



chicago park district

COMMUNITY GARDENS IN THE PARKS MANUAL FOR DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! We are pleased that you would like to work with us to start a community garden in your local park. Chicago has already made great strides toward becoming one of the leading “Green” cities in the country. The Chicago Park District is helping to promote and expand the greening efforts in our city by providing valuable outdoor space for communities in Chicago to garden together.

Designing, planting, and caring for a garden can yield very rewarding results. Gardening gives us opportunities to be active, creative and social, as well as to establish a direct connection with nature. Gardening promotes good overall fitness and health.

In order to form a community garden in a Chicago Park District park, the following five-step process must be completed by your group. Use this detailed manual as your guide along with the Checklist which outlines the five steps.

DEFINITION

A Chicago Park District Community Garden is defined as:

An assigned space within a park that is reserved solely for the use of an organized group of community members for the purpose of growing ornamental or edible plants. The community gardening group is solely responsible for all necessary maintenance of this space.

STEP ONE: FORMING THE GROUP

Creating a Community Garden in the Chicago Park District is a grass-roots operation; in effect you will become park developers. This is a long-term responsibility which will require community support and dedicated, on-going commitment by all members of the community gardening group.

Residents of Chicago who would like to develop a Community Garden in their neighborhood park should organize themselves as an official garden club or group (Group). As a public agency, Park District policy requires inclusiveness; anyone interested in joining the Group is to be fairly considered.

The Group will appoint a liaison, or group leader, who will serve as the Group’s representative to the Chicago Park District and to the public. The liaison will be responsible for organizing and monitoring all garden activities, as well as scheduling the group’s attendance at a park Advisory Council meeting to present and discuss the proposed community garden. It would be beneficial for your group to join the Advisory Council, especially for assistance with fundraising efforts.

Once established, your Group must develop working relationships with the Park Supervisor, Area Manager, and the Advisory Council. Support from all of these parties is crucial.

STEP TWO: DEFINING THE GARDEN TYPE & LOCATION

DEFINE THE GARDEN TYPE

1. **Ornamental Gardens:** Includes annuals, perennials, small shrubs, etc., with no plants intended for use as food. Ornamental gardens may be planted directly into existing soil.
2. **Edibles Gardens:** Includes plants for use as food and must be planted in raised beds. ***Raised beds are to conform to Park District requirements using new, clean soil, special liner, etc.**
3. **Combination Gardens:** Includes ornamental plants and plants intended for use as food. Combination gardens **must also be planted in raised beds.***

SELECTING THE LOCATION

Consider these factors which must be used in identifying and defining a site for a proposed Community Garden:

1. Confirm with the Park Supervisor that the specific location is owned by the Chicago Park District.
2. Does the Group want to garden in **existing** garden beds or to create a **new** garden space?
NOTE: An existing garden space is preferred.
3. Look for any under-utilized sections of parks or playlots which will not interfere with park aesthetics or existing uses.
4. Is the space large enough to accommodate the garden bed(s), if creating a new garden?
5. **AN EXISTING WATER SOURCE IS MANDATORY. The garden must be located within 100 feet of a functioning water source. The use of fire hydrants or drinking fountains is not an option.**
6. Consider sun exposure and shade from buildings, trees, etc. Full sun to mostly sunny is best.
7. Is it a reasonable distance to restroom facilities?
8. Ornamental Gardens should be sited in an area which will not need a fence.
9. After deciding on a site, inform the Park Supervisor and Area Manager of your selection.

STEP THREE: APPLICATION

Upon completion of Steps One and Two, submit an Application (**Form #1**) to the designated department:

For an <u>Ornamental</u> community garden:	For an <u>Edibles</u> or <u>Combination</u> community garden:
Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR) Chicago Park District 541 N. Fairbanks Ct., 6 th Fl. Chicago, IL 60611 Attn: Community Garden Application	Environment, Culture & Special Events (ECSE) Chicago Park District 541 N. Fairbanks Ct., 4 th Fl. Chicago, IL 60611 Attn: Community Garden Application

- Please keep in mind that not all parks are available for community gardening.
- All application forms received will be reviewed per the deadlines listed on our website: www.chicagoparkdistrict.com
- Group's liaison will then receive an Application Approval Letter from the Park District directing you to proceed to Step 4 **OR** a request for more information.

STEP FOUR: PETITION, COMMUNITY SUPPORT & PROPOSAL

Community consent and support is vital in obtaining Park District approval for a successful community garden. After receiving your Application Approval Letter complete the following five parts:

IDENTIFY FUNDING

- One of the necessary initial steps is to locate funds to develop and operate this garden. Please refer to the Appendix for ideas.

PETITION (FORM #2)

- A petition of support must be circulated within the neighborhood surrounding the proposed site. It is recommended petitioning at least 3 blocks in each direction. A minimum of 15 signatures is needed, with only one signature per household.
- **IMPORTANT:** Include the signatures of both gardeners and non-gardeners. Members of the Garden Group are not permitted to sign.

SITE & USAGE SURVEY (FORM #3)

- Survey visits determine what's going on in the area of the park surrounding your proposed garden site by identifying who is there, times of heaviest usage, various types of sporting activities, etc.
- Arrange for the Park Supervisor to accompany you on your first survey visit.
- 3 separate site visits are to be conducted over a period of one to two weeks.
- Of these 3 required visits to the park, 1 is to be during peak usage time on a weekday & 1 during peak usage time on a weekend (work with the park supervisor to find peak usage times).
- Please conduct the surveys during times of high usage.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

The Group should be taken under the umbrella of the park's Advisory Council and/or closest neighborhood association in order to assist in finance, maintenance, and safety concerns. Collect letters of support from both the local park's Advisory Council* and the Ward Alderman.

* If not available, then get a letter or two from a neighborhood governing association, local block club or school.

A PUBLIC NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

A minimum of one public meeting must be held to get a consensus of the neighbors surrounding the proposed Community Garden. This meeting should be arranged by the liaison and can be held at any Neighborhood Association, C.A.P.S., or park Advisory Council meeting.

IMPORTANT: Notify the Park Supervisor **and** the Park District's DNR or ECSE department in advance of the date, time and location of this meeting.

WRITTEN PROPOSAL

A written proposal consists of the following documentation:

- **Group Membership roster** Name of Group, park, contact information of the primary group leader, secondary group leader, and a complete listing of current group members.
- **Funding plan.** All costs for the proposed Community Garden are the sole responsibility of the Group.

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- **Garden design.** Include a sketch which can be basic and hand-drawn. Show the garden layout including dimensions, and locations of the water source, nearby buildings, and trees. Describe which direction it faces, how many hours of direct sunlight per day, and the soil type. For Edibles Garden only: be sure you have received the Park District’s specifications that should have been sent along with your Application Approval Letter. If you did not receive the specifications, contact the Park District’s ECSE department right away.
- **Plant list.** Provide a list of plants to be used in the garden (Ornamental gardens only).
- **Installation, Labor & Supply.** Answer the following:
 - ✓ How will your garden be installed?
 - ✓ Who will your laborers be?
 - ✓ Edibles Garden only: What is the source for materials such as lumber and soil?
- **Maintenance plan.** Provide a detailed maintenance plan, indicating how the garden will be cared for on a daily and seasonal basis, including watering, weeding, mulching, spring prepping and winterizing.

SUBMIT THE PAPERWORK

Mail the following to the appropriate department (see Step Three) by the deadline listed on our website:

- PROPOSAL PACKAGE* {
- Petition – Form #2
 - 3 Usage surveys – Form #3
 - Letters of Support
 - Written Proposal details
 - a copy of your application approval letter

Your proposal package will be reviewed at the next upcoming deadline. You will then be notified that your proposal has been approved or that further information is needed.

After approving your proposal, you will negotiate design possibilities with the Park District. The resulting designs will then be shown at the next public park Advisory Council or neighborhood association meeting for review and agreement. The Chicago Park District will inspect the installation process.

STEP FIVE: LETTER OF COMMITMENT

The most important aspect of successful community gardening in a park is on-going community support and communication between the community and the Chicago Park District. Listed below are the responsibilities and guidelines the Group must adhere to, and the community must support:

GARDEN/PLOT MAINTENANCE

The Group is entirely responsible for the maintenance of the Community Garden. Keep in mind that the space allocated is on public land and must always be actively maintained. The Group is to provide the Chicago Park District with a schedule detailing routine maintenance procedures, spring prepping, and fall winterizing.

Pathways and areas between Garden Beds must be mulched and maintained by the group. The Park District will not do any maintenance within the Community Garden itself.

Through the Park District’s independent observation, if the space is deemed unsightly, weedy or unkempt, the designated liaison will be given two separate warning notices both via two different means (for example, phone call and letter through the mail) each time. If the problem continues thereafter, the agreement will be revoked and the Group will be responsible for proposing a plan to restore the garden to parkland to the satisfaction of the Park District’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

WATER

Please conserve water!!! The water supply is **ONLY** to be used by gardeners caring for their assigned areas. Washing of cars or other personal non-garden related activities is prohibited.

ORGANIC PRACTICES

It is strongly recommended that all cultivating practices be organic; to the extent possible only organic fertilizers should be applied in edibles gardens.

PEST & DISEASE CONTROL AND CHEMICALS

Only organic means of disease and pest control may be used. **NO CHEMICAL PEST CONTROL MEASURES MAY BE USED WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL FROM THE PARK DISTRICT'S DNR/ECSE DEPARTMENTS!**

COMPOSTING

Composting is encouraged, but only that which is organic and will decompose (e.g. plant material, fruit peels/cores). Avoid rodent-attracting foods such as rice, bread, meat, or grease. Inorganic or non-plant materials such as plastic, metal, kitty litter, feces, or any large or thorny branches are not suitable for compost. The compost must be contained in a manner approved by the Park District's DNR/ECSE departments such as a tumbler or open cage.

An alternative to a compost bin is bagged plant material waste which the Park District landscape crew will pick up upon notification.

STRUCTURES AND SIZABLE LANDSCAPE MATERIAL

Structures such as trellises, walls, and permanent fences, or sizable plant material such as trees are not allowed, unless approved by the Park District's DNR/ECSE departments.

GARDEN BORDERS

The garden boundaries must remain as submitted on the original design plans. Any proposed expansion must be reviewed and approved by the Park District's DNR/ECSE departments. **NO EXCEPTIONS.**

MONITORING THE COMMUNITY GARDEN

The community, especially Group members, shall continually monitor the Community Garden for quality control and good management practices.

MANAGEMENT

Frequent communication with the Chicago Park District regarding management of the Community Garden is required. If problems occur with the operation or patrons of the Community Garden, the Chicago Park District should be informed and involved in the resolution of any problems.

NEW MEMBERS

The Group shall inform new members of the Community Garden rules and regulations; stressing the importance of ongoing maintenance. The group must follow a transparent membership process open to all. As a public agency, Park District policy requires inclusiveness; anyone interested in joining the Group is to be fairly considered.

LIABILITY

The Park District is not responsible for the garden itself; or to anything in or pertaining to the garden. Each member of the gardening group must sign a waiver of liability.

FUNDRAISING

The Group may organize fundraising events to finance needs of the Community Garden such as a compost bin, water hoses, plants, etc.

CLEAN-UP ACTIVITIES

The Group will be expected to participate in park clean-up days such as Earth Day (April), Clean & Green (May & October) events and those held in conjunction with the Friends of the Parks organization.

SIGNAGE

Each Community Garden will have a sign indicating the name of the Community Garden Group and other information as required by the Chicago Park District. Signage to be provided by the Park District.

VEHICLES

Park patrons are permitted to use motorized vehicles within a park **ONLY** on designated roadways, driveways and parking facilities. **The parking or driving of motorized vehicles by any park patron on walkways, restricted-access drives, lawn areas, under trees, or within landscaped areas is strictly forbidden.**

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES

- **Littering, dumping, alcohol consumption** and other unlawful activities.
- **Amplified sound**
- **Pets** are not allowed in the garden per the Code of the Chicago Park District.
- **Ball playing** or other forms of active recreation.
- **Vehicular traffic** inside the park.

GARDEN TERMINATION

If the Group decides to no longer maintain their space, they must immediately notify the Park District's DNR/ECSE departments and the Park Supervisor and Area Manager. Group will be responsible for proposing a plan to restore the garden to parkland to the satisfaction of the Park District's Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

QUALITY ASSURANCE

A Chicago Park District representative may attend a neighborhood association and/or park Advisory Council meeting to review the successes or challenges experienced by the Community Gardeners. The Park District will take appropriate action based on that assessment. Failure by the Community Gardeners to provide the required operational and financial support will result in the removal of the garden by the Park District.

FINISH: INSTALLATION OF THE GARDEN

After the Park District has accepted your signed Letter of Commitment, Liability Waivers, and final garden design, it's time to install the garden. If you complete the Community Garden development process by the May installation date, your Community Garden should be ready in time for the new growing season. Or, if you qualify for the November installation date, your garden will be ready to start the following spring.

IMPORTANT: Your Group will be required to renew its Community Garden registration every three years. You will be asked for a progress report on your garden, current membership details, and a budget plan for the next 3 years. Your Group may also be required to submit a renewed Letter of Commitment.

Finally, Congratulations! You have raised all the community support and commitment needed for a successful Community Garden. This is a big responsibility and we are pleased to be in this venture together and wish your group great success.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CPD:

Your Park Supervisor and Area Manager are your main contacts for all departments within the Park District; very important relationships. Just as you have been given responsibility to maintain your garden in an appealing manner, your Park Supervisor and Area Manager will work with you by sharing information about any activities in the park which may impact your garden space.

Park District landscaping crews will be shown your garden space to assure that the boundaries are respected and to see where their maintenance responsibilities adjoin yours.

APPENDIX: FUNDING IDEAS, RESOURCES and CLASSES

Here are a few ideas for locating funds and/or horticultural resources for your Community Garden:

- **Parkways Foundation** is the non-profit partner of the Chicago Park District which is offering grant opportunities to officially registered community garden groups. Community gardens must be fully registered with the Park District prior to the grant application deadline. Contact <http://www.parkways.org> or (312) 742-4808 for grant information.
- Your park **Advisory Council** can work with your Group to hold fundraising events; auctions, plant sales, concerts, etc.
- **GreenNet** is a coalition of non-profit organizations and public agencies committed to supporting community greening in Chicago. Their website lists guides, other community gardens, ideas, resources, organizations and potential funding: www.greennetchicago.org
- **GreenCorps**, which is found under the Dept. of Environment, City of Chicago, suggests grants, resources, and support: www.cityofchicago.org
- **Growing Power**, an organization that inspires communities to build sustainable food systems that are equitable and ecologically sound, creating a just world, one food-secure community at a time. www.growingpower.org
- **Friends of the Parks** has mini-seed grants available: www.fotp.org
- **Kilbourn Park Organic Greenhouse** offers workshops and lectures, as well as their annual plant sale and Harvest Festival. They provide horticultural ideas, resources, and help.
- **Garfield Park Conservatory** provides a wealth of information, ideas and resources for horticulture. They also host workshops and lectures.
- **Wicker Park Garden Club** is a highly successful community garden that provides many resources, workshops, lectures and events: www.wpgarden.org
- **Openlands** supports community gardens under their Urban Greening program: www.openlands.org
- **Chicago Botanic Garden** has an extensive line of lectures, classes and workshops available. They also have wonderful demonstration gardens of various types and designs.
- **University of Illinois Extension** website supplies a wealth of resources: web.extension.uiuc.edu They have a plant clinic based at the Garfield Park Conservatory where they can troubleshoot many individual plant/gardening problems. Master Gardener and Master Composter certification classes are also available.
- **American Community Garden Association** works to create new resources for community gardens, coordinates an annual conference, and has online resources and informative lists of all topics involving community gardens: www.communitygarden.org
- **National Gardening Association** promotes the environment, is a resource of plant information, has a free newsletter, and provides links for gardeners. Periodically, they provide information about grants and other funds available: www.garden.org
- **Local businesses** may be interested in donating materials, monetarily, and/or with volunteer hours.
- **Local officials** may have funds available to support such a community improvement project.