Building a Community Garden on City Land

Community gardens help increase access to healthy and local foods and build community. They also contribute to environmental education and provide opportunities to connect with nature. If you are interested in building a new community garden, here's what you need to know to get started.

About Community Gardens
A community garden is a piece of land that is gardened collectively by community members, in partnership with a non-profit society. Community gardens can be on City-owned land or on private land. This guide summarizes how to build a community garden on City owned land. If you want to build a community garden on private land, contact the City to share your ideas or enquire about potential support.

All community gardens on City owned land must be approved by Council. This document explains step-by-step how a community garden evolves from concept to reality. Email parks@victoria.ca or call 250.361.0600 at any stage for more information or to share ideas.

1. Read the Community Gardens Policy
The Community Gardens Policy will guide Council in assessing the proposed garden. Carefully read the policy to understand requirements for community gardens. The policy is available at: victoria.ca/communitygardens

In Victoria, there are three types of community gardens:
Commons gardens are communal areas maintained and managed by community volunteers. The harvest is available to the public.

Allotment gardens have individual garden plots that are rented, maintained and harvested by an individual that is a member of the garden.

Community orchards are groves of fruit or nut trees. A community organization is responsible for the care, maintenance and harvesting of the trees. The harvest goes to the community.

A community garden can be a mix of these different types of gardens. Gardening activities include, but are not limited to:
• Growing food plants, medicinal plants, flowers
• Growing indigenous, cultural and native plants
• Pollinator gardens and hobby beekeeping
• Permaculture projects
• Fruit and nut trees
• Demonstration farming
• Edible landscaping

Products regulated in the Controlled Drug and Substances Act cannot be grown in community gardens.

Photos left to right:
The Burnside Gorge Community Garden in Cecelia Ravine Park is an allotment garden.
A planting party at the Banfield Park Community Orchard.
2. Build a team

**Non-profit society:** You need to partner with a non-profit society to start a garden. Non-profit societies can include neighbourhood associations or other established community organizations. The non-profit society must be willing to enter into a licence agreement (typically a three-year agreement) with the City and have liability insurance. Contact the City if you need suggestions of non-profit societies who may be able to support your project.

**Volunteers:** Community gardens require a dedicated team of volunteers. Work with the non-profit society, neighbourhood associations and other local groups to share your ideas and build a team.

3. Find a site

Consult the Community Gardens Map at vicmap.victoria.ca/CommunityGardens/. This map shows both existing community gardens and an inventory of City-owned land with community gardening potential. If you already have a site in mind, the inventory will help you determine if the site is owned by the City and if it has community gardening potential. If you are looking for a site, the inventory can help you find a potential location.

Consider if the site offers the right conditions for the type of gardening activities you want to do. Think about sun exposure, slope, soil, size, drainage, site access and parking. Talk to the people using or living near the site, and observe how the site is used.

4. Submit an Expression of Interest

The Expression of Interest (EOI) form is available at victoria.ca/growinginthecity. The EOI presents an overview of your project idea to the City. The form asks for a brief description of the project, its proposed location, and to identify project partners. A detailed proposal is not needed at this stage.

By submitting an EOI, you are signaling to the City that you want to work on a detailed proposal to build a new community garden. City staff will review the EOI and contact you to go over next steps.

The annual intake date for submitting the EOI is June 1. Submit the EOI by June 1 if you are aiming to start gardening in the next calendar year. For example, if you want to build your garden in 2020, submit the EOI by June 1 2019. You can submit the EOI after June 1, but it is less likely you will be able to start gardening in the next calendar year.

5. Consult the community

Public consultation helps ensure the community is informed and supportive of the proposed project. After submitting the EOI and connecting with City staff to confirm you are ready to work on a community garden proposal, public consultation can begin.

Public consultation will vary depending on the project, and City staff can help you determine which form of consultation is appropriate. Public consultation could involve an open house, a neighbourhood survey, letters of support, or working with the City to create and display a descriptive sign on-site and collect written comments.

The information provided to the public as part of the consultation process should include a proposed garden location map and a description of gardening activities.

6. Prepare a Community Garden Proposal

The community garden proposal is a detailed description of the project that will be presented to Council. City staff will help you identify what you need to include and ensure that the proposal meets City regulations. Sample proposals are available for reference. Elements typically included in a community garden proposal are:

- The general vision for the garden, including garden type(s) and who will participate
- A description of the gardening group and the non-profit society responsible for garden activities, including garden management and governance structure
- An overview of the installation and ongoing maintenance tasks (e.g. pruning, watering, harvesting, weeding, handling garden waste) and who will accomplish these tasks
- A summary of the public consultation demonstrating community support
- A description or examples of proposed structures, such as container gardens, toolsheds, composters, or signs
- Additional community benefits, such as educational, recreational and artistic opportunities for schools, youth groups, seniors group and community associations
- A budget, including estimated costs, anticipated funding sources such as membership fees, in-kind contributions, donations, and what the City is being asked to provide
- Approximate project timeline
- A detailed to-scale site map showing:
  - The location and dimension of raised beds or gardened areas
  - The location and cultivar of food trees or shrubs

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6. Prepare a Community Garden Proposal, continued

- The location and footprint of proposed structures, for example toolsheds, compost bins, seating areas or pergola. Structures larger than 10 square metres will require a building permit.
- The location, species, diameter at 1.3 metres high and drip line of City trees within the proposed area, or that are less than 10 metres from the edge of the proposed garden. Private trees within 10 metres from the proposed garden should also be noted on the site map.
- Location, dimensions and materials of any fencing
- Pathway materials and width
- Main access points or gates
- Water faucet(s) and water meter(s). City staff can help you identify the location of existing water meters.
- Universal accessibility features, such as pathways, gates or raised beds.
- Signage

7. City staff presents your community garden proposal to Council

The community orchard in William Stevenson Park.

If Council approves the proposal, staff will draft a licence of occupation to be reviewed and signed by the non-profit society and the City. The licence will specify the terms of the licence, including the start and end date of the agreement (typically a three-year agreement). If Council does not approve the proposal, the community garden cannot go forward in the proposed form. If directed to do so by Council, City staff can assist you in revising the proposal.

8. Build your garden!

Once the licence is signed and its term has begun, start building your garden! If applicable, City staff will install a water connection and minimal fencing (typically split rail fence). You will need City approval to deliver soil, woodchips, garden containers or any other materials that would be brought on site using vehicles.

Finally, please stay in touch! Let the City know about community gardening events, send us photos, and contact us with any questions.

Frequently Asked Questions

What kind of support does the City provide to implement community gardens?

The City provides a water connection and minimal fencing (typically split rail fence). The City also waives water charges and stormwater utility charges, and provides leaf mulch for all community gardens. The City does not help design, build, operate and maintain community gardens. Project proponents are responsible for all costs related to designing, building, operating and maintaining the garden, with the exception of the support mentioned above.

Are City grants available?

Yes, the City offers grants that can be used to build and manage community gardens. This includes the Micro-Loan Grant, the Community Garden Volunteer Coordinator Grant, and the My Great Neighbourhood Grant. More information is available at victoria.ca/grants.

How is the garden managed and operated?

All community gardens must have a user agreement that establishes how the garden will be managed and operated. The user agreement can be developed and implemented in partnership with the non-profit society. The City is not involved in the preparation or review of the user agreement. If applicable, the user agreement must meet these requirements:

- Participation is determined from a waiting list on a first come, first served basis
- Membership in allotment gardens cannot be restricted by neighbourhoods
- Victoria residents are given priority for membership and opportunity to garden
- Management responsibilities are outlined
- User fees are specified
- Does not exceed three years, with an option to renew
- Does not permit pesticide use on site
Frequently Asked Questions

How is the garden managed and operated, continued

• Lists regulations for site use and requires members to sign a contract to indicate compliance with these regulations
• Specifies that membership or use of the site can be revoked for individuals that do not comply with the user agreement

What type of liability insurance is needed?
The non-profit society entering into the licence agreement is required to have a general public liability insurance against claims for bodily injury, death or property damage arising out of garden-related activities. The City must be named as an additional insured and a copy of the liability insurance must be provided to the City. Insurance terms are detailed in the licence agreement.

Design tips

Community gardens are public spaces often situated in parks and greenspaces already used for sports, dog walking, and other leisure activities. The areas surrounding community gardens are maintained by City staff and need to be accessible for general site maintenance. The City usually does not maintain inside the community garden area. With this in mind and if applicable:

• Design the garden so it positively impacts surrounding land uses and becomes a neighbourhood asset.
• It should be welcoming to the public and easy to maintain and keep orderly.
• Good visibility will enable the community to provide passive site surveillance. Plantings, structures and fences cannot create hide zones and sightlines must be maintained.
• Plan for year-round site access and production.
• Prioritize good sun exposure (a minimum of six hours of sunlight per day).
• Locate water access points to provide good coverage and easy access.
• Maintain at least 6 feet of clearance area around the garden for City staff to mow the surrounding area.
• Place trees at least 4 metres from each other.
• Include universal accessibility features such as wheelchair accessible raised beds and pathways. Wheelchair accessible pathways should be at least 1.5 metres wide.
• Do not plant invasive species. City staff is available to help you determine which invasive species should not be planted.

City Resources

• Community Gardens Map: vicmap.victoria.ca/CommunityGardens
• Community Garden Info: victoria.ca/communitygardens
• Growing food and gardening: victoria.ca/growinginthecity
• Parks: parks@victoria.ca or call 250.361.0600
• City Grants: victoria.ca/grants