

Starting a Community Garden in Your Neighbourhood

Community gardens help people access fresh, locally grown food and build connections with others. They promote environmental education, sustainable practices and time in nature. Here's what you need to know to get started.



1. Get Informed

A good first step is to explore the City's community garden resources.

Visit the **Community Garden feature map** to learn about existing community gardens, their locations and the non-profit organizations that run them.

The **Community Gardens Policy** outlines requirements and guidelines for developing, operating and maintaining community gardens within the City. It will help you understand the key considerations and expectations for creating a successful community garden.

The map and policy are 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 and 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.

2. Build a Team

To start a community garden you must partner with a non-profit society in good standing. The non-profit must be willing to enter into a licence agreement with the City (typically for a five-year term) and have liability insurance. Contact the City for information on organizations that may be interested in supporting your project.

Community gardens also depend on a team of dedicated volunteers. Work with your non-profit partner, neighbourhood associations and other local community groups to share your ideas and build a team who can contribute to the garden's long-term success.

About Community Gardens

This step-by-step guide outlines the process for developing a community garden on City-owned land. All community gardens on City-owned land must be approved by the Director of Parks and Recreation and comply with the City's **Community Gardens Policy** and related requirements.

Community gardens can also be developed on private land. Contact the City to share your ideas and to learn about the requirements and available supports for building a community garden on private land.

Email parks@victoria.ca or call 250.361.0600



Huntingdon Manor Community Garden

3. Find a Site

Check the City's land inventory for potential community garden sites at victoria.ca/communitygardenpotential.

This map identifies City-owned properties suitable for community gardening. It can serve as a starting point for finding possible community garden locations or help you find out if the property you have in mind is City-owned and appropriate for garden use.

When evaluating a site, consider if it offers the conditions needed for your proposed garden type and activities. Important factors include sunlight exposure, slope, soil quality, site size, drainage, accessibility and parking availability. It is also helpful to speak with people who live nearby or who regularly use the site to understand how it is currently used and if there are any potential opportunities or concerns.

City-owned land is limited and often supports multiple community needs. Applicants are encouraged to also explore opportunities for community gardens on private, institutional or other non-City-owned properties.

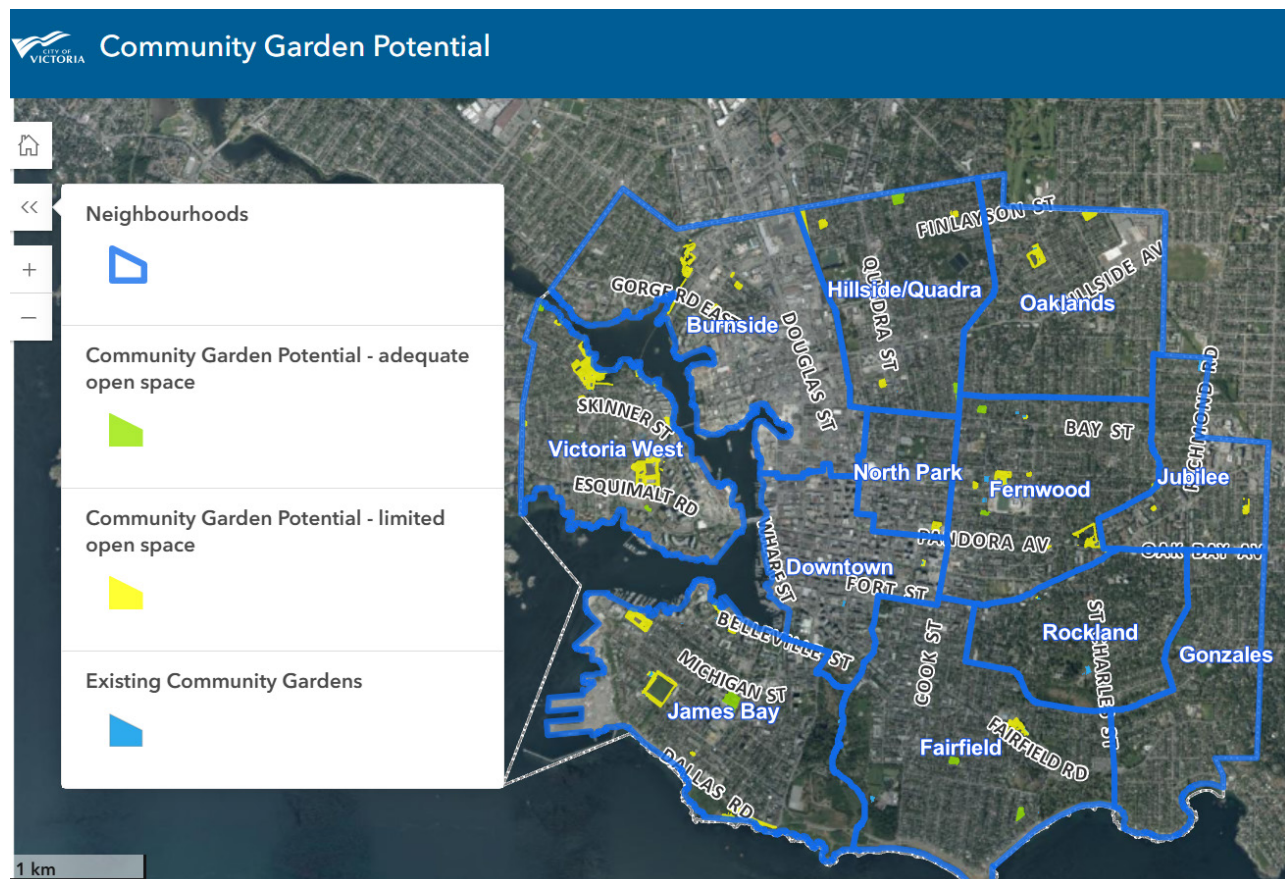
4. Submit an Expression of Interest

When a suitable site, non-profit partner organization and team members are identified, please fill out an Expression of Interest (EOI) form at victoria.ca/communitygardens.

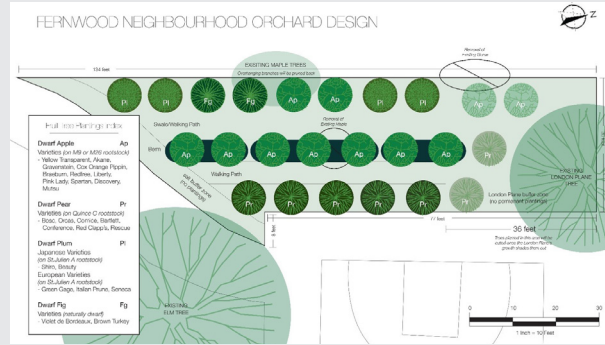
The EOI gives the City an overview of your community garden proposal. The form requires a brief description of the project, its proposed location and information about project partners. A detailed design or project plan is not needed at this stage.

City staff will review your proposal and assess the suitability of the location once you've submitted your EOI. Then they will provide feedback and tell you if the project can move to the design phase.

The annual intake deadline for EOI submissions is June 1. Please note that establishing a community garden is a multi-stage process. If an EOI is approved, it typically takes at least one year from submitting an EOI to opening a garden, depending on the project's scope, complexity and approval requirements.



The Community Gardens Map shows City-owned lands with community garden potential.



(Left) The community orchard in William Stevenson Park.

(Right) An example of a site plan for a community orchard at William Stevenson Park. Site maps do not have to be computer generated, they can be hand drawn.

5. Design your Garden

The design phase involves creating a detailed site plan and engaging with the community to support a formal Community Garden Proposal for the City to review.

Community gardens vary widely in their size, scope and intended use. The time required and level of effort involved in the design phase will depend on the complexity of the project and site-specific considerations.

If your Expression of Interest is approved, the City's food systems coordinator will meet with your project team to discuss what's needed for the design phase to help ensure it fits with the nature and scope of your proposed community garden.

Preliminary Community Input

Engaging the community early can help shape the garden's design, identify local priorities and build support for the project. City staff can help determine the appropriate level of engagement based on the proposed garden's scope and location.

Engagement activities may include an open house, design workshop, neighbourhood survey or other opportunities for community members to share their ideas for the space. This process helps gauge interest, identify concerns and gather feedback to inform the garden's design and long-term success.



5a. Prepare a Community Garden Proposal

The Community Garden Proposal is a detailed document that outlines the project for City staff review and approval. The proposal must be approved before the project can proceed to the build phase.

If approved, the proposal becomes part of the Licence of Occupation agreement and serves as a binding document for the project. Sample proposals are available from the City's food systems coordinator to support proposal development.

The Community Garden Proposal includes three main components:

- Project information
- Garden design
- Community consultation

Project Information

Elements that must be included in this section are:

- The general vision for the garden, including garden type(s).
- A description of the gardening group and the non-profit society responsible for activities, including garden management.
- Information on the governance structure like who will participate in the garden and how it will be managed. Good governance is essential to the long-term success of community garden projects. Community gardens on City land are expected to operate as welcoming, inclusive community-building projects.
- Additional community benefits, such as educational, recreational and artistic opportunities.

Left: Produce grown by the Fernwood Allotment Garden.
Photo by Mila Czernyrs

- A brief overview of the design and installation phases and expected project timeline.
- A complete overview of regular maintenance tasks (like pruning, watering, harvesting, weeding, handling garden waste), who will accomplish these tasks (like volunteers, non-profit staff) and any associated timelines.
- A project budget outlining estimated capital and operating costs, and funding sources such as membership fees, grants, donations, sponsorships, fundraising activities and in-kind contributions. The budget should also show how the community garden will be established and maintained over the long term.
- Any initial or ongoing support requested from the City, such as mowing pathways in a commons gardens. Refer to the Community Garden Policy for more information on the services the City typically provides.

Garden Design

A garden design submission should include a detailed site plan, a materials list and a plant list.

A) The site map should be to scale and show the following features, if part of the proposed design:

Structures

- The locations and dimensions of all features, including pathways, raised beds, garden beds and gates
- Identification of any universal accessibility features, such as pathways, gates or raised beds
- Locations, dimensions and materials of any fencing
- Pathways materials
- The location and footprint of proposed structures, such as toolsheds, compost bins, seating areas or pergolas (structures larger than 10 square metres require a building permit)
- Proposed and existing water faucets and meters
- Main access points and gates
- Location and size of signage
- Location and variety of food trees and shrubs, including their expected full-grown size
- Indication of planned use where appropriate (such as annual garden bed or pollinator meadow)
- Details of all trees located in or within 10 metres of the proposed community garden, including their location, species, trunk diameter (measured at 1.3 metres above ground), drip line and ownership (City or private).

B) MATERIAL LIST

- The materials list should reference the structural elements outlined above and include descriptions or examples of planned materials, dimensions, design and other key characteristics.

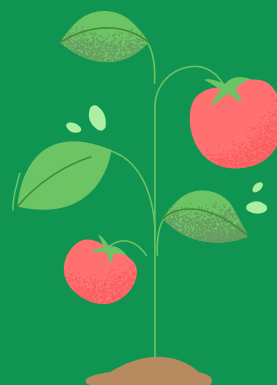
C) PLANT LIST

- A comprehensive inventory of all plants shown on the site map, including their common and Latin names. Invasive species must not be planted. Please ask City staff for guidance on prohibited plant species.

Design tips

Community gardens are public spaces often within parks and green spaces already used for activities such as sports, dog walking and other recreation. The areas surrounding community gardens are maintained by City staff and need to be accessible for general site maintenance. In most cases, the City does not maintain the inside of community garden areas. With this in mind, where applicable:

- Design the garden so it positively impacts surrounding land uses and becomes a valued neighbourhood asset
- Create a welcoming, well-organized space that is easy for the community to maintain
- Plan for year-round site access and production
- Prioritize good sun exposure, with a minimum of six-hours of direct sunlight per day
- Locate water access points to provide easy and effective coverage throughout the garden
- Maintain at least six feet of clearance around the garden perimeter for City staff to mow the surrounding area
- Space trees at least four metres apart
- Include universal accessibility features like wheelchair-accessible raised beds and pathways (at least 1.5 metres wide)
- Keep the garden visible by ensuring plants, structures and fencing do not block views or create hidden areas
- Do not plant invasive species (check with City staff)



Community Engagement: Consultation

Community consultation is an important part of the design phase of a community garden. It informs the public of the proposed project and gives them an opportunity to provide input and support.

Community consultation plan

A consultation plan helps ensure a diverse range of residents can share their ideas and contribute to the garden's development. The type of consultation will depend on the project's size, location and complexity. City staff will work with the project team to determine the appropriate consultation approach for each project.

Your plan should include:

A list of community groups engaged:

- Consider how to engage people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences.
- Multiple engagement strategies may be needed to reach different audiences.

A description of engagement strategies:

- Use a variety of approaches to reach people with different schedules, accessibility needs and preferences.
- In-person strategies include hosting an open house, attending community events or posting on-site signs that invite written feedback.
- Online strategies include surveys, social media outreach or collecting letters of support through digital platforms.

At a minimum, project teams are asked to notify neighbours within one block of the proposed site and post a sign at the site showing the proposed garden area and contact information.

The final community engagement process should include information about the proposed garden, including its parameters, site plan and planned activities.

Your engagement plan should also include a list of questions that will be asked across the chosen consultation methods. Required questions include:

- Are you a resident of this neighbourhood?
- Based on the plans shown, do you support the community garden proposal?
- Are you interested in participating in the community garden?

The community consultation plan must be approved by City staff before engagement activities begin. Depending on the project timeline, engagement may take place during or after the proposal and design are developed.

Once the plan is approved, the project team can carry out the engagement activities and prepare a summary of the feedback received.



5b. Summarize Community Consultation

Once community consultation is complete, the project team must gather the results and prepare a report summarizing the engagement results.

This document should include:

- The total number of people engaged, including in-person and online
- A summary of consultation methods used
- The engagement timeline
- A summary of quantitative findings like survey results, including the percentage of respondents in support of the proposal
- A summary of qualitative feedback, including key themes, areas of support and concerns or disagreements raised
- An explanation of how feedback was incorporated into the proposal, such as design changes, plant selections or rationale for decisions made

After the summary report is complete, combine it with the project information and garden design documents to create the Community Garden Proposal for submission and review.

The City's food systems coordinator can help applicants ensure all required information is included before the proposal is submitted.

5c. Submit your Community Garden Proposal for Review

When the final community garden proposal is submitted, the City's food systems coordinator will initiate a full staff review. The design and community consultation will be evaluated to ensure that the project is feasible and supported, and determine whether it can proceed to the build phase.

Staff may provide feedback and request changes to the design before it can proceed. The food systems coordinator can assist with any revisions needed.

Once a final community garden proposal is approved, the non-profit organization participating in the application will sign a licence of occupation with the City that will cover the agreement terms, liability, and roles and responsibilities. The City can provide a template if needed.

6. Build your Garden

The construction planning phase can begin after the licence agreement has been signed. Connect with the City's food systems coordinator to confirm what permits, approvals and next steps are needed before construction.

Requirements may vary depending on the approved design. Be sure to understand any costs and funding needs early, including any work that may need to be done by contractors. Grants may be available to support the construction of new community gardens.

All construction and building must be completed by qualified contractors to ensure public safety and compliance.

Where applicable, City staff will install a water connection and minimal fencing. You will need City approval to deliver materials to the site, including soil, wood chips, garden containers or any other supplies that require vehicle access.

Once the licence of occupation is signed, the non-profit organization is responsible for operating and maintaining the community garden in accordance with the approved proposal. This means that volunteers, staff or a combination of both will take on day-to-day garden management. This includes coordinating activities, maintaining the site, overseeing volunteer participation and addressing operational issues as they arise.

All operations must continue to follow the City's Community Gardens Policy, to help ensure the space remains safe, inclusive and welcoming.

Each community garden should have a user or volunteer agreement to keep things running smoothly. This is especially important for allotment-style gardens. The agreement should be developed in collaboration with the non-profit organization and supported by a steering committee or similar volunteer group.

While the City does not review or approve user agreements, the food systems coordinator can provide resources and guidance to support the development of effective garden governance tools.

After the licence of occupation is signed and your project team is in place, the community garden becomes part of a growing network of gardens that foster connection, sustainability and community wellbeing across Victoria.

Frequently Asked Questions

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

The City will install a water connection and minimal fencing (typically split-rail fencing). It will also waive water and storm water utility charges, and provide soil-building materials, such as leaf mulch and wood chips (when available), for all community gardens.

The City does not design, build, operate or maintain community gardens. Project proponents are responsible for all costs related to planning, building, operating and maintaining the garden, with the exception of the support listed above.

Are City grants available?

Yes, the City offers grants that can be used to build and manage community gardens. See available community garden grants at victoria.ca/GITC.

The City also supports established community gardens through the My Great Neighbourhood Grant.

How is the garden managed and operated?

All community gardens must have a user agreement that outlines how the garden will be managed and operated. This agreement can be developed with the non-profit society responsible for the garden. The City reserves the right to review the user agreement to ensure it aligns with the City's Community Gardens Policy.

Where applicable, user agreements must meet the following requirements:

- Manage participation through a first-come, first-served waiting list
- Do not restrict allotment garden membership by neighbourhood
- Prioritize Victoria residents for membership and gardening opportunities
- Clearly define management responsibilities
- Specify user fees
- Limit agreement terms to three years, with an option to renew
- Prohibit pesticide use on site

- List site-use regulations and require members to sign a contract confirming compliance
- Specify that membership or site access may 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. 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.

City Resources

Community Gardens Map:

victoria.ca/findcommunitygardens

Community Garden Potential Map:

victoria.ca/communitygardenpotential

Community Garden Info:

victoria.ca/communitygardens

Growing food and gardening:

victoria.ca/GITC

All Our Voices Engagement Framework

victoria.ca/allourvoices

