

# Denver Dweller

## Inspiration for Better Local Living

### 31 WAYS TO BUILD COMMUNITY IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD



Do you want to live in the type of neighborhood where kids play together in front yards and adults hang out on front porches? You can have that, but you might need to take steps to create it. Here's a month's worth of ideas to build community in your neighborhood...

There are days when my husband and I will go outside for a stroll down the block, kids in tow, and end up at an impromptu neighborhood gathering on the sidewalk. Kids and dogs running around playing as the adults chat and catch up. Sometimes someone even says, "Hang on," and runs inside to grab beers for all of us. I love this. It's one of my favorite things about where we live. It's the sort of thing you just can't plan. But if you keep showing up and reaching out to your neighbors, this sense of community in your neighborhood just happens organically.

Neighborhood sense of community has been shown to be linked to so many positives: creating sense of belonging, providing a physical and mental health boost, and even lowering crime rates. With benefits like these, we could all stand to strengthen our neighborhood ties. Here's a month's worth of strategies for building community in your neighborhood.

1. **Get to know your neighbors.** If you can't name more than a neighbor or two, it's time to introduce yourself. Even if you've lived in your

home for a while, this first introduction doesn't need to be awkward or a big production. Simply smile and say, "Hey, I've been meaning to introduce myself..."

every neighbor who walks by, even those I don't know who may live many blocks away, still smiles and says hello.

3. **Create a block directory.** If you don't yet know your neighbors, this is the perfect way to get started. It doesn't need to be fancy. Just drop off a sign-up sheet in everyone's mailbox and, once they return it to you, you can email the final version to everyone.
4. **Be respectful of your neighbors.** Don't be that guy. Clean up after your dog and keep him leashed when out walking. Be aware of any disturbing noise levels that you are creating. Maintain your property and respect property boundaries.
5. **Organize a block party.** I didn't learn most of my neighbors' names until we had our first block party. After that one party, it seemed there was a lot more interaction on our block. This one does involve a little work, but if you share the coordinating duties with other neighbors and keep it simple (at least that first year), this is an easy way to get to know your neighbors.
6. **Build a Little Free Library.** As a book lover and a community builder, I've always loved the idea of the Little Free Library. And, we're lucky to have two within a couple of blocks of our house (one a residence, one a business). Each Little Free Library is registered online, so you can even see if there already is one near you.
7. **Build a community garden.** This is a time-tested way to promote community interaction in your neighborhood as well as share in a bounty of fresh veggies. Check out the [American Community Gardening Association's steps for getting started](#).
8. **Host a backyard movie night.** Treat the neighborhood to your favorite movie. But keep it PG rated—it will be outdoors, after all.
9. **Create a formalized tool-sharing program.** Sure, you can just ask Joe next door if you can borrow his drill, but consider establishing a more formal tool-sharing program to get everyone involved. I love this idea because tools are one of those things that you generally only use once in a while, so why not share them when they're not in use? [Local Tools](#) is an online lending library management system that can get you started. Or check out [Peerby](#) or [Streetbank](#) to see if your neighbors are already participating.
10. **Welcome new families.** You can bring a traditional baked good, but I also love the idea of welcoming newcomers by sharing your favorite local restaurants and businesses, perhaps a [stack of your favorite take-out menus wrapped up in ribbon](#).
11. **Establish a neighborhood watch program.** These programs can be one of the most effective deterrents to neighborhood crime. Check out the [National Crime Prevention Council's guide to getting started](#) here.
12. **Celebrate Neighborday in April.** Since 2010 Good Magazine has sponsored Neighborday the last Saturday of April, by providing tools and suggestions to encourage good neighboring. You can check the website to get neighborly inspiration from all over the globe.
13. **Host a regular monthly gathering, same time, no RSVP needed.** Years ago I read in Sunset Magazine (unfortunately, the article does not appear to be archived online) about a woman who hosted a monthly soup social at her house. The idea was simple: she provided the soup, neighbors would bring a baguette or drink to share, and their own bowl. And, this was key...it was the same time every month and no RSVP was necessary. A regular gathering that requires no commitment and little forethought makes for an easygoing gathering.
14. **Start a neighborhood book club.** In my last neighborhood, we had a block book club. When you only have to walk two houses over, it is a lot easier to be able to participate. Or if that feels like too much commitment (and when your kids are young, reading an entire book each month can feel like an unattainable goal), consider something slightly different...I love this idea for an "[articles club](#)."
15. **Use the inspiring Playborhood concepts to make your yard a neighborhood hang-out for kids.** Do you know the book, [Playborhood: Turn Your Neighborhood into a Place for Play](#)? It reminds me of my childhood when the entire neighborhood seemed to be our playground.
16. **Shovel your neighbor's sidewalk when it snows, especially if it is difficult for them.** If your neighbors are older or perhaps just going through a hard time with a new baby or sickness, spend a few extra minutes to clear their sidewalk too. This is no small gesture. In Denver, homeowners can actually be ticketed if their sidewalks aren't clear 24 hours after it snows, even if they are out of town. Plus, you never know who will return the favor.
17. **Support your neighborhood schools.** There is a reason the most successful schools are the ones where parents are actively engaged. Good schools have successful, if informal, partnerships between the administration, the parents and the community-at-large. Even if you don't have kids at the school, it's important to remember that the local school is also a member of the community, and can greatly

18. **Address concerns or issues directly with your neighbor.** Don't let a problem fester and escalate. And, don't immediately call to report a problem to the city without first trying to work it out with your neighbor directly.
19. **Host a porch party.** This is something I've always wanted to do! I love hanging out on my front porch, and a porch party feels like an easy way to socialize with your neighbors without the work of a "real" party.
20. **Shop locally if you live near a business district.** You will not only see and interact with your neighbors at the local businesses and along the way, but you will also get to know your other neighbors—the local business owners and employees.
21. **Support our youngest entrepreneurs by buying the neighbor kids' lemonade.** I once read somewhere you should always buy whatever kids are selling on card tables in their front yards. I think it goes back to the "it takes a village" concept...you're helping to encourage the initiative and resourcefulness of the young. Plus, just think back to when you were a kid and you were so excited to have a lemonade stand...you made all of the lemonade and spent an hour working on your sign, and then you sat and waited and waited. And when that first customer finally showed up, it didn't matter that you only made 50 cents...you were so excited. Be that person for the neighborhood kids.
22. **Treat your neighbors to a front-yard concert.** Music has always been something that brings people together. Still this one's a little tricky and depends on the neighborhood. Many would welcome a guitarist strumming on his front steps but perhaps not a full band. You have to know your neighborhood and, of course, be aware and respectful of noise levels. Check out [Boulder's Mapleton PorchFest](#) for inspiration.
23. **Share your skills.** Are you tech savvy? Perhaps you can sew or like to tinker with cars. Your neighbors would love for you to share these skills with them, either by teaching them or just helping on a one-time basis. Skill-sharing banks are popping up in neighborhoods across the country. See how [this Ohio community](#) is using this as a way for neighbors to share their valuable skills.
24. **Talk to other parents at the park.** The neighborhood park is where I get the best scoop! If you have kids, the neighborhood playground can offer a wealth of info...which schools parents like and why, where the best activities for kids are, which new restaurants are coming to the neighborhood. Exchanging neighborhood info at the park is a time-honored tradition among parents, but so often today everyone is on their smart phone. And I admit, I've been that mom. But I've also learned to make play dates and gather neighborhood intel.
25. **Coordinate a neighborhood yard sale.** Garage sale, tag sale, yard sale...whatever name you go by, this is a good way to clear out your home's clutter and help your neighbor do the same.
26. **Start a networking group.** Like the old nursery song goes, you just never know "who are the people in your neighborhood, the people who you meet each day." One of them just might be the the perfect person for you to connect with professionally. Who knows? Your next position or client could be as close as the guy who lives four houses down. Meet up at a neighborhood coffee shop and publicize it on their community board to cast a wider net in the neighborhood.
27. **Let your neighbors know when you will be out of town and ask them to contact you or the police if anything is suspicious.** You don't need a formalized neighborhood watch program to keep the neighborhood safe. My next-door neighbor had a break-in stopped by a helpful neighbor who knew she was traveling. If you ask your neighbors, they will likely ask you in turn, which helps to keep the neighborhood safe for everyone.
28. **Welcome new little ones to the neighborhood.** When I was growing up, every time one of the families had a new baby, the neighbors would decorate the families' front porch with pink or blue ribbons. It was a small gesture, but a way of simultaneously announcing to everyone the baby's birth and welcoming the baby into our community.
29. **Share small neighborhood gifts at holiday times.** It's rare that anyone gets anything fun in the mail these days. Why not surprise your neighbor with a holiday treat? Keep it simple...baked goods, seasoned popcorn, or even a bottle of wine will be welcomed by most.
30. **Drive like your kids live here...because they do!** I have become one of those people who yells, "slow down!" whenever a car speeds down our street, which means I've become my parents. But, I get it now that I have kids. We all like to live in vibrant, bustling neighborhoods, but this means people, especially kids, need to feel safe when walking or biking around.

neighborhood Facebook group page. But, be sure to use it to encourage offline interaction, too.

Looking for more neighborhood life inspiration? Check out [9 Thoughtful Ways to Welcome New Neighbors](#) and [Teach Your Kids to Value Neighborhood Community](#).



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