyone involved in the process. Members have also volunteered to bring ingredients, assisted with shopping and presented recipes.

The Trinity group is facilitated on a whole by Florence. However, there is a rotating schedule of recipe leaders for each session. Members are scheduled or can volunteer to lead specific sessions. In this role, a member is in charge of selecting the recipes to be prepared that month. That member then relays the information to Florence, who purchases the ingredients and prints the recipes. As a facilitator, you take the lead on your recipe, and delegate roles to others. This style allows each of the members to experience leadership and facilitation. It can also be a great method for sharing personal and family recipes.

In both of our groups, everyone assists with clean up duties. You'll find that some people always want to wash dishes, but make sure the chore is shared as much as possible.

"I have gained so much knowledge from the cooking group I have been attending. I was a very basic cook that always cooked the same things and never tried anything new. I now cook with a lot more fresh fruits and vegetables. I cut up fresh onions and garlic instead of using onion and garlic chips. I love cooking the foods at home for my family that we cook in the cooking class. I now plan meals before going grocery shopping. I also like the idea of each person sharing their recipes with the group, I will be sharing mine in the near future, and that is something I would not have done a few months ago"

Mary Huff, Cooking Group Member



THE NEXT STEPS

After your first cooking group session, it's time to start looking ahead. The debriefing portion of meeting will have likely provided you with new challenges, areas for improvement, and ideas for the future. The following is a list of some of the topics and situations that we've dealt with, as well as the outcomes of those discussions.

RECIPE SELECTION

After each session we discuss the recipe selection for the evening, particularly in regards to the amount of time required to make it, difficulty, and personal tastes. Make note of and acknowledge any recipe suggestions brought up by group members. This can be a valuable aid in your planning for future sessions.

ROTATING FACILITATORS

This gives members an opportunity to take on leadership and organization roles, as well as enhance public speaking skills. Our groups do this on a volunteer basis. When members see others facilitate, they might feel more confident about trying it out as well.

SHARE SHOPPING RESPONSIBILITIES

So far we have only done this once with our King Cooking Group. However, it was a great opportunity to shop with group members at their chosen grocery store and work within a limited budget. This is an area that leaves ample room for opportunities depending on the goals of the group.

SURVEYING NEEDS

It's very important to check in with the group to make sure their needs are being met. This can be accomplished by taking periodic surveys. You can ask questions such as :Would you like to focus more on healthy eating tips? Do the meals we prepare and the skills we share feel relevant and engaging?

We've also come up with plans for group cookbooks as well as an end of the year potluck and celebration that will bridge both cooking groups. The Trinity group is becoming more self sufficient, with members reaching out to others in their communities about interest in new cooking groups.



Bettie and Florence in the Trinity kitchen

RESOURCES AND NOTES

COMMUNITY KITCHEN INFO

Community Kitchens NW

<http://www.communitykitchensnw.org>

Fresh Choice Kitchens

<http://www.communitykitchens.ca>

These two organizations have been a model and an inspiration for our work. Both websites are full of valuable resources and information on community kitchen spaces.

FUNDING

City of Portland Neighborhood Small Grants Program

<http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/index.cfm?c=43120>

Program run on a yearly basis to award small grants to neighborhoods

Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods

<http://necoalition.org>

Supports projects within NE Portland, including Kitchen Commons

Awesome Food

<http://www.awesomefood.net>

Awards monthly microgrants to food related projects

RECIPES

Punchfork

<http://www.punchfork.com>

A great resource for recipe searching. It pulls from some of the most popular food websites and food blogs, and allows you to search by ingredient or style.

Food Hero

<http://www.foodhero.org>

Great recipe website aimed at healthy food and small budgets, run by Oregon State University Extension

Allrecipes

<http://www.allrecipes.com>

A good general source for recipes, all with a very helpful built in conversion calculator.

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND FRIENDS

Kitchen Share SE

<http://www.kitchenshare.org>

Non-profit and kitchen tool sharing library

Urban Gleaners

<http://www.urbangleaners.org>

Getting surplus food to those in need

Portland Fruit Tree Project

<http://portlandfruit.org>

Utilizes urban fruit that would otherwise go to waste

Portland Farmers Market

<http://www.portlandfarmersmarket.org>

Hollywood Farmers Market

<http://www.hollywoodfarmersmarket.org>

Well known sources for delicious, fresh, locally grown produce and food

Oregon Food Bank

<http://www.oregonfoodbank.org>

Working to eliminate hunger in Oregon; supports the Cooking Matters nutrition education program.



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