



chicago park district

COMMUNITY GARDENS IN THE PARKS REFERENCE MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

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. Chicago Park District's community gardens program serves to support the long term sustainability of your garden by offering technical support, education and networking opportunities, and promoting overall best practices. The management and care of your garden remains with you and the members of your garden group.

Designing, planting, and caring for a garden can yield very rewarding results. Gardening gives us the opportunity to establish a direct connection with nature and our communities and to promote the beautification of our park lands. Gardening allows us to pursue healthy and active lifestyles, to be creative and to act as stewards of our parks. Many of Chicago Park District's Community Gardens support ongoing learning opportunities and provide our youngest neighbors the chance to engage in and learn from the gardening process.

Becoming a registered community garden group is required to maintain a garden on park property, and in return for your stewardship the Community Gardens in the Parks program hopes to support your work in ways that uphold the long term sustainability of your garden and garden group. Assistance with fundraising efforts, the lending of tools for community workdays, and the offering of classes and workshops are just a few ways in which we can help. If your garden is seeking something in particular, please let us know and we will do our best to meet your need with the appropriate resources.

The purpose of this manual is to make clear the expectations that are involved with starting and managing a garden on park property.

DEFINITION:

A Chicago Park District Community Garden is defined as:

An assigned space within a park that is used by an organized group of community members for the purpose of growing ornamental or edible plants, either for park beautification or home use. The Community Gardening group is solely responsible for all management, financing and ongoing maintenance of this space.

If you wish to grow any crops for sale or other business purposes- please contact us before proceeding any further at communitygardens@chicagoparkdistrict.com

GARDEN TYPES:

1. **Ornamental Gardens:** Includes annuals, perennials, and small shrubs, with no plants intended for use as food. Ornamental gardens may be planted directly into existing soil. Native and drought-tolerant plants are encouraged, please see our native plant list for suggestions.
2. **Edible Gardens:** Includes plants for use as food, grown only in raised beds.
*Raised beds are to conform to Park District requirements: they must be at least 12 inches tall, have a liner to prevent roots from growing into the ground, and use new, clean soil. For accessibility, we recommend beds that are no wider than 4 feet across.

3. **Combination Gardens:** Include ornamental plants and plants intended for use as food.
*Combination gardens must also be planted in raised beds.

YOUR GARDEN 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.

Your garden group is responsible for the total care of your garden, both financially and in garden maintenance and management. Each group must nominate a garden manager, who will serve as the Group's liaison to the Chicago Park District and representative to the public.

We strongly encourage, but don't require, that at least one member of your Group serves a member of your park's advisory council (if one exists). Your Group should take care to develop working relationships with the Park Supervisor and Area Manager as well, support from all of these parties is crucial.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

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. Maintenance of plumbing features, when necessary, will remain the responsibility of the Park District as well.

The Community Gardens in the Parks staff and your Park Supervisor are your main contacts for all departments within the Park District. Just as you have been given responsibility to maintain your garden in an appealing manner, the Chicago Park District will work with you by sharing information about any activities in the park which may impact your garden space.

STARTING A NEW COMMUNITY GARDEN

Outlined below is a step by step process for starting a new community garden. The Community Gardens in the Parks staff are happy to help guide you through this process and answer any questions you may have along the way. It can take anywhere from 2 - 6 months to get your garden up and running, and depends in large part on the location you've selected and the time of year you wish to begin. We welcome your application any time, and encourage fall or winter as the best time for your group to get started in planning.

Step 1: Introductions

Form a garden group of neighbors and other community members who will be involved with your garden. Choose a garden/group name.

Familiarize yourself with community gardening on park property. This manual describes in detail what's expected of your garden group, not only as you are planning and building your garden, but also in the years to come. If you still have questions once you've read it through, please contact us at **Community.gardens@chicagoparkdistrict.com**

Step 2: Selecting the Location

Community gardening on park property is a great way to bring community members together. When seeking a space to garden in your park, look for any underutilized sections of the park which will not interfere with park aesthetics or existing uses. Consider activity in and around the space. Will the proposed garden conflict with overall park usage? Please keep in mind that not all parks are well suited for community gardens, and when possible, our staff will try to guide you through this site selection process.

When you have identified a location you think would be well suited for your garden, please take the following steps to ensure its availability:

1. First, check with the Park Supervisor to ensure the land you seek is on park property, and does not interfere with other park activities. If there is no field house near the location you are considering you may call 312-742-PLAY (7529) to get this information, or search the Chicago Park District website at chicagoparkdistrict.com/
2. **A FUNCTIONING WATER SOURCE WITHIN THE PARK IS MANDATORY.** The garden must be located within 100 feet of a working water source. Using fire hydrants or water fountains is usually not an option. The Park District does not have a map or list of functioning water sources, your group is responsible for locating these on your own. In some cases, water fountains also have hose connections but in many cases they do not. Please check carefully.
3. Consider sun exposure and shade from buildings, trees, etc. Full sun is best. No existing healthy trees will be removed to accommodate a garden.
4. Is it a reasonable distance to restroom facilities?
5. Gardens should be situated in an area which will NOT need a fence.

Step 3: Submit your Initial Application

Once you have identified a suitable space for your garden, submit the **Application for Starting a New Community Garden** (available on the Chicago Park District website) along with photos or drawings of the proposed garden space to: communitygardens@chicagoparkdistrict.com

or by mail to:

For Ornamental community gardens:

Attn: **Liz O’Callaghan**
 Chicago Park District
 Dept. of Cultural & Natural Resources
 541 N. Fairbanks Ct., 6th Floor
 Chicago, IL 60611

For Edible or Combined community gardens:

Attn: **Kristin Brock**
 Chicago Park District
 Dept. of Cultural & Natural Resources
 7059 S. South Shore Drive
 Chicago, IL 60649

After the application is received by the Park District, it will be reviewed as soon as possible. The group’s liaison will then receive either an Application Approval Letter from the CPD directing you to proceed to Step 4 **OR** a request for more information. In some circumstances, the requested location may be denied.

Step 4: Community & Financial Support

Community consent and support is vital in obtaining Park District approval for a successful Community Garden, as is your plan for funding the establishment and upkeep of the garden. After your location has been approved you may proceed with these next steps:

Conduct a Site & Usage Survey. Using the Community Gardens in the Parks Site & Usage Survey form found on our website, **three** separate site visits are to be conducted over a period of one to two weeks. Survey visits determine what’s going on in the area of the park surrounding your proposed garden site by identifying who’s there, times of heaviest usage, any type of nearby sporting activities, etc. The Park Supervisor must accompany you on your first visit. Your remaining visits should occur during peak usage times, once on a weekday and once on a weekend. Your Park Supervisor can help you determine when to schedule your visits to satisfy this requirement.

Identify funding. One of most critical steps is to locate funds to develop and operate this garden. Please refer to the Appendix for ideas. Please note that your group will need to cover the cost of building raised beds and filling them with new, clean soil if you are starting a vegetable garden.

Meet with your Park Advisory Council to share your plan **AND obtain a letter of support**. If your park does not have an advisory council, continue to maintain communication with your Park Supervisor and seek a letter of support from a neighborhood association or your Alderman.

A public meeting is required and serves to ensure any concerns from neighbors or other community members are heard. This meeting can be held in conjunction with a Park Advisory Council, CAPS or Neighborhood Association meeting, so long as the gathering is open to the public. Both the Park Supervisor and a Community Gardens in the Parks staff member should be notified in advance of the time, date and location of this meeting.

A New Community Garden Petition Form 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 allowed. Members of the Garden Group and members of their household are not permitted to sign.

Step 5: Submit your Final Proposal

After you have received the initial approval for your garden's location, and have gained the necessary community and financial support, you should create and submit your final proposal (see list below) to the Community Garden staff member listed above. This is a more detailed description of your garden plans that the Park District will use to consider your final design and installation process. You're almost finished!

1. Your **Petition** (Form #2), all **3 Site & Usage Surveys** (Form #3), your **Letter of Support**, and a written report detailing all of the following:
2. **Group Membership roster:** name of your Group, park, contact information of the primary group leader, secondary group leader, and a complete listing of current group members.
3. **Funding plan:** provide a detailed funding plan, outlining how much the garden will cost, and the sources of your funding.
4. **Garden design:** should be detailed and to scale, and include the garden layout with dimensions of the beds or plots, dimensions of the garden as a whole, the location of the water source, nearby streets, buildings, and trees.
5. **For Edible Gardens 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 gardening staff right away.
6. **Plant list:** provide a list of plants to be used in the garden. For suggestions, please consider our list on Page 8. We strongly encourage native and drought tolerant plants in our Ornamental gardens, for Edible gardens an exact list is not required, but an effort in this area is encouraged.
7. **Installation, labor & supply plan:**
How and by whom will your garden be installed? What is the source for materials such as lumber and soil?
8. **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.

REGISTRATION ACCEPTANCE

After the Park District has received all of the required documents, they will be reviewed and your liaison will be notified of your registration status.

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

APPENDIX A: DETAILS FROM THE LETTER OF COMMITMENT

The most important aspect of successful community gardening in a park is ongoing community support and communication between the community and the Chicago Park District. Listed below are the responsibilities and guidelines the Group must follow:

MANAGEMENT

The Community Gardens in the Parks staff is designed to help your group not only start your garden, but help you sustain a positive and productive presence in your park. Maintaining communication with the Park District regarding management of the Community Garden is expected. Information about changes in leadership, events, workdays, classes, etc. that are hosted in the garden should be shared with the Community Gardens in the Parks staff. If problems occur with the operation or patrons of the Community Garden, the Park Supervisor should be informed and involved in the resolution of any problems.

In the event the garden leader needs to step down, he or she is responsible for recruiting and facilitating new garden leadership.

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.

GARDEN/PLOT MAINTENANCE

The Group is entirely responsible for the maintenance of the Community Garden and for the organization and management of the Group members. Keep in mind that the space allocated is on public land and must always be actively maintained. The Group must follow the Maintenance Plan (step 6 of your Written Proposal).

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 otherwise neglected, the designated liaison will get two separate warning notices. 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 Cultural and Natural Resources (DCNR).

Gardens are expected to be cleaned up/put to bed by December 1st of each year. Any temporary structures or plant supports must be removed and stored off-site by this date.

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. Irrigation systems are discouraged. Drip hoses or other water conserving devices are encouraged.

ORGANIC PRACTICES

In keeping with the Chicago Park District's commitment to sustainability, and for the health and safety of all park patrons, it is required that all gardening practices, including disease and pest control, be organic. **NO CHEMICAL PEST CONTROL MEASURES MAY BE USED.**

COMPOSTING

Composting of on-site garden waste is encouraged. Per the City of Chicago's Municipal Code, please do not bring material from outside sources. Avoid rodent-attracting foods such as meat, starches, and cheese. Also avoid large or thorny branches and diseased plant material. The compost must be contained in a manner approved by DCNR such as a tumbler or bin with a lid. An alternative to a compost bin is bagged plant material waste. Ask your Park Supervisor to contact his or her landscape crew for pickups as needed.

SOIL

It is the responsibility of the Group to ensure that the soil used in the garden is clean. Groups working in vegetable gardens should take care to test your soil regularly to ensure it is safe enough to grow edible crops.

BIRD FEEDERS

Bird feeders are not allowed. Use of native plants will provide natural food sources such as berries and seeds without attracting rodents or pigeons. Please refer to and utilize our Native Plant List.

PERMANENT STRUCTURES AND SIZEABLE LANDSCAPE MATERIAL

Permanent structures such as fences, walls, and sizeable plant material such as **trees** are **NOT** allowed, unless approved by DCNR. Sheds are not permitted. Small trellises are permitted and must be removed and stored by the Group by December 1st each year.

GARDEN BORDERS

The garden boundaries must remain as submitted on the original design plans. Any proposed modification or expansion requests must be approved by DCNR **BEFORE** any changes are made. Please contact the Community Gardens in the Parks staff for further guidance and instructions.

RODENTS

Garden groups growing edible plants are expected to harvest regularly and properly support plants so as to keep excessive produce from rotting on the ground and attracting rodents.

VANDALISM

Like drought, hail and freezing temperatures, theft and vandalism are among the assumed risks of gardening in the park. All gardens in the parks are and will continue to be public property. While the Community Gardens in the Parks program continues to support efforts to reduce unnecessary vandalism or theft, we cannot guarantee that any garden is free from the risk.

LIABILITY

The Park District is not responsible for the garden itself, or to anything in or pertaining to the garden.

EACH MEMBER OF THE GROUP MUST SIGN A WAIVER OF LIABILITY [FORM 4B].

SIGNAGE

Each Community Garden will be provided with a sign by the Park District upon request.

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 IN THE GARDEN

- **Littering, dumping, grilling, alcohol consumption** and any otherwise 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.

GARDEN TERMINATION

If the Group decides to no longer maintain their space, they must immediately notify the Park District. The Group will be responsible for proposing a plan to restore the garden to parkland to the satisfaction of the Park District's Dept. of Cultural & Natural Resources (DCNR).

While unlikely, the Chicago Park District reserves the right to remove the garden at any time and will make every effort to provide notification prior to removal.

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.

APPENDIX B: FUNDING IDEAS, RESOURCES and CLASSES

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

- **Friends of the Parks** may have seed grants available for registered Community Gardens: <http://fotp.org/>
- Your **Park Advisory Council** may be able to work with your Group to hold fundraising events.
- **Chicago Community Gardening Association** is a coalition of garden groups and non-profit organizations committed to supporting community greening in Chicago. Working together, they aim to support establishing new community gardens and the sharing of ideas & resources: <http://chicagocommunitygardens.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 programs: www.kilbournpark.org
- **Garfield Park Conservatory** holds workshops and lectures. They provide a wealth of information, ideas and resources for horticulture: <http://www.garfield-conservatory.org/>
- **Wicker Park Garden Club** oversees a highly successful Community Garden that provides many resources, workshops, lectures and events: <http://www.wpgarden.org/>
- **Openlands** supports Community Gardens in their Urban Greening program, and offers training courses such as *Building Urban Gardens* and *GardenKeepers*: <http://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: <http://www.chicagobotanic.org/>
- **University of Illinois Extension** website supplies a wealth of resources: web.extension.illinois.edu They have a plant clinic based at the Garfield Park Conservatory where they can troubleshoot many individual plant/gardening problems. Soil testing, 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 or may have funds available to support your project.
- **Local officials**, including your Alderman may have funds available to support such a community improvement project.