



# A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY GARDENING IN THE CITY OF MELBOURNE

A companion to the City of Melbourne community garden policy

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[melbourne.vic.gov.au/sustainability](https://melbourne.vic.gov.au/sustainability)



CITY OF MELBOURNE

## A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY GARDENING IN THE CITY OF MELBOURNE

This guide to community gardening in the City of Melbourne is a companion document to the Community Gardens Policy. It applies to community gardens operating on land that the City of Melbourne owns and/or manages. There are three parts to this guide:

**Part 1: Developing a community garden** outlines what you should consider when developing a proposal for a community garden in your local area:

- Formulate a proposal
- Develop your idea
- Define the purpose
- Planning
- Working with others
- Building partnerships

**Part 2: Essential elements of a successful community garden** covers essential aspects of operating and managing a successful community garden:

- Location
- Funding
- Health, safety and welfare
- Maintenance
- Composting
- Sharing what you grow
- Water-wise practices
- Keeping animals
- Insurance and duty of care
- Incorporated associations
- Complaints and conflict
- Pests
- Soil contamination
- Preventing crime
- Vandalism and raiders

**Part 3: Expression of interest** provides the criteria for making an Expression of Interest for a community garden on land that the City of Melbourne owns and/or manages:

- Your proposal
- Community consultation
- Expression of Interest

## PART 1 – DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

### Formulate a proposal

There are many things to consider when starting a new community garden project:

- What do you hope to achieve with your community garden? Perhaps your key goal is to increase social connections and communal activities? Perhaps your priority is to promote a sustainable lifestyle and/or food education?
- Have you investigated whether sufficient interest exists among local people so your garden is viable over the long term?
- Is there an established community garden in your local neighbourhood that you could join?
- Have you considered other types of gardening projects that may be better suited to your neighbourhood, such as street or roof-top gardening?
- Do you have a location in mind or do you need to find a suitable site?

### ***Security of tenure***

New gardens established on land that the City of Melbourne owns and/or manages will be approved for an agreed trial period of no longer than 12 months. The City of Melbourne does not charge community garden groups for preparation fees.

If your management group fulfils its duties in regard to managing the garden and there is an option to extend the trial period, a longer arrangement may be agreed with your group in the interests of continuity, sustainability and modernisation of community gardens. Longer term tenures may be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The City of Melbourne can revoke an agreement with a community garden group if:

- Your group disbands or stops functioning due to internal conflict.
- You have been unable to secure sufficient local support for your garden.
- Your garden is not maintained or becomes unsafe for public access.
- You fail to gain appropriate insurance cover.
- The site of your garden is no longer available or suitable.

## Develop your idea

A community garden is a wonderful addition to a neighborhood, but requires a lot of planning, resources and commitment.

- Establish a group with people that share enthusiasm and commitment who will collaborate on the design and development of the concept for your garden.
- Research your garden project well so the group understands what is involved in starting and managing the garden. How many people will you need? What skills will they need? How many hours a week will be needed from people to manage your garden?
- Develop a 'road map' for your garden that describes its key elements.
- Design the garden together around the vision, skills and knowledge of your management group.

## Define the purpose

Clearly defining the purpose and aims of your community garden is vital to success. Some gardens have specific aims:

- Do you wish to involve specific community members or groups in your garden? These could include children, young people, Aboriginal/Indigenous people, or people with physical or intellectual disabilities, those who may be isolated, or low-income earners.
- Is building knowledge about horticulture and gardening skills a key goal?
- Do you plan to host workshops for locals and visitor groups? These might include art and craft workshops or cooking workshops.
- Is providing a welcoming space for people to build community connections important to your garden? For example, is a play area for children a goal, or providing facilities designed for people with disabilities?
- Do you wish your garden to showcase sustainable urban agriculture? This might include organic composting, waste reduction, and water-sensitive design features.

## Planning

The design and layout of your garden usually aligns with its purpose and aims. Your management group will need to decide:

- Will your garden be an 'open space' with shared plots where the workload and harvest are shared equally among members or will some plots be dedicated to particular types of plants, such as herbs or root vegetables?
- If your garden includes allotments, how long can someone 'occupy' one. How will you handle vacancies?
- What is the most suitable size of plots and common areas for your garden?



- What do you think will grow best in your garden considering its site and soil type? Some gardens grow crop vegetables while others opt for shrubs and vine fruits.
- How will your garden attract birds and insects and foster bio-diversity?
- Will your garden use organic principles or permaculture techniques?
- Will you fence your garden?

We recommend reading the *Sustainable Gardening in the City of Melbourne* booklet for handy hints and ideas for your garden, which provides information about choosing plants, water use and composting. Find this booklet on [melbourne.vic.gov.au/sustainability](http://melbourne.vic.gov.au/sustainability)

## Working with others

A community garden is an asset to any neighbourhood and generates many benefits. Where gardens operate on public land, the City of Melbourne encourages a wide cross-section of the community to participate in its operation and management. This includes people of all ages, ability, gender, cultural and language backgrounds.

You are responsible for the daily management of your garden and for making sure it meets the health and safety requirements for the surrounding community:

- How will your garden members make sure that inclusive, transparent and fair decisions are made?
- What are the benefits and burdens of becoming incorporated?
- How will your garden group deal with problems and conflicts?
- How will your group consider the needs of the surrounding neighbourhood, for instance, will your garden generate any noise, odour or water run-off? What hours will your garden be open?
- How will you make sure your garden is safe for volunteers and visitors? Will there be minimum standards in place i.e. putting all equipment away securely at the end of the day?
- How will you find new members for your gardening group? Will you allow occasional volunteers and how will you manage this?
- How will you communicate with visitors and volunteers about events or activity rosters?
- How will your garden harvest be shared or distributed?
- How often will members need to attend working bees?
- What happens if a member stops using their garden plot?
- Will you charge a fee for members to use the garden?

## Building partnerships

When neighbours work together a lot can be achieved. Here are some ideas:

- Host a community celebration to promote your garden, such as a street party.
- Organise an event such as a neighbourhood fund raiser.
- Invite a guest gardener to speak to your group.
- Hold a workshop on a topic of interest to your group.
- Hold a garage sale for garden equipment.
- Host a picnic showcasing your garden produce or organise a vegie swap.
- Invite a local charity to raise awareness of an issue to your group.
- Create a website or use social media account to share information.
- Promote your garden on a local radio station.
- Arrange a story in your local newspaper.
- Invite children from a local school or child care centre for a visit.
- Paint garden beds with murals.
- Collect books and magazines on gardening for people to share.

A community garden needs resources to that it keeps going over the long term. Partnerships can help with funding and managing your garden. The City of Melbourne encourages groups to seek partnerships with:

- Corporate sponsors and local businesses such as nurseries, cafes, restaurants or sporting clubs.
- Schools and child care centres.
- Community organisations, such as Men's Sheds.
- Government organisations.
- Worship communities, such as churches and temples.
- Other garden groups.

Once you have decided on a design for your garden and how it will be managed, your group must think about a budget and where to find funding:

- How will you raise funding? Can you identify any research grants you might apply for, or fund-raisers you could hold?

- What in-kind support could you source? This might include donated compost, equipment, plant cuttings or manure.
- Perhaps an 'honesty box' could be used, where people pay gold coin for herbs or vegetables?
- Can you source pro-bono (free) work from others, such as marketing, promotions, permaculture workshops?

You may wish to elect someone in your group with the skills and networks to take charge of partnerships:

- Who will talk with new business partners, the City of Melbourne or the bank that holds your accounts?
- Who has fund-raising skills or business networks?
- Who would like to induct new members into your garden?
- Who will purchase and maintain the shed?

## PART 2 – ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY GARDEN

It is wise to know why some community garden groups fail so you can be aware of any warning signs that your garden is not doing well. Some common risks to community gardens are listed below. You may use these to form your Expression of Interest (see Appendix 1).

### Location

The location of a community garden has a big influence on whether it will flourish or not.

- Any water leaving your garden must not be contaminated by sediment, fertiliser, manure or excessive organic matter that might pollute waterways.
- Noise levels in the garden must not disturb neighbours within certain times.
- The layout of your garden and the garden beds must suit the people you wish attract as members.
- You must make sure people can reach and use your garden safely. Culturally-appropriate signage is sometimes important i.e. safety instructions and welcome notices displayed in languages other than English.

### Funding

Community gardens need ongoing resources to support the group so your garden flourishes. Once your group has found the physical resources for the garden, it is important to think about and plan for funding sources.

While every garden is unique, there are some standard ways you can access funding:

- Government – grants are available such as City of Melbourne community grants.
- Philanthropic trusts and foundations.
- Business sponsorships and partnerships.
- Fund raising – open days or fetes.
- Visitor or member donations.

Keep in mind that most options for funding are only available to incorporated community garden groups (see further information on incorporated groups). Non-incorporated groups cannot apply for City of Melbourne community grants without a financial sponsor. It is a good idea to explore these options when forming a budget for your community garden.

### Health, safety and welfare

Community gardeners must take care of their safety while working in the garden and be mindful of risks to themselves and to visitors. You should develop a risk assessment that considers basic safety – appropriate clothing, appropriate and safe use of tools, being sun smart, careful handling of materials and soils. This risk assessment should identify how to reduce or eliminate any risks.



- What pesticides and fertilisers will you allow and what rules will apply to using and storing them?
- How you will manage trip hazards, such as hoses, cords or tools?
- How will you keep sharp things safe, such as barbed wire or pitch forks?
- What rules will apply to machinery, such as chain saws or whipper snippers?
- What rules will apply to storing and using compost and manures to avoid spores and microbial dust?
- What about first aid for cuts, snake bites, spiders or caterpillars?

## **Maintenance**

It's important to understand the key maintenance tasks and infrastructure you will need for your garden to flourish.

- How will you maintain compost, fertilisers so they do not attract pests (like rats) or produce bad smells?
- How will you make sure any rainwater collecting systems are designed and maintained so the water quality is high?
- How will you organise that lawns are regularly cut and garden beds and pathways are weeded and kept tidy?
- How will you manage any materials delivered to or stored at your garden so it remains pleasant, organised and safe?
- How will you avoid spreading weeds and attracting pests such as rates? A horticulturist or nursery or the Parks Services Branch of the City of Melbourne can help with information.

## **Composting**

The City of Melbourne encourages community gardens to establish organic composting and/or worm farms to provide low-cost source mulch and fertiliser. Think about which ones will best suit your needs and how to maintain them, as they can be smelly and attract pests, such as rats.

## **Sharing what you grow**

Your garden management group may form a policy on how excess food that members grow might be given to other community groups such as soup kitchens, or swapped with other gardeners and people in the local area.

The City of Melbourne does not allow food grown in community gardens on land that it owns or manages to be sold.

## Water-wise practices

Community gardens are encouraged to be water wise, by using mulch and wicking beds, by harvesting rainwater, and by watering in the mornings and evenings. Community gardens must comply with water restrictions when these are in place.

## Keeping animals

Animals such as goats or chickens are generally not allowed in a community garden. The Health Services unit of the City of Melbourne must be consulted about any animals in your garden.

## Insurance and duty of care

It is vital your garden group is aware of health and safety risks, and that you plan and take action reduce or eliminate them.

You must indemnify your garden group against legal action should an accident or injury occur. The City of Melbourne strongly advises incorporated community garden groups to purchase public liability insurance and that non-incorporated groups find a financial sponsor that may provide insurance over. Options for obtaining insurance cover include:

- Community garden groups may become an incorporated association and manage their own insurance.
- A group may be auspiced or sponsored by another organisation or agency, such as a local business, chamber of commerce, neighbourhood centre, and will be covered as a project of the auspicing agency or organisation.
- A group of community gardens with similar objectives can purchase insurance together.

There are many grey areas when it comes to insurance and it often depends on who makes the claim. For example, theft of tools and equipment may be covered by private home insurance. For this reason, the City of Melbourne recommends that assess the risks of your community garden site and purchase insurance.

The Municipal Association of Victoria provides a low-cost insurance scheme for volunteer groups and community organisations – see [communityinsurance.net.au/mav](http://communityinsurance.net.au/mav)

## Incorporated associations

The City of Melbourne encourages community gardens to establish themselves as an incorporated group. This enables you to open a bank account, purchase public liability insurance cover and apply for City of Melbourne and other government grants.

An incorporated organisation must adopt a constitution that sets out how members will be appointed, how meetings will be conducted, how decisions will be made and how conflicts can be resolved.

In addition to these legal requirements, community garden groups should develop a ‘user agreement’ for people who will use the garden or allocated spaces in the garden. The user agreement sets out the

terms of use, hours of access, user fees, access and security procedures, code of conduct and how 'gardening' decisions will be made (what to grow).

## **Complaints and conflict**

Community gardens should aim to promote a tolerant, accepting and inclusive environment. When conflict arises, action to address the conflict should be taken immediately. This includes communicating respectfully and considering asking a mediator to help if appropriate.

The City of Melbourne recommends community gardeners develop a management plan that includes a gardener's agreement that all members agree to follow. An agreement should provide information on the expectations of behaviour in your garden, the management of shared garden areas and plots, and a conflict resolution process.

The City of Melbourne will consider requests for help with mediation between a garden group and outside stakeholders and the community.

Everyone involved in the community garden, from committee members to visitors, should demonstrate respectful, inclusive behavior and communication. Sometimes conflict can arise between members or the public or partners. The best way to tackle conflicts is to have a clear statement of how this will be resolved so that participants know what is expected of them. Conflicts may arise due to the following issues:

- Distribution of the harvest
- Ownership of tools and equipment
- Noise and odour issues
- Money and purchasing of goods
- Access to plots and a water source
- Rosters and working bees
- Installation of new structures
- A gardener not complying with the garden rules
- Theft of produce
- Use of structures on plots that cause shading.

The City of Melbourne recommends community garden groups develop their own basic grievance procedure or a 'code of conduct' that can be displayed in the garden which sets out rights and responsibilities.

## **Pests**

Pests such as rates and insects ruin your plants and can also disrupt the work of your garden group, which can be demoralising. The City of Melbourne supports the efforts of community garden groups in

pest management with professional pest management strategies, advice so there are high standards of public health. If there is a pest problem in your garden, seek professional advice and discuss the problem with the City of Melbourne.

## **Soil contamination**

It can be assumed that most sites appropriate for community gardens in the CoM are likely to have some level of soil contamination due to various industrial uses from the past. In the interests of public health potential community garden sites should be investigated prior to planting. The Community Garden Policy and Guidelines reflect the provisions for land contamination outlined in the City of Melbourne Street Garden Policy and pertain to Council owned and managed land. In keeping with the Street Garden Policy, certain types of Council owned and managed land are inappropriate for community gardening purposes, including heritage listed sites, nature strips, public parks and gardens.

Furthermore, this policy and guidelines require compliance at all times with the Victorian Government's '*Guidelines for Managing Risks Associated with Land Contamination*' administered by the Environmental Health Unit, Victorian Department of Human Services. You can access this document from the Department of Health Website, at [health.vic.gov/environmental/hazards-contaminated-land](http://health.vic.gov/environmental/hazards-contaminated-land)

Further mitigation of potential soil contamination can be undertaken by community groups including laying down geo-fabrics, using clean infill and organic matter as well as installing raised beds or above-ground containers suitable for growing plants.

In the instance of soil contamination, any produce should not be eaten. Where new community gardens are proposed on CoM owned or managed land, the group should liaise with staff to raise the issue and seek advice about how to mitigate this problem. This problem is generally overcome by laying down geo-fabrics, using clean infill and mulch as well as installing free-standing planter boxes. In the instance of soil contamination, produce should not be eaten.

When a new community gardens are proposed on land that the City of Melbourne owns and/or manages, the garden management group should talk with our staff to raise the issue and seek advice about how to reduce the problem.

## **Preventing crime**

Safety in community gardens can be addressed by design. Adopting CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) principles into the planning, design, construction, management and maintenance of community gardens will help manage safety issues. Actions include maximising natural surveillance, placing signs and lightning in the best locations and creating visual prompts to separate public and private spaces. For more information on CPTED principles visit [police.vic.gov.au](http://police.vic.gov.au)

The need for fencing a community garden is assessed on an individual basis. The City of Melbourne has a preference for no fencing or low-level fencing to promote public access to a garden. Community gardens should be open to the wider public but can be compared with tennis clubs and sports ovals – open to visitors but visibly a semi-public space. If you plan a fence for your garden, the hours of opening and community access should be advertised in different languages. In this case a locking system with a key deposit would be necessary for community garden members.

You may consider listing emergency and Neighbourhood Watch contacts on signs around your garden.

## **Vandalism and raiders**

It's important to promote a strong message to the surrounding neighbourhood that anyone can get involved in your garden

Lighting and good visibility are environmental design elements that can deter vandalism and people 'reaping what they have not sown', or stealing produce from your garden. A locked garden shed for members-only use is a good place to keep tools and equipment away from public view.

## **PART 3 – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST**

Developing a community garden on land the City of Melbourne owns and/or manages requires a range of considerations. See the City of Melbourne Community Garden Policy for information on these considerations.

The next step for a community gardening group is to prepare an Expression of Interest.

When seeking to do any work on land the City of Melbourne owns and/or manages, it is important to contact us and meet with staff overseeing community gardens in your neighborhood. They can help you understand the approval process and work with you to develop on your proposal.

The City of Melbourne considers all Expressions of Interest submitted by community garden groups on the basis of how each essential element is addressed.

The City of Melbourne retains the sole discretion on whether a proposed site is suitable for a community garden. It also retains the right to reclaim the land (cancel the lease or licence) and/or relocate the community garden if the site is later required for other uses.

### **Step 1 – Your proposal**

The City of Melbourne encourages all community gardening groups to discuss their proposal with a relevant officer before submitting an Expression of Interest. This allows us to provide direction, guidance and support in the early phase of your garden project. You should complete your Expression of Interest using the form attached below, providing as much information as possible.

A City of Melbourne staff member will discuss your Expression of Interest with you to determine if your proposal is viable and appropriate proposal. This is where you can ask questions and build understanding about what a community garden project involves.

### **Step 2 - Community consultation**

Once your Expression of Interest is assessed and approved, your gardening group will consult in the neighbourhood in partnership with the City of Melbourne. It is also important to consult residents and property owners to inform them about your garden plans. The City of Melbourne will advise your group on what type of consultation should occur, which depends on the scale and location of your proposed garden.

Your community garden project will be strengthened by including or partnering with other community groups and individuals, seeking opinions from neighbours, neighbourhood associations, community centres, apartment blocks, local social organisations and City of Melbourne councillors.

If you identify issues that are important to the wider community or to specific groups that are not addressed by your garden proposal, you may be able to win their support by revising your garden concept or plans. The City of Melbourne considers any feedback from consultation and will work you so that any concerns are addressed.

If the City of Melbourne declines your Expression of Interest (due to community feedback or further information) our staff will discuss alternative options with you. We will write a letter outlining why we declined and listing alternative options. If the City of Melbourne approves your Expression of Interest, you can begin developing a more detailed proposal for your garden.

### **Step 3 – Expression of Interest**

To progress your community garden project, a detailed project proposal is needed to address each element outlined above in Part 2: Essential elements of a successful community garden.

We encourage you to develop a project proposal in collaboration with other members of your garden group and to discuss your proposal with City of Melbourne staff for additional support, guidance and information.

Your proposal will be assessed by a City of Melbourne panel. Councillors must then approve your proposal at a Council meeting. If they approval your proposal, our staff will meet with you applicants to develop any relevant written agreements to help you start establishing your garden.

#### **Appendix 1 - Community Garden Expression of Interest form – sample only**

Describe your project and your goals

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Describe the need for the project and who is involved, engaged and affected:

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Describe the site and maintenance factors of your proposed garden:

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Describe how you plan to manage your garden:

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Additional information – provide any other relevant details:

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Signature and date

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