

Operating a Community Vegetable Garden



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



Contact Us

✉ gardens@waterloo.ca
☎ 519-886-1177 ext. 27253

Emergency after hours

For urgent issues after 4pm Monday to Friday, weekends, and holidays
☎ 519-886-2310

What is a Community Vegetable Garden?

Community gardens are spaces where land is gardened collectively by residents, often involving assigned plots (e.g. raised beds) for interested users, to grow vegetables, fruits, and herbs for their own use. Gardens are coordinated by volunteers.

This guide will support community garden volunteers with operations of community gardens in City of Waterloo parks and public property. For community gardens outside of these spaces, please visit the [Waterloo Region Community Garden Network](#) for resources and existing locations.



Looking to explore another type of planting in a City park such as trees or a pollinator patch? Check out the [community programs in parks webpage](#) for more details.

Responsibilities of the garden committee

Running a garden involves seasonal administrative and operational duties. Community garden volunteer teams are responsible for ensuring garden locations complete required items and request support as needed.

Use the timeline below to help assist you and your team with organization each year.

Administrative tasks

Timing: Winter

- Organizing a community garden involves a number of administrative tasks to keep responsibilities organized, information well communicated, and to ensure effective volunteer support.
- Review any outstanding action items from last season prior to the spring of the new season.
- Review garden rules and practices that need updating and discuss changes as a team.
- Assign tasks amongst the garden team to share the workload and complete needed updates prior to the garden season.

Update the garden team

Timing: Spring

- Each garden season, the garden volunteer team needs to be updated to include current volunteers, new volunteers, and any other team changes. This includes members completing volunteer forms or training when applicable.
- Recruit any needed new members. Garden teams must have 3-5 volunteers.
- If you know your community garden lead will be changing, please contact gardens@waterloo.ca as soon as possible to ensure necessary volunteer screening is complete prior to the start of the garden season in May.

Finances

Timing: Spring and ongoing

- Determine costs for supplies needed for growing season.
- Review current resources as a garden team to determine if new items are needed such as hand tools, boards for raised beds, soil, or compost.
- Budget for the upcoming season based on current funding and incoming plot fees.
- Review the plot fee for any needed changes. Ensure an affordable and equitable cost is maintained, which could include support for those facing barriers to cost.

Communication with gardeners

Timing: Spring and throughout the garden season

- Contact gardeners and assign plots.
- Determine availability for waitlists.
- Ensure gardeners have signed garden paperwork including a garden agreement and garden rules.
- Consider asking your local neighbourhood association to share information about the garden at the start of each season to make neighbours aware and share any important updates such as new additions, changes in rules, available plots, or other details.

Garden rules and agreements

Timing: Spring and at the start of the garden season

- The garden team should determine some basic guidelines for the garden and gardeners when a garden is first established.
- Rules should be monitored by the garden team to ensure a safe, equitable, and enjoyable experience for all.
- Update rules and agreements as needed.

Park water hydrants

Timing: Throughout the garden season

- Park water hydrants should remain locked at all times when not in use by volunteers and gardeners.
- All locks are issued through City of Waterloo parks services. Private locks are not permitted and will be removed.

Garden maintenance

Timing: May and throughout the garden season

- **Request mulch** through the City of Waterloo request form shared with garden leads. Mulch deliveries occur in May or September annually. The request form must be completed by the deadline and will be shared over email to garden leads by City staff.
- **Consider compost or soil needs** for the garden season. Waterloo Region Community Garden Council is willing to be contacted if gardens are needing assistance with compost access or transportation. Visit the [Region of Waterloo](#) for information on free compost availability.
- **Schedule garden work days** throughout the season to ensure everyone is contributing to keeping the garden space maintained. Tasks may include:
 - weeding mulched areas

- weeding pollinator patches
- collecting yard waste bags to bring home for regular pick-up
- cleaning and organizing the garden shed
- spreading mulch, soil, or compost at the start of the season

Supplies and services provided by the City

Park materials

The City will supply each site with:

- a garden name sign
- a sign with garden rules
- one picnic table
- provide annual mulch (must be requested within seasonal deadlines communicated to garden leads)

Contact gardens@waterloo.ca if you have questions or concerns about these items throughout seasonal operations.

Garden promotion

- Printing of flyers or posters to promote the community garden and special events upon request.

Liability insurance

- Liability insurance for all approved community garden team volunteers assisting with the operation of the community garden. Volunteers must sign up through the appropriate forms prior to the garden season.
- Purchase of plot and garden insurance for registered members through the City of Waterloo's insurance provider. Interested gardeners are required to complete the insurance form to request this support each season. Those not registered do not receive coverage.

Park and water service maintenance

- Facilitate maintenance and repairs for park water hydrants. Any water service issues should be reported to gardens@waterloo.ca.
- General park maintenance will be completed by City staff including grass cutting as per established City standards, empty of garbage receptacles, and maintenance in the park area surrounding the community garden.

City staff support

- Support and assistance for unique needs of each community garden location. Contact us at gardens@waterloo.ca.

Garden Modifications

As gardens grow and change, new items might be added or the garden expanded. Please complete the [request form](#) for any changes to items at the garden site including the addition of structures such as a shed, composter, new garden beds, changed layout, and other site details.

The form will ask details about:

- The measurements of the new area
- A drawing or design of the proposed updates
- Materials you will need, including soil
- Details of your structure including type of structure, size, material, and base, if applicable
- Composter details
- If tools will be used at the park
- If delivery will be needed at the park

If any materials need delivery, a park access permit is required from the company completing the delivery. This requires proof of third-party liability insurance in the amount of \$2,000,000 from the company. Park access permit fees are waived for community garden applications.

If you prefer to avoid delivery (there are often fees involved!), consider other ideas to get items to the garden:

- borrow wagons to move items from vehicles or homes to the park
- fill up portable containers that can be carried
- order bags of soil or compost that can be easily transported



Reporting Incidents

Be prepared in the event of an incident. Report all accidents and incidents through the accident/injury report form. The form is included in each garden leader's orientation package or by emailing gardens@waterloo.ca.

What types of incidents should be reported?

- Any property damage
- Anytime there is bleeding, pain from an injury, or any kind of injury to the head
- Accidents including participants at the gardens or volunteers
- If you are ever in doubt, complete the form

Any reports should be brought to the attention of the entire garden volunteer committee. Completed reports should be sent to gardens@waterloo.ca.

After hours incident reporting

For urgent matters (such as serious injury or unsafe property damage), after 4pm Monday to Friday, weekends, and holidays please call 519-886-2310 and email gardens@waterloo.ca. Be sure to call 911 if the situation warrants emergency services.