

# Starting a community vegetable garden



**Great neighbourhoods start with you.**





## How to reach us

### EMAIL AND PHONE

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

 519-747-8772

**TTY** 1-866-786-3941

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### EMERGENCY AFTER-HOURS

*If a serious accident or incident takes place after hours.*

After 4 p.m. Monday to Friday,  
weekends and holidays

 519-886-2310

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### 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.



Community vegetable 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. Volunteers coordinate gardens.

This guide will help you start and organize a community vegetable garden in Waterloo parks and public property.

## ① Examine resources

In Waterloo, local resources are available to help you understand what community gardens are all about. This guide is one key resource.

The Community Garden Council (CGC) of Waterloo Region helps community gardens grow and prosper. This group provides:

- advice for starting and maintaining a garden
- information about garden tools and equipment
- sample templates for garden rules and agreements
- a mailing list about opportunities available for your garden

Learn more at **[www.community-gardens.ca](http://www.community-gardens.ca)** We encourage you to review this information before creating a garden plan.



## ② Gain community support

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

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

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

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

Volunteers play an important role in ensuring the success of the garden because they support the size of the garden and the work required to get things started. Each garden will need:

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

## ③ Contact us

Once you have secured interest from the neighbourhood and you have reviewed some of the community garden resources, please email [gardens@waterloo.ca](mailto:gardens@waterloo.ca) to talk about your idea. Staff members can help you determine a suitable garden location, apply for grants, and establish a garden committee.





## ④ Materials and funding

You will need funds to purchase supplies and materials to make the garden successful.

The City of Waterloo will:

- conduct a soil test prior to establishing the garden
- purchase and install a garden name sign
- provide one picnic table
- purchase and install a sign with garden rules
- provide annual mulch (upon request)

The garden team may purchase the following items:

- 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)

We encourage neighbourhood garden groups to submit an application for a neighbourhood matching fund grant for up to \$7500. Groups must match the funds requested. This means that for every \$1 requested, the group must contribute \$1 in volunteer labour, donated services/materials or cash. Visit [waterloo.ca/nmf](http://waterloo.ca/nmf) to learn more. Please email staff at [neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca](mailto:neighbourhoods@waterloo.ca) for assistance.

Other possible grants include:

- Community cash grants – City of Waterloo
- Mini grants for neighbours – City of Waterloo
- Community environmental fund – available periodically – Region of Waterloo

Donations and fundraising are also possible opportunities to explore. Membership models, where gardeners pay a small fee, are an option to cover ongoing operational costs.



## 5 Form a garden team

After you have received neighbourhood support for the garden, and shared the details with neighbours and City of Waterloo staff, establish a 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:

- assigning garden plots in an equitable manner
- maintaining a waiting list for plot assignments
- informing gardeners of rules and guidelines
- working with city staff to ensure rules and guidelines are followed
- scheduling regular work days 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
- determining garden costs
- delegating tasks

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.

## 6 Create garden guidelines

The garden team should establish rules and practices to support smooth garden operations. Groups should develop guidelines for 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 the vegetable garden location.



## ⑦ Final garden design

City of Waterloo staff will work with garden leaders to determine an appropriate space for a requested community vegetable garden. Criteria for a suitable site may 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.



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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.

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Groups should pick one of the following garden designs:

- Plots: Individually assigned plots that make up a minimum size of 10 plots, divided by woodchip walkways.
- Shared garden: All gardeners care for the same large space and share the harvest.
- Raised beds: Individual beds or boxes created from wood frames and filled with soil. Heights may vary based on the garden 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 you make a design decision, the group can plan a layout to prepare for the build day (e.g. 6 beds long by 2 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





## 8 Garden Build Day

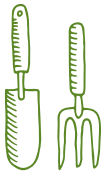
Interested gardeners and community members will gather to build the garden.

Tasks for build day include:

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

Typical supplies provided by the garden team may include:

- water
- shovels
- gloves
- wheelbarrow or large buckets
- hand tools
- rakes



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

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Volunteers with 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 any other time.

Now you are ready to garden!



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If you apply for a neighbourhood matching fund grant, consider including a request for funds to host a garden potluck or opening celebration.

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# Ongoing maintenance



Maintaining a garden involves annual seasonal tasks. The timeline below should assist with organization each year. The resources city staff can provide require notification to ensure supplies are ready for opening day or work days.

GARDEN TEAM	ACTIONS	TIMING	CONTACT
Review practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update rules or practices</li> <li>• Determine costs for the plot</li> <li>• Review garden resources to determine if purchases are required (e.g. new shovel, repair a garden board)</li> </ul>	Annually in early Spring	All garden volunteer team members should be involved in the process
Prepare the garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request water be turned on</li> </ul>	Annually in April	gardens@waterloo.ca or 519-886-2310 x30232
Organize participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact gardeners and assign plots</li> <li>• Contact wait list residents as needed</li> <li>• Ensure gardeners have signed the garden agreement and are complying with the garden rules and guidelines</li> <li>• Recruit garden volunteer team members if needed</li> </ul>	Annually in early Spring	Garden team as assigned
Rototilling (in-ground gardens only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request rototilling of garden area</li> <li>• Prepare for rototilling: clear plots of debris, fencing, and rocks</li> </ul>	Annually in April	gardens@waterloo.ca or 519-886-2310 x30232
Order supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order mulch as needed</li> <li>• Order compost as needed</li> </ul>	Annually in May or September	<p><b>Mulch</b> - annually in the 2nd and 4th week of May or September. City staff will send an email form in early April.</p> <p><b>Compost</b> - available from the Region of Waterloo at 925 Erb St. W., Gate 2. Contact greenbin@regionofwaterloo.ca for bulk orders.</p>
Schedule work days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spread out compost and/or mulch</li> <li>• Clean out gardens and surrounding area</li> <li>• Work together as a garden team</li> </ul>	Spring opening, Fall closing, and as needed throughout the season	Garden team and all gardeners



# Accident/incident reports

## WHEN SHOULD YOU COMPLETE A REPORT?

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

## WHERE DO I GET AN ACCIDENT/INCIDENT FORM?

The form is included in each garden leader's orientation package. You can also get it by emailing [gardens@waterloo.ca](mailto:gardens@waterloo.ca)

## HOW DO YOU SUBMIT THE COMPLETED REPORT?

Report all accidents and incidents through the accident/injury report form. Submit the completed report by email to [gardens@waterloo.ca](mailto:gardens@waterloo.ca)

## AFTER-HOURS ACCIDENT/INCIDENT REPORTS

If a serious accident or incident takes place after hours – after 4 p.m. Monday to Friday, weekends and holidays – please call 519-886-2310.

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