

COVID-19 Guidance for Community Gardens

Community gardens can play an important role in our food system by providing spaces for residents to grow their own food. They offer other benefits for participants as well, such as promoting a sense of community belonging, providing an opportunity to be physically active, and contributing to mental well-being.

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, precautions must be taken in public settings, including community gardens, to limit the spread of COVID-19. On April 25, 2020, the Government of Ontario lifted restrictions that previously required community gardens to be closed. While they are still not permitted for use as recreational spaces or for social gatherings, community gardens are allowed to be operational for growing food if they can follow the guidance provided by their local Health Unit.

This memo provides guidance and recommendations from the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, under the direction of Dr. Jim Chirico. Visit www.myhealthunit.ca for up to date information about COVID-19. It is the responsibility of each garden coordinator/manager to ensure that garden members/clients, staff, and volunteers are aware of these recommendations.

If a garden is not able to follow this guidance, it cannot open until emergency measures in Ontario have been lifted, or the garden can set up these safety protocols.

Entrance Restrictions

- Only garden members/clients, staff, and volunteers are permitted to enter the garden. Visitors are not permitted to enter.
- Ask garden members/clients, staff, and volunteers to complete the online [self-assessment](https://www.19.ontario.ca) (covid-19.ontario.ca) prior to entering the garden. If that is not possible, ask if any of the bullet points below apply to them. They must not be permitted to enter the garden if:
 - They have symptoms of COVID-19. Symptoms vary, but may include fever, new cough, difficulty breathing, chills, fatigue, headache, sore throat, runny nose, digestive issues, difficulty swallowing, hoarse voice, or loss of sense of taste or smell. Anyone who is feeling unwell with these symptoms should stay home, and call the Health Unit to be assessed.
 - They are a close contact (for example, someone in their household or workplace) of someone who has or may have COVID-19, someone who is sick, and/or someone who recently travelled outside of Canada (including any contact they had with the person up to 48 hours before the person became sick).

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- Access to community gardens is allowed only to plant, maintain and harvest food. Keep trips to the garden at a minimum. Other social events, programming, training, workshops, group build projects, etc., are not permitted.
- Consider developing a schedule for garden members/clients, staff, and volunteers to limit the number of people in the garden at one time.
- Children should only be brought to the garden on an as-needed basis and should be instructed to practice physical distancing and hand hygiene recommendations.

Physical Distancing

- At least 2 metres (6 feet) must be maintained between people, except for members of the same household.
- Limit the number of people in the garden at one time to ensure physical distancing can be maintained. This number will vary from garden to garden, depending on the size.

Hand Hygiene

- Ask those entering the garden to wash their hands well with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use 70% alcohol-based hand sanitizer, when entering and leaving the garden. Ask them to do so again before and after handling shared garden tools or equipment. If hands are visibly dirty, but soap and water is not available, hands should be wiped clean before applying hand sanitizer.
- Where possible, provide handwashing stations in the gardens with handwashing signage and hand sanitizer. If hands are visibly soiled, handwashing with soap and water is preferred. If a handwashing station is not available, hands should be wiped clean before applying alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- If there is a bathroom or port-a-john on site, it needs to be equipped with water under pressure, liquid hand soap, paper towels and be cleaned at least daily and more frequently if necessary.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

- Ensure that shared garden tools and equipment are cleaned and disinfected upon opening and closing the garden. Participants can be encouraged to bring their own items if they have them available to avoid using the shared items.

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- Instruct individuals who use gardening gloves not to share them with others, and to wash them after each use. Gloves are not a substitute for handwashing, and touching one's face should still be avoided, even if wearing gloves.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces. These may include door, gate and shed handles, benches, etc. (refer to Resources Section).
- Develop a system that works for the garden to minimize touching of shared surfaces. Measures may include keeping garden gates and shed doors open during operating hours, or offering to water garden beds for participants to decrease use of watering cans and hoses.
- Wash all produce harvested from the garden thoroughly with water before consuming.

Signage

- Post clear, highly visible signage at all garden entrances reminding members/clients, staff and volunteers:
 - About the signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
 - Where to seek assistance if they have COVID-19 symptoms (Ontario's self-assessment tool, and consult with health care provider or the Health Unit [1-800-563-2808]).
 - Only members/clients, staff and volunteers are permitted to enter the garden.
- Post clear, highly visible signage throughout the garden, especially where shared equipment, tools, etc. are located, reminding members, staff and volunteers of the requirements that must be followed when using the garden to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

Communication

- Develop policies/procedures specific to the garden as needed based on these recommendations and communicate relevant information to members/clients, staff and volunteers.
- Ensure the list of current members/clients, staff and volunteers who will be utilizing the garden in 2020 is updated, including contact information, and use a sign-in and sign-out system to track who is in the garden each day. This may assist with communication and close-contact tracing if required.
- Share that it may be necessary to revoke access to the garden if members/clients, staff, and volunteers do not adhere to the recommendations provided.

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Additional Resources

- Sustain Ontario: [COVID-19 Proposed Regulations for Community Gardens](#)
- Government of Ontario [news release about community gardens](#)
- [Online self-assessment](#)
- [How to self-isolate](#)
- [Physical distancing](#)
- [How to wash your hands](#)
- [Cleaning and disinfection for public settings](#)
- [Ontario's 2019 novel coronavirus webpage](#)

Current as of May 1, 2020.