



Community Gardens Guidelines





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Introduction

Our area has a growing population, and the need for access to community spaces to gather and undertake passive activities is critical to foster a sense of community. Community gardens provide an opportunity for growing food locally, reducing food waste, enhancing biodiversity and building local community networks.

The City of Canada Bay Council's *Community Gardens Policy* and *Community Gardens Guidelines* provide the framework for Council to support the development and management of local community gardens. These guidelines are designed to assist interested groups in the process of applying for and establishing a community garden on Council land in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993*.

Community gardens – what are they and why are they beneficial?

Community gardens are a type of community managed open space, used by a local community group to grow non-commercial food locally. These gardens facilitate community-wide engagement in a sustainable recreational activity and contribute to the health and wellbeing of the residents.

Community gardens come in many forms. They can be community run on public land or private gardens open for local membership. For the purpose of this document, the garden will be on Council owned or managed land. Gardens on private property and verge gardens are not regulated by the *Community Gardens Policy* or these guidelines.

Community gardens provide opportunities for environmental education, sustainable food production, waste minimisation, and social interaction by encouraging community members to engage with one another.





What are the basic principles for your garden?

Approval: Every community garden on public land must be approved by Council. The approval process is explained below. Each group is required to have a minimum of \$20 million public liability insurance, this is normally through an incorporate group. Applications will be assessed on a case by case basis and must comply with the *Community Gardens Policy* and these supporting *guidelines*.

Collaboration: Interested members need to come together and form a group that work together and support each other. Experienced members are encouraged to mentor others and assist at different stages of the process.

Consultation: All new gardens should gain local support for the proposal, this can be done through flyers, doorknocking or online promotion. The site should not interfere with other land uses and must consider the existing space involved.

Inclusive and accessible: The garden must be open to all residents of the area and have some members that reside in the area. Sites should have disability access, as well as delivery access, so that all members of the community can participate and engage with the garden site.

Organic and sustainable: All community gardens must be chemical-free. No herbicides, pesticides or artificial fertilisers are allowed. Council encourages a permaculture approach; activities such as composting, worm farming, and seed harvesting are encouraged.

Safety: The community garden group have a duty of care to the community who will access the garden, therefore it is necessary for the site to comply with related Work Health and Safety Regulations and it should have good passive surveillance.

Self-sufficient: It is essential for the group to have the skills necessary to organise, manage, maintain and fund the community garden to a high standard. The group must be able to demonstrate these capabilities to Council. The garden must have an approved management plan and design layout of the site details. The site must have water access and solar access to comply with the required suitable growing conditions.

Structured: The community garden group must have an organisational structure with a committee in charge following a garden management plan.



Process for setting up a new garden

Council supports the development of community gardens, particularly in high-density areas. We may be able to assist in locating new garden sites on public land, where available land exists, neighbours are supportive, and a community group demonstrates interest and commitment.

The timeframe to establish a community garden on Council land may vary. The time it takes to obtain approvals including community consultation and endorsement should be considered.

1. Have an idea

Applicants talk to residents to gauge support and establish an informal community garden group that is committed to running a garden.

2. Research some sites

The group researches potential sites in their area, as certain sites may not be suitable for a community garden.

Public/private land: If the proposed land is public contact Council, if it's private, contact the land owner.

3. Draft a management plan

The group develops a basic management plan. This will include a description of their vision for the garden, the details of the garden, their objectives, the activities proposed and the responsibilities of the group.

4. Draft a garden design or layout

The group will also develop a garden design or layout to show the details of the garden site. This will include details of the garden beds, pathways, composting area and potential plantings.

5. Express an interest to Council

Contact Council on 9911 6555 or at council@canadabay.nsw.gov.au stating your interest, the potential garden site and draft plans of the garden.

7. Consult with residents

Where there is initial Council support, we will undertake community consultation about the proposed garden. This consultation will give residents the opportunity to provide feedback. Where issues arise, Council may try to work through the issues with stakeholders. If there is strong opposition to the proposal, a new site might be considered or the application might be refused at this point.

6. Council assessment

A Council officer will assess the site. If the site is unsuitable, a new site may be recommended by Council.

8. Formally apply

If the community garden proposal is endorsed to proceed, applicants will be asked to develop a final management plan and garden design to submit as part of the formal application.

9. Council determination

Council's Parks, Property, and Sustainability teams will then formally assess the application and it will be sent to Council meeting for endorsement or approved under delegation.

10a. Application is approved

Council staff meet with the group to finalise plans and designs for the garden and a community garden agreement will be signed. A formal group will be registered as an incorporated organisation and will purchase public liability insurance.

10b. Application is declined

The applicant is advised of the recommendation of refusal and the details surrounding this decision.

11. Building commences

Once the final design is agreed on with Council, an agreement is signed. After this, the group can start construction on the proposed site. This is to be self-funded or the community garden group can apply for grants with council.

12. Start gardening

The group enacts the management plan and organises membership promotion, a working bee schedule, and begins to plant crops. The group must maintain the garden as per the agreement and work with Council to make any physical changes to the design of the garden in line with the agreement.



Community garden design and management plan

When planning a community garden, the group needs to consider all of the requirements and this must be a long-term commitment. The below points will help guide applicants through the process of preparing an application and developing a management plan.

Vision

The first step is to think about the vision for your garden:

- Why are you starting this garden? What is the purpose?
- How does the garden benefit the broader community?
- Is this a staged plan or do you want it to grow over time?

A quick management plan checklist:

- ☐ Vision
- ☐ Choose your land
- ☐ Design and gardening
- ☐ Resourcing
- ☐ Membership
- ☐ Communications and marketing
- ☐ Health and safety
- ☐ Insurance and risk management

Tips for choosing land

Location

- Is it consistent with the current open space?
- Are the neighbours informed and supportive?
- Is it close to high-density living?
- Is there an area of approximately 750m²?

Usability of site

- Is the site visible and safe?
- Does the site receive at least 6 hours of sunlight a day?
- Is there a good shaded area for compost or worm farms?
- Is there power and water?

Accessibility

- Is the site accessible for a range of user groups and close to public transport (where possible)?
- Does the site allow for disability access?





Design and gardening

Next, you need to think about the practicalities of your proposed garden. The design and membership numbers are important to ensure everyone has access to produce and activities.

Design

- How will you define the garden boundary?
- How will you access the garden area? Is it accessible to everyone from outside the garden? Are all beds accessible internally?
- How many garden beds will you start with? Can you plan for expansion later on?
- What design will your gardens beds be and what will they be made of?
- How big will they be and how many will fit in your space?
- What is the ratio of garden members to garden beds so the garden is maintained well?
- Will you use sustainable or recycled materials where possible?
- Will your garden be fully or partly accessible to people with disabilities?
- How are you going to water the garden? Will you have a rainwater tank to water your plants? What about water runoff from the garden?
- Will tools be stored on site? Will there be a shed or a lockable storage case?
- Will you include a work bench and/or area for gathering and eating? Have you considered seating/rest areas in shade?
- How will your garden be laid out? Please submit a draft plan as part of your proposal to Council.

Gardening

- What style of gardening will your group practice?
- Will your garden have shared or individually managed plots?
- Will you practice permaculture?
- Will you include native edible plants and improve biodiversity?
- Will you manage a worm farm and/or compost?
- Will you plant fruit trees?
- Is the main purpose to grow food, or is it to educate the community? How will your group and members decide what plants to plant?
- How will you manage pests?
- How will you source tools and equipment for your garden?
- Will you run scheduled working bees for all members or will you work on a roster to manage the garden?
- How will you deal with garden waste?
- Will you share your produce with the public?
- How will your group handle repairs and maintenance of the garden's equipment and assets?



Resourcing your garden

Once you have a clear vision for your garden and a plan for implementing that vision, you will need to develop a budget and consider where you will obtain the necessary financial resources. In-kind support such as donations from local businesses and applying for grants are some of the ways community garden groups have resourced their projects.

The requirements of each unique garden will vary, but most gardeners will need to consider the following:

- Public liability insurance
- Construction materials (e.g. termite-free recycled sleepers, raised garden beds)
- Organic material for no-dig bed construction
- Tools and equipment (e.g. hand-tools, wheelbarrows, watering cans, hoses, propagation supplies)
- Costs of involving the community (e.g. producing promotional material, mail-outs, local advertising, venues for meetings).



Accessing funds

There are many ways community gardeners can access funds for their project, depending upon its scale and focus. It is important to plan your fundraising to ensure that you will have enough money to construct and maintain your garden. Membership fees will generally need to be supplemented with grants and donations depending on the size of the garden.

Successful ways that community gardeners have raised funds include:

- Events – open days, celebrations, festivals and markets can all attract a donation for entry. You may also attract new members this way
- Annual plot and membership fees – these are the fees people pay to be part of the garden
- Visitor donation box – decorate it to attract attention
- Courses and workshops – this can be a significant source of income in a well designed and developed garden with appropriate facilities
- Grant funding – community gardens provide a diverse range of social and environmental benefits so they are eligible for a wide variety of local, state and federal government grants. Visit canadabay.nsw.gov.au, ourcommunity.com.au and grantslink.gov.au for further information on obtaining grants
- Sponsorship and business support, including donations such as garden sheds or materials. Similar support can be gained through sponsorship but a more detailed agreement will be required. Council's sponsorship package can be used as a guide.



Incorporation of the garden group

Garden groups must apply to the NSW Office of Fair Trading to become Incorporated Associations. This arrangement affords the group some flexibility in the management of funds and enables them to open a bank account, obtain public liability insurance cover, and apply for government grants. Incorporation as an association requires groups to establish a management committee with annually elected office bearers and to commit to regular meetings. This is a requirement of Council's agreement with the group and will help the group to manage issues.

Membership and group rules

Membership

You need to consider whether you would provide a free membership to interested community members or whether you will be charging an annual membership fee.

Group

It is important to also have some principles for members to act in accordance with, such as a process to resolve possible conflict amongst members.

- What will be the organisational structure of your group, i.e. what additional committee roles will there be above and beyond the incorporated group roles (e.g. contact person for Council and community)?
- How will your group communicate with each other about meetings, issues, new ideas or suggestions?
- Does your group have sufficient skills and experience or is there a training need?

Communication and marketing

It is important to think about how you will engage with the community.

- Will you run educational workshops for the wider community, or is your main goal to grow member numbers?
- Will you engage with schools and other organisations?
- How will you advertise your garden (e.g. flyers, signs, social media, website, open days)?





Health and safety

You need to work out how your group will meet health and safety requirements, to protect members and garden visitors. The following is a guide to consider:

1. Induction to site
How will you induct new members to health and safety procedures?
2. Personal protective equipment
Will you supply this or do people need to supply their own?
3. Risks and safety
You will need to undertake a risk assessment and have the appropriate registers to manage risks at the site.

All groups will be required to provide evidence of all members completing an appropriate site induction, as well as relevant work, health and safety training on an ongoing basis. Depending on the nature of the site use agreement with Council, gardeners may be required to follow Council site visitor procedures and/or establish their own process as an incorporated group in relation to work, health and safety.





Insurance and risk management

Each garden group has a duty of care to the community who access the garden areas. Groups are required to have Public Liability Cover of \$20 million that indemnifies Council. This is a yearly commitment and a copy must be supplied to Council. Sites should have good passive surveillance as part of this process.



Council assessment

Following public exhibition, Council will then make an assessment whether to approve or decline an application. In making this decision, the following is considered:

The availability of suitable land

- Community or Council demand to use the land for other purposes
- Suitability of land
- Previous land uses and possible contamination, topography, drainage, microclimate, the existence of services such as stormwater pipes and infrastructure, and underground and above ground cables and easements
- Attitudes of neighbours to the proposed community garden
- The capacity of the community garden group and detail provided in the application to show the long-term sustainability of the garden.





Signing an agreement with Council

If approved, Council will develop a licence to enable the site to operate on Council land. Council may charge groups for the cost of utilities, such as water.

The licence will contain special conditions and outline the activities that will be permitted to enable your group to develop and maintain the community garden. These are specific to the site and group. Any proposed changes to garden activities or the use of space require approval from Council.

Due to some soil contamination throughout the City, all new garden beds are required to be raised with an underlying barrier, such as geotech fabric, unless otherwise previously advised. The raised beds should be at least 450mm tall or adjusted where root systems would extend beyond this depth.

If development approval is required as part of your proposal, this will be treated separately.

Council assistance

To assist the group in managing the garden and its surroundings, Council will:

- If successful, provide initial advice on design and maintenance of the garden
- Connect local gardens and gardeners to each other, to help build relationships and encourage the sharing of information and experiences
- Promote community gardening through Council's website, publications, events, and other communication media
- Provide advice, support, and assistance when establishing new or managing existing gardens
- Maintain any Council property adjoining the garden as per usual standard
- Help organise workshops to support gardens engagement with the community.



