

Starting a community vegetable garden



Great neighbourhoods start with you.



How to reach us

EMAIL AND PHONE

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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 January 2026.

What is a Community Vegetable Garden?

Community Vegetable Gardens (CVGs) 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 help residents organize community vegetable gardens in City of Waterloo parks and public property.

Step 1: Examine resources

In Waterloo, there are local resources that can assist everyone to understand what community gardens are about. This guide is one key resource for community gardens in the City of Waterloo.

Another great resource is the Community Garden Council (CGC) of Waterloo Region. This group is dedicated to helping community gardens grow and prosper and can provide details such as:

- advice for starting and maintaining a garden
- information on garden tools and equipment
- sample templates for garden rules and agreements
- sign up for a mailing list about opportunities available for your garden
- find out more at [Waterloo Region Community Garden Network](#)

Reviewing some of these materials will give you resources to start creating garden plans.

Step 2: Gain community support

Collaboration is a key part of community vegetable gardens. Share the idea of a community garden in your local park so others can show support and get involved. Consider connecting with:

- neighbourhood associations
- neighbours
- schools
- local businesses
- other community organizations such as sports teams, recreation groups or service clubs

Make sure to involve those interested in the garden during all stages. Residents can:

- help brainstorm ideas
- assist with grant writing
- contribute to stages of planning
- volunteer and participate in the completed garden

Volunteers will play an important role in ensuring the garden is possible. Committed residents are needed to support the size of the garden and the work to get things started. Each garden will need:

- a garden leader to be the main organizer
- 3-5 garden volunteers to form a garden team
- residents interested in caring for a garden plot

Step 3: Contact us

Once you know there is interest in the neighbourhood and you have had a chance to review some of the community garden resources, you should contact gardens@waterloo.ca to talk about your idea. Staff members can assist you to move your idea to implementation through determining a suitable location, applying for grants, and establishing a garden committee.

City of Waterloo staff will work with garden leaders to determine appropriate space for a community vegetable garden in city park locations. Suitable sites include:

- Sun exposure
- Soil drainage
- Proximity to water
- Other seasonal uses of the park

The desired location should include an existing water source or the ability to create a sufficient rain water system.

Step 4: Funding

In order to set a new garden up for success, funds are needed to purchase supplies and materials. The resources available from the City of Waterloo include:

- purchase and installation of a garden name sign
- sign with garden rules
- one picnic table
- annual mulch (upon request)

Garden team purchases may include:

- garden hand tools
- storage shed with a lock
- compost system (*required, ensure the composter is large enough to accommodate the garden size)
- high quality top soil
- non pressure treated lumber for garden beds
- wheel barrow
- seeds and plants
- water supplies (water tank, hoses, and heavy duty nozzles)
- Lock box for water key

Neighborhood garden groups are strongly encouraged to consider submitting a Neighbourhood Fund grant application for up to \$7500. Visit [Neighbourhood Fund](#) webpage to find out more about upcoming deadlines, application forms, and edibility. Staff are available to discuss details at neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca.

Other possible grants include:

- [Community Environmental Fund is available periodically](#)
- [Mini Grants for Neighbours](#)

Donations and fundraising are also possible opportunities to explore. Membership models, where gardeners pay a small fee, are often implemented to cover ongoing operational costs beyond the initial build.

Step 5: Forming a garden team

Once the details of starting a garden are organized with local residents and the City of Waterloo, the leaders on the project should establish a community vegetable garden team. The team should consist of 3-5 adults with one garden leader to oversee garden operations.

The garden team will be responsible for facilitating the garden, including:

- assigning garden plots in an equitable manner
- maintaining a waiting list for plot assignments
- informing gardeners of rules and guidelines
- working with City representatives to ensure rules and guidelines are followed
- determining garden costs
- delegating tasks
- scheduling regular workdays throughout the season
- promoting garden events and activities
- arranging waste management and disposal of excessive garden compost
- organizing the storage and maintenance of all tools

- updating garden practices (as needed)
- communicating with city staff and garden members
- providing guidance to new gardeners and committee members.

Individuals who are members of the garden team will work with the city as registered volunteers, which ensures volunteers have insurance, recognition, and staff support. The garden leader will connect with city staff to receive required garden orientation materials each season.

Step 6: Create garden guidelines

Each garden should establish rules and practices to support smooth garden operations. Groups should develop guidelines on areas such as garden etiquette, the assignment of plots, and day-to-day operations. The Community Garden Council provides some great information to consider.

City of Waterloo garden rules will be posted on signs at each community vegetable garden location.

Step 7: Final garden design

Groups should pick one of the following garden designs:

- **Plots:** Individually assigned plots that make up a minimum size of 10 plots (10 x 10) and are divided by woodchip walkways.
- **Shared Garden:** All gardeners care for the same large space and share the harvest.
- **Raised Beds:** Individual beds or boxes are created from wood frames and filled with soil. Heights may vary based on CVG needs.

All in-ground designs that require heavy equipment for excavation and rototilling on parkland will take place the fall prior to the first desired planting season.

Once a design decision has been made, groups can plan beds to prepare for the build day (E.g. 6 beds long by two beds wide for 12 total beds, a shared community garden space 3 meters by 3 meters, etc.). Considerations include:

- space between plots to move around
- placement of a composter
- accessibility to walkways



Consider accessibility in the early stages of garden planning. Wider pathways, distances between plots, and access to the garden will benefit persons with disabilities. Contact staff for assistance with planning.

Step 8: Preparation for garden building day

Garden leaders will need to work out a few steps to prepare for initial garden build. These steps include:

- Working with City staff to obtain locates before digging or site work occurs (may take up to 6 weeks)
- Any vehicle or equipment access the site must apply for a [Park Access Permit](#)
- Determine if any city staff assistance is needed prior to build day, such as removing sod
- Finalize garden build date and delivery details

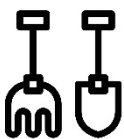
Step 9: Garden build day

Interested gardeners and community members will gather to build the garden. Tasks for build day include:

- building, securing, and filling all raised beds
- assembly of the garden shed
- placement of the composter
- outlining pathways between plots

Typical supplies provided by the garden team may include:

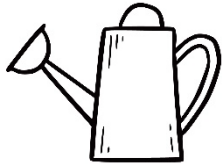
- water
- gloves
- hand tools



For a new in-ground gardens (built in the fall), the build day is still important in the spring for activities such as prepping garden beds, laying compost, mulching, etc.

Any volunteers who have experience operating small tools (such as a drill) are required to sign a form acknowledging their skills. This ensures those with minimal experience or confidence are not operating tools on build day. Power tools are not permitted in the park at any other times.

Now you are ready to garden!



If you apply for a Neighbourhood Fund, consider including funds to host a garden potluck or opening celebration to start building connections.

Ongoing maintenance

Once your community garden is complete, ongoing maintenance will include annual seasonal tasks. To learn more about timelines and supplies provided by the City, check out the [Operating a Community Vegetable Garden](#) guide.