

Building a Community Garden in Your Neighbourhood

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.



1. Get Informed

The Community Gardens Policy will help Council assess 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.

Above: Produce grown by the Fernwood Allotment Garden. Photo by Mila Czemyers

2. Build a Team

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 five-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.

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.

About Community Gardens

This document explains step-by-step how a community garden evolves from concept to reality on City-owned land. All community gardens on City-owned land must be approved by Council.

Community gardens can also be on private land. If you want to build a community garden on private land, contact the City to share your ideas or enquire about potential support. Email parks@victoria.ca or call 250.361.0600 for more information or to share ideas.



Raised garden beds at the Yates Street Community Garden. Photo by: Public Health Association of BC, Can You Dig It

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/communitygardens. 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 a list of project partners. A detailed proposal is not needed at this stage.

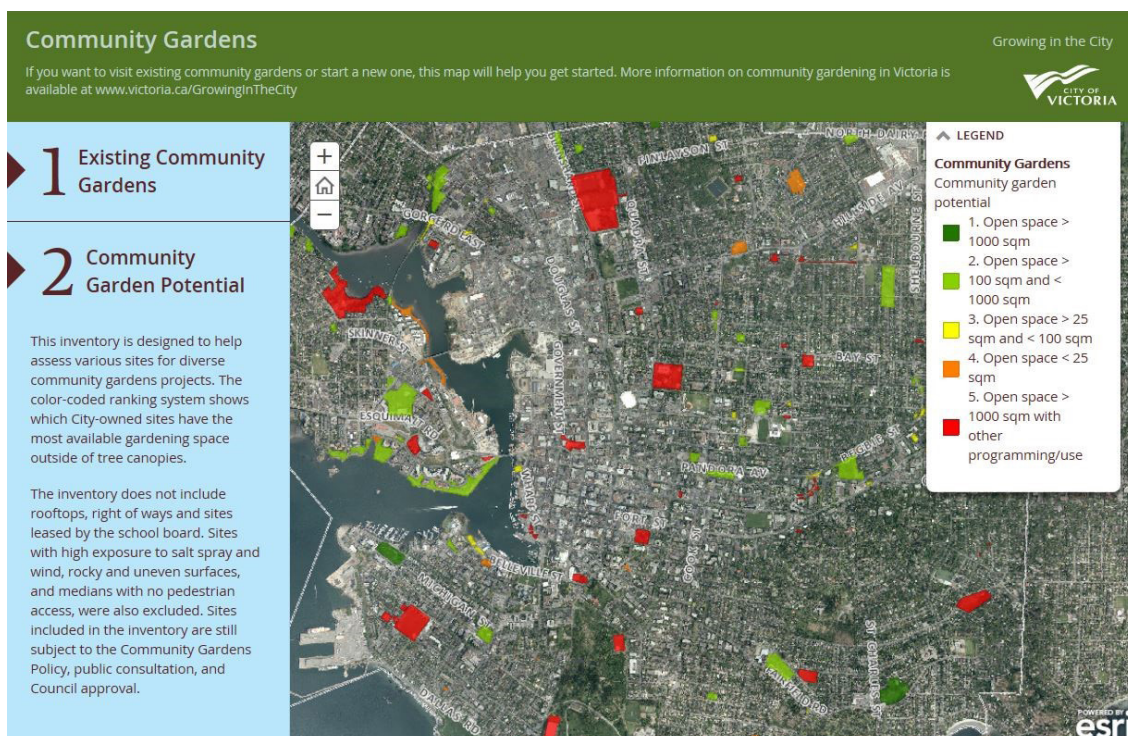
By submitting an EOI, you are signaling to the City that you want to work on a detailed proposal. City staff will review the EOI and contact you to go over next steps.

The annual intake date for submitting the EOI is June 1. Submit by this date if you are aiming to start gardening in the next calendar year. For example, if you want to build your garden in 2022, submit the EOI by June 1, 2021. You can submit after the deadline, but it is less likely you will be able to start gardening in the next calendar year.

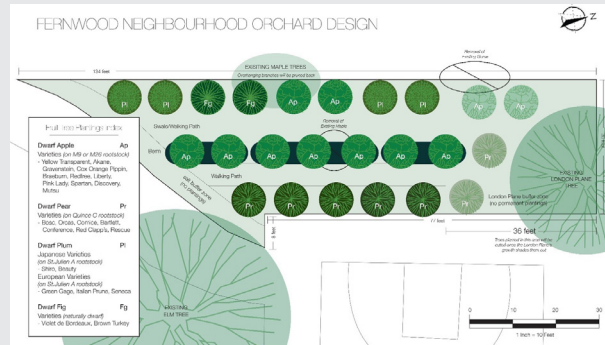
5. Gather Preliminary Community Input

City staff will review your EOI and provide feedback confirming your group is ready to start working on a community garden proposal. At this stage, your team can start to design the garden and think through how best to invite community input into the design phase.

This first phase of community engagement will vary depending on the project, and City staff can help you determine which form of initial consultation is appropriate. It could involve an open house, design workshop, neighbourhood survey or other method to ask, “What would you envision as a part of a neighbourhood community garden?” This is also a good opportunity to test how the community will respond to this potential development.



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.

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. Sample proposals are available for reference.

The community garden proposal is comprised of 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), activities and who will participate
- A description of the gardening group and the non-profit society responsible for activities, including garden management and governance structure
- Additional community benefits, such as educational, recreational, and artistic opportunities for schools, youth groups, seniors' groups, and community associations
- 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 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

Garden Design

A garden design includes a detailed site map and materials list. The detailed, to-scale site map needs to include (if these features are a part of the design):

A) SITE MAP

Structures

- The locations and dimensions of raised beds or garden areas
- Locations and dimension of universal accessibility features, such as pathways, gates or raised beds
- Locations, dimensions, and materials of any fencing
- Pathways materials and width
- The location and footprint of proposed structures, such as toolsheds, compost bins, seating areas or pergola (structures larger than 10 square metres require a building permit)
- Water faucet(s) and water meter(s) (City staff can help you identify the location of existing water meters)
- Main access points and gates
- Location and size of signage

Plant material

- Location and cultivar of food trees and shrubs
- 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)

B) MATERIAL LIST

- The materials list should review the elements listed above and include descriptions or examples of proposed structures, such as container gardens, toolsheds, composters or signs

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 six feet of clearance area around the garden for City staff to mow the surrounding area
- Place trees at least four metres from each other
- Include universal accessibility features such as wheelchair accessible raised beds and pathways (at least 1.5 metres wide)
- Do not plant invasive species (check with City staff)

For more information regarding plant material, please see the resources list on the last page of this document.



Community Engagement

Community engagement helps to ensure the public is informed and supportive of the proposed project.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

This section describes the steps required to ensure a diverse range of communities are being included in the design and engagement phase of garden development. The consultation strategies will vary depending on the project and City staff can help determine which form of engagement is appropriate.

Your plan should include:

List of stakeholders or community members engaged – How is diversity, social equity, inclusion, and accessibility considerations being intentionally integrated from the design phase?

Engagement strategies – The final public engagement could involve several strategies to engage a variety of people with various accessibility considerations. In-person options could include an open house, written letters of support, or working with the City to create and display a descriptive sign on-site and collect written comments. Online options could include a neighbourhood survey, marketing or social media campaign, online letters of support or online message boards.

What is being publicly reviewed?

The information provided to the public as a part of the final community engagement process should include the specific parameters of the garden, a detailed site plan and the description of the garden activities.

Please include a list of questions that will be posed through the engagement strategies. At a minimum, questions must include:

- Are you a resident of this neighbourhood?
- Based on the proposal showcased, do you approve of the community garden proposal? (have clear options for yes and no)
- Are you interested in participating in the community garden?

City staff will review and help refine proposals upon request. Once the applicant has completed all three sections, the proposal will be reviewed by the Parks review team. City staff may ask for clarifications, make suggestions, or request that proposals be adjusted to meet the regulations or requirements related to Parks maintenance and operations.

Once approved, the applicant will be given permission to move into implementing the community engagement plan and sharing the final proposal.

7. “What We Heard” Engagement Summary

After the applicant conducts the final community engagement, the community garden team is required to compile the data and summarize it into a “what we heard” document. This should include:

- The total number of people engaged (this can include in-person and online engagement)
- The final engagement strategies used
- The engagement timeline
- The results including quantitative data, i.e. percentage of respondents who support the community garden (please include the hard data as an attachment)
- The results summarizing high level themes of qualitative data, i.e. areas of support and areas of disagreement with the project
- What feedback from the engagement was integrated into the proposal

The final proposal, including the project information, design, and engagement will be presented to Council by City staff for review.

8. City Staff Present the Community Garden Proposal to Council

City staff will review and help refine your proposal so it is ready for staff to present to Council.

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 start and end date and other terms of the 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.

9. 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, wood chips, 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 Community Garden Start-Up Grant, the Community Garden Volunteer Coordinator Grant, the My Great Neighbourhood Grant and the Micro-Loan 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

- 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. 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:

vicmap.victoria.ca/CommunityGardens

Community Garden Info:

victoria.ca/communitygardens

Growing food and gardening:

victoria.ca/growinginthecity

City Grants:

victoria.ca/grants

Pollinator and Allergy-Aware Gardening

Small Species Selection Guide

Medium Species Selection Guide

Large Species Selection Guide

Lower Allergen Landscape Planting Resource List

