

Community Gardens



Community Gardening Guidelines

A community garden has many benefits for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Community garden programs increase nutrition knowledge, enhance healthy eating habits, and increase physical activity. Gardens can build community capacity and contribute to supportive food environments. Consider these best practice guidelines to create a safe and welcoming garden.

Setting up your Garden

- Outdoor gardens should be established in protected and/or monitored sites.
- When choosing a site for the garden consider the relative location of potential contamination sources: garbage areas, wells, septic systems, utilities (i.e. water access), animals and livestock.
- Soil and fertilizer that are brought from an outside source must be sterilized. These can be found at any garden or home improvement centre.
- Chemical pesticides, herbicides, and poisonous substances should not be used in the garden.
- Only clean and safe water should be used in the garden. If the garden is using a rain barrel, ensure it is protected from contamination and access by small animals such as birds and rodents. Use a barrel in good condition that has never been used for hazardous materials.
- Poisonous plants should not be grown in edible gardens.
- Before eating any produce it should be washed with safe, cold running water, even if it appears to be clean.

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Operating your Garden

There are many different styles of community gardens. Some contain multiple plots for individuals to rent. Others are meant to grow produce for a specific program or general consumption. A written policy for operation of the garden should be accessible to those participating. A policy should include information about the maintenance of the garden, any fees and deadlines, and responsibilities for the gardeners and managers of the gardens. Consider having clear messages for gardeners on these topics:

- When produce may be picked and who is responsible
- Pets can disturb garden beds and defecate on produce. Clear direction limiting pet access to the garden is important
- Children should always be supervised while gardening
- Discourage gardeners from coming to the gardens if they have been ill recently or are experiencing symptoms of foodborne illness such as: vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat and fever.
- Promote handwashing prior to entering the garden and when exiting the garden. Hands should be washed with warm running water and soap before eating or drinking. Hand sanitizers will not be effective if there is visible dirt or debris on hands.

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Donating Garden Produce

Many community gardens are established with plans to donate all or part of their harvest to local food programs. It is important the quality and safety of donated produce is protected, consider these recommendations before donating produce:

- Before donating garden produce shake, rub, or brush off dirt from produce. There is no need to wash produce immediately after harvest or before donating.
- Cooling produce after harvest will promote freshness and extend the shelf-life of produce. To maintain produce quality and safety, the produce must be donated the same day of harvest OR it must be refrigerated after harvesting. Produce should be kept at or below 40°F (4°C) during storage and transportation.
- Any fruits or vegetables that are stored at room temperature (such as tomatoes, potatoes, and onions) should be stored in a cool, dry, pest-free, well-ventilated area separate from chemical storage.
- Foodborne illnesses can be carried from harvesters to the fresh produce. Harvesters should wash their hands frequently. Discourage harvesters from coming to the gardens if they have been ill recently or are experiencing symptoms of foodborne illness such as: vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat and fever.

Creating a policy which outlines your commitment to quality and safety of garden produce through the above practices may assist organizations in receiving donated produce.

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Receiving Donated Garden Produce

Community gardens can be a great option for supplying affordable, fresh produce for programs. When using produce grown in a community garden consider implementing policies to ensure the safety and quality of the produce is protected:

- Tracing and recording the origins and transportation of the produce is important when receiving or using garden produce. These records will assist in the event of an outbreak of foodborne illness.
- Information recorded should include: the produce type and quantity, delivery date, harvest date, produce source including the location of the garden, and who delivered and received the produce.
- Quickly cooling produce will promote freshness and extend the shelf-life of produce. To maintain produce quality and safety, the produce should be stored at or below 40°F (4°C).
- Any fruits or vegetables that are stored at room temperature (such as tomatoes, potatoes, and onions) should be stored in a cool, dry, pest-free, well-ventilated area separate from chemical storage.
- Before eating any produce it should be washed with potable, cold running water, even if it appears to be clean.

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For More Information

Contact Public Health to speak with a Public Health Inspector or a Public Health Dietitian with questions about your community garden

Grey Bruce Health Unit
101 17th Street East
Owen Sound Ontario N4K 0A5
Phone: 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456
Email: publichealth@publichealthgreybruce.on.ca

Helpful Resources:

- FoodShare is a non-profit organization that works with communities and schools to deliver healthy food and food education. This website contains resources and community garden how-to guides
<http://foodshare.net/>
- Food Banks Canada's Community Garden Toolkit is a useful tool for programs interested in creating a community garden
<https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/getmedia/c92619d7-d911-48eb-bf09-ecfd74042bc5/Community-Gardens-Toolkit-EN.pdf.aspx>
- Evergreen is a Canadian charity that supports the transformation of public landscapes into community spaces with environmental, social and economic benefits.
<https://www.evergreen.ca/>
- Tree Canada's Edible Tree Grant:
<https://treecanada.ca/en/programs/edible-trees/>
- Donation of Food Act, 1994, S.O. 1994, c. 19
<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/94d19>