

# Operating a Community Vegetable Garden



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



# How to reach us

## EMAIL AND PHONE

✉ [gardens@waterloo.ca](mailto:gardens@waterloo.ca)

☎ 519-742-8772

For urgent issues after 4pm Monday to Friday, weekends, and holidays

☎ 519-886-2310

## NEIGHBOURHOODS WEBSITE

Check out the [neighbourhoods website](#) to find more how-to guides, find your neighbourhood and subscribe to the e-newsletter.

## ACCESSIBLE FORMATS

This material is available in alternative accessible format upon request. Please contact us a minimum of 3-5 business days before it is required.

## GUIDE VERSION

This guide was last updated March 2026.

# 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 vegetable 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 park such as trees or a pollinator patch? Check out the [help care for our parks webpage](#) for more details.

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## 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 tasks and request support as needed.

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

### ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

Timing: Winter

- Review any outstanding action items from last season prior to the spring of the new season.
- Review garden agreement, 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](mailto:gardens@waterloo.ca) as soon as possible to ensure necessary volunteer screening is complete prior to the start of the garden season in May.
- Attend the community garden orientation. At least one volunteer per team should attend.

## FINANCES

Timing: Spring and ongoing

- Determine costs for supplies needed for the growing season.
- Review current resources 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.



There is funding available to support community gardens! Check out the [neighbourhood grants](#) page to explore which grant would be right for you.

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## COMMUNICATION WITH GARDENERS

Timing: Spring start, fall close, 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, how to get on the waitlist, or other details.

## GARDEN RULES AND AGREEMENTS

Timing: Spring, at the start of the garden season

- If you are launching a new garden, the garden team should determine some basic guidelines for the garden and gardeners when a garden is first established. Explore examples on the [Waterloo Region Community Garden Network webpage](#) or connect with the [gardens team](#).
- Rules should be monitored by the garden team annually 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.
- Update water access processes as needed. For example, purchase a new key lockbox if the old one is broken, get a key deposit from new garden volunteers, or explore changes to how gardeners access the key if the current system could be improved.

## GARDEN MAINTENANCE

Timing: May and throughout the garden season

- Request mulch through the City of Waterloo request form that city staff share with garden leads. Mulch deliveries occur in May annually. The request form must be completed by the given deadline.
- Consider compost or soil needs for the garden season. Visit the [Region of Waterloo](#) for information on free compost availability or explore other providers at cost.
- 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 installed on a 6 x 6 post

- a sign with garden rules
- one picnic table
- provide annual mulch (fill out and send the mulch form within seasonal deadlines)
- 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 must be reported to [gardens@waterloo.ca](mailto:gardens@waterloo.ca).
- General park maintenance will be completed by City staff including grass cutting as per City standards, emptying garbage receptacles, and general maintenance in the park area surrounding the community garden. City staff will NOT maintain any area associated with the community garden.

## CITY STAFF SUPPORT

- Support and assistance for unique needs of each community garden location. Contact us at [gardens@waterloo.ca](mailto:gardens@waterloo.ca) if you have questions or concerns.

## 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 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 shed 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 million from the company. Park access permit fees are waived for community garden applications.

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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



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## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:gardens@waterloo.ca). Be sure to call 911 if the situation warrants emergency services.