



2017 Garden Plot Rules and Guidelines

The Fairfax County Garden Plot Program is a community garden plot rental program. Residents participating in the program enjoy nature, plant flowers, grow fruits and vegetables for food, and get exercise from the practice of gardening. The Garden Plot Rules and Guidelines provide the gardeners, their families, and the entire gardening community with basic principles for a successful garden plot program.

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I. Purpose of the Program

The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) provides Fairfax County residents the opportunity to participate in a community gardening experience through the Community Garden Plot program. Almost 700 garden plots in nine County parks are rented on an annual basis. Most plots measure 30 feet by 20 feet. Gardening is permitted when the host park is open, generally from dawn to dusk.

The rules and guidelines for the Garden Plot Program ensure that all participating gardeners have the opportunity for a positive gardening experience, that garden plot sites are an asset to the community, and that all plots are used in a productive manner.

Many residents want to garden, and we have waiting lists of willing gardeners. By following the rules and guidelines, you show that you want to garden successfully in a garden plot rental program. All gardeners agree to follow the rules and guidelines of the Garden Plot Program.

II. Gardener Eligibility

The following criteria establish eligibility for having a garden plot:

1. Must be residents of Fairfax County. If you move from the county, you must return your plot at the end of the growing season.
2. Must sign and return rental contracts with payment by the date on the contract.
3. May have only one garden plot per household.
4. Must grow crops in the rental garden plots for personal consumption. Crops may not be grown for commercial purposes.
5. Must agree to comply with the Rules and Guidelines for the duration of the rental agreement.

III. Rules

Below are the rules that govern the program. These rules ensure that the plots are gardened, that the area is safe, and that policies and laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Fairfax County, and the Fairfax County Park Authority are followed (*Source: Fairfax County Park Authority Regulations: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parkpolicy/app7regs.pdf>*).

When gardeners sign the Garden Plot rental contract each year, they acknowledge that they have read and understand the following rules:

1. All gardening activities must be contained within the plot boundaries as marked by the Garden Plot Coordinator.
2. Spring weeds must be kept under control prior to planting. Prepare your entire plot for gardening and begin planting on or before May 1. Finish planting by May 31. Your garden must be “active,” which means having at least two-thirds of the land in cultivation, weeds always kept under control, spent plants removed, and crops harvested throughout the season. Complete fall clean-up by November 15. Clean-up activities include removal of any remaining dead plants and weeds, securing plant supports, and mending fences. **Active winter gardening is encouraged.** Living, productive winter crops such as greens and root vegetables may remain in place. Plant a cover crop such as rye grass, if desired.
3. Fences

Fences are not required. If a gardener chooses to erect a new fence, the gardener supplies the materials and labor. Recommended fencing is galvanized steel wire fencing on 4” x 4” wooden posts. The following criteria apply to new and existing fences:

- a) Fences and other structures are to be kept in good condition: gates on hinges; posts and fence materials upright; no sharp/rusty wire or other protrusions that could cause injury.
- b) Posts must be placed deep enough into the soil to securely anchor the post in a vertical (plumb) position. **NO poured concrete may be used.**
- c) Fence posts may be up to 8 feet tall (8 feet above ground) and up to 4 inches wide. Wooden 4” x 4” posts are preferred. Metal fence posts are also permitted. If metal posts are used, it is recommended that they have a flange at the base.
- d) Fences must have mesh fence materials (preferably galvanized steel wire mesh) and may be no taller than 6 feet, but can have a single strand of wire or string above the fence. The total height of the fence and strand of string or wire is not to exceed 8 feet.
- e) Fences may be used as a trellis between plots only if BOTH garden plot renters agree. Fences on the outside edge may be used as a trellis for plants if the plants do not encroach or obstruct the path. We recommend separate trellises within the plot border.
- f) Please contact the Garden Plot Coordinator with any fencing questions.

4. Structures

Simple, non-permanent structures, such as trellises, raised beds and deck box containers are allowed. The gardener supplies the materials and labor for non-permanent structures. The following criteria apply to new and existing structures:

- a) Raised beds are permitted. Wood is recommended for the bed edging, but not required.
- a) Simple trellis structures are permitted if they do not shade other gardens.
- b) DO NOT use poured concrete for anchoring any structure.**
- c) Neither solid walls nor solid roofs are permitted on trellises.

- d) Storage bins for tools are permitted with a maximum size 30 inches by 30 inches by 60 inches. We recommend using plastic deck storage boxes.
 - e) Your box or bin must not shade other gardens.
 - f) Row covers are permitted. Anchor them securely to prevent blowing away, and store them when not in use.
 - g) Cold frames are permitted if they are no taller than 30 inches and the covers are made of sturdy plastic - not glass.
 - h) Greenhouse-type structures are not permitted.
5. Open, standing water is not permitted in your plot at any time or in any form because it fosters the development of mosquitoes.
- a) The use of plastic as a ground cover, or any material on which water puddles, is not permitted. Permeable weed cloth is acceptable as long as it does not block infiltration.
 - b) Empty all containers and store them upside down. Buckets, trash cans, wheelbarrows, or other open containers of water are prohibited.
 - c) All water-filled containers, such as rain barrels, must be tightly covered.
6. Gardeners may not dig channels or create berms outside of their plots.
7. Mulches such as stone, carpet and artificial turf are prohibited. All tarp must be covered with natural material such as wood mulch or leaf mulch. If grass and/or other plants (including weeds) are used to secure soil between beds, the plants must be kept cut to a height of 5 inches or less.
8. All woody plants, such as trees, shrubs, roses, woody vines, etc., must be kept shorter than 6 feet. All woody plants are measured from the top of the soil line to the highest branch of the plant. If a gardener's plant roots extend and/or the plant creates shade in a neighboring plot, the gardener may be asked by the Garden Plot Coordinator to remove or relocate the plant.
9. Use chemical controls as a last resort. If you must use a pesticide or herbicide, you **MUST** follow these rules:
- a) **READ THE LABEL.** It is against federal law to use a pesticide or herbicide for a purpose that is not listed on the label.
 - b) **NO** restricted pesticide (pesticides requiring a permit for use) is permitted under any circumstances, even if the person is a licensed pesticide applicator.
 - c) Research the problem pest and the guidelines for managing it in the Virginia Pest Management Guide, <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/456/456-018/456-018.html>.
 - d) Mix and apply the chemical agent according to the label. Increasing the dose or frequency may harm your crop or other people.
 - e) For everyone's safety, **NO** commercial, chemical or organic pesticides and **NO** fertilizers may be stored anywhere in the garden plot at any time, including locked storage bins.
 - f) Flamers or torches for weed control are **NOT** permitted due to the risk of fire and personal safety (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parkpolicy/app7regs.pdf>, §1.06).
10. According to state and local game regulations, it is illegal to bait or trap or transport any animals across property lines. (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/parkpolicy/app7regs.pdf>, §1.10).
11. Take all trash and plant debris that you do not compost within your plot to your home, or to a citizen trash collection location, such as the center on West Ox Road. **DO NOT place plants, weeds, or trash anywhere outside of your plot, or in surrounding park or wooded areas.** It is illegal to dump anywhere on Commonwealth of Virginia and Fairfax County property. (Source: Code of Virginia: § 33.2-802, [<http://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title33.2/chapter8/section33.2-802/>])

12. Gardeners may not store excess lumber, fencing mesh or other materials not currently used for gardening at their plots for aesthetic and safety reasons.
13. Weeds must be kept under control throughout the year. Keep weeds off fences and weed 8 inches on the outside of the non-shared fence(s) (i.e., remove weeds from the fence to where the ground crew mows). Gardeners may place bark mulch or leaf mulch on the outside of their fences to a height not to exceed 8 inches above ground against the fence (measured up the side of the fence) and to a distance not to exceed 8 inches away from the fence (measured from the fence along the ground to the edge of the mulch).
14. Do not block off-road garden paths and aisle ways with structures, equipment, debris, or vehicles.
15. Gardeners who are not in compliance with these rules will:
 - a) Receive a notice by email or phone from the Garden Plot Coordinator;
 - b) Have 14 calendar days to correct the problem upon receipt of the notice; and,
 - c) If the problem(s) is/are not corrected or addressed within the allotted time frame, the garden plot may be reclaimed and reassigned.

Receiving more than one notice of non-compliance in a single calendar year may result in the plot being reclaimed. Receiving the same notice in consecutive years (such as allowing your plot to become weedy while you are on vacation each year) may also result in a reclaim.

IV. Guidelines

These guidelines are designed to make gardening enjoyable and successful for you and your garden plot neighbors. For more gardening information, visit the Green Spring Gardens library, the Green Spring Gardens website, <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/greenspring/plots.htm>, and the Virginia Cooperative Extension website, <http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/category/fruits-vegetables.html>.

1. Making Good Plant Choices

Gardeners may grow a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers. Choosing from among the wide range of plants for the garden is challenging and fun! The guidelines below will help you make good plant choices. Talk to your gardening neighbors to share ideas for success.

- a) Perennials such as asparagus, rhubarb, and many desirable flowers are permitted. Divide them as needed to manage their size. Take them with you when you leave the garden plot program.
- b) Herbaceous vines are permitted. Seek your neighbor's permission to grow them on a shared fence.
- c) No plants on the Virginia Invasive Plant List, <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invspdflist> may be grown. Other invasive plants may be prohibited at the discretion of the Garden Plot Coordinator. Many of these are weeds in areas surrounding the garden plots. Please control them as much as you can.
- d) Some desirable plants can be weedy, such as raspberries, blackberries, mints, morning glories, and fennel. Please keep these plants 1 foot or more away from plot boundaries. Grow plants like mint in pots to contain them. Remove and throw away seed heads before the seeds ripen. Take the plants with you when you leave the garden plot program.
- e) Gardeners may plant a fall crop or cover crop after the summer season. Fall and winter crops are encouraged.

4. Mulch and Fertilizers

Using mulch in your garden plot has many benefits. As organic mulches break down, they add valuable nutrients to your soil. You will need less fertilizer. They also help conserve water.

- a) Organic mulches, such as compost, leaves, and straw, are highly recommended to conserve water and add nutrients to the soil. Shredded bark mulch is an appropriate deterrent for weeds in pathways within your plot and the area outside your plot, along the fence.
- b) Non-biodegradable mulches, such as stone, carpet and artificial turf, are prohibited. Porous weed blocker covers are permitted, but need to be secured to the ground to prevent them from blowing away. Cover them with a thin layer of soil, mulch, or other organic material.
- c) Composting plant materials within the plot is an excellent way to reduce trash and conserve nutrients. Do not compost food scraps (such as meat, oils, or fat), as this attracts animals.
- d) Avoid fresh manure which may contain weed seeds, smells bad, and may have sanitary issues that could affect neighboring plots. Liquid 'compost tea' fertilizer must be used immediately and may not be stored in the plot. Composted manure is permitted.
- e) Mulch delivery to Fairfax County Parks is determined by the Fairfax County Department of Solid Waste Management. Garden Plot renters may obtain mulch at the following parks: Baron Cameron, Lewinsville, Pine Ridge/Bo White, and Grist Mill. Gardeners can also pick up mulch from E.C. Lawrence, Bull Run Regional Park, the I-95 Citizens' Recycling and Disposal Facility, and the I-66 Citizens' Recycling and Disposal Facility. For Fairfax County mulch delivery information, call 703-324-5995 or refer to the Fairfax County web site: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpwes/trash/dispmulch.htm>. The mulch at garden plot host parks is available for use by all Fairfax County citizens, not just garden plot renters.

5. *Watering*

Most of the community garden plot sites have water faucets where gardeners may attach their own hoses. Many gardeners must share the same faucet. We recommend using water conservation methods such as mulching and selecting plants that use less water. Earth-friendly and low-water gardening methods are encouraged.

- a) All hoses must be stored in areas that do not present a safety problem to other gardeners or to the mowing crews that maintain the common areas. Mowing crews are not responsible for damage to hoses.
- b) All gardeners should have a Y-splitter to attach to the main faucet while they are watering their plot. This will enable another gardener to water simultaneously.
- c) Hoses may not be hung on other gardeners' fences without their permission.
- d) All gardeners should be considerate when using the water. If someone is waiting to water, please limit your time to 15 minutes.
- e) Fix leaky hoses and leaky connections so water is not wasted or causing a problem with soggy spots in other plots or common areas. Use washers to prevent leaks at hose connections and at the pump. Please report water faucet problems to the Garden Plot Coordinator.
- f) Do not leave your hose unattended while watering. Do not leave the park while watering. After watering, turn off the water at the hydrant and remove the hose from the hydrant to prevent leaking.
- g) Keep in mind that standing water or excessively wet spots are breeding grounds for mosquitoes, which are a health hazard.

6. *Managing Pests*

There are many potential pests in the garden, such as weeds, insects, fungi, small mammals, etc. Most can be controlled using good gardening practices. We ask all gardeners to try these actions first.

Remember the garden plot community is like a crowded neighborhood. Your actions can affect everyone. Please use any commercial pesticide very sparingly and only as a last resort. See the Rules for specific guidance on pesticide use.

- a) Choose plant varieties that are appropriate for our area and are resistant to pests.
- b) Keep plants healthy by using compost for fertilizer and mulches to retain water. Over-watering can cause diseases to increase.
- c) Get a soil test every three years.
- d) Remove insects by hand, such as caterpillars and beetles.
- e) Clean up dead and diseased plants immediately.
- f) Get ideas from your fellow gardeners, bulletin boards, books and magazines, and the Internet to help you resolve your pest problems safely.

Small mammals, such as mice, voles, rabbits, squirrels and groundhogs can be a problem. Barrier methods, such as fencing below the soil line and netting, may help protect your crops.

V. Administration

1. Program Management

The Fairfax County Garden Plot Program is managed by the Fairfax County Park Authority through the Community Horticulture Office at Green Spring Gardens. Patricia Dietly, the Garden Plot Coordinator, manages the day-to-day operations and can be reached at 703-642-0128. You may also e-mail the Garden Plot Coordinator at patricia.dietly@fairfaxcounty.gov.

2. Rental Procedures

- a) The annual garden plot contract period begins on February 15 of the current year and ends February 14 of the following year.
- b) Gardeners in good standing will be automatically mailed renewal contracts by US mail to their street address. **This procedure constitutes an annual check for continued Fairfax County residency, which is a requirement for participation in the program.**
- c) Renewal contracts are mailed early in January and must be signed and returned with payment by the date on the contract (February 15). Unpaid plots for the upcoming year may be assigned to new gardeners after this date.
- d) As a garden plot renter, the gardener agrees to abide by the rules and guidelines of the program. He or she also accepts responsibility for family members and others who help with the plot.
- e) A gardener whose plot is in compliance with these Garden Plot Rules and Guidelines may request a trade to a different plot during the off-season. Contact the Garden Plot Coordinator in December to request a change for the upcoming year.

3. Garden Plot Waitlist and Offers to New Gardeners

Gardening is popular, and we maintain a waitlist of potential new garden plot renters. Aspiring gardeners may enter the list by completing the form on the website

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/greenspring/plots.htm>

or by calling 703-642-0128.

- a) Plots are offered throughout the year as they become available. Offers are sent by email when an email address is given.
- b) When a potential gardener is offered a particular plot, he or she may accept or decline the offer. If the offer is declined or if no response is given within the allotted time for reply, the person is retired from the wait list. The time allotted to reply to an offer is usually about 5 calendar days, and usually includes a weekend.
- c) Persons who are retired from the wait list may re-apply and will be placed at the end of the list.
- d) Names remain on the list from year to year, until a plot is offered.

4. *Existing Plot Condition – New Tenant*

- a) All plots are rented in their existing condition.
- b) A new tenant is responsible for bringing a plot into compliance by clearing and active planting of crops within two weeks of accepting the offer for the plot.
- c) Plots offered in June through September 10 must be cleared and 2/3 planted with late season and/or winter crops within 2 weeks of accepting an offer.
- d) Full annual rent must be paid for the calendar year in which a plot is accepted. Plot rental fees are not pro-rated.

5. *Inspections*

- a) The Garden Plot Coordinator will inspect and send email or telephone notices to gardeners whose plots are not in compliance with the rules, who interfere with neighbors; or, whose plots are not used appropriately.
- b) Gardeners who fail to address a rules violation within 14 calendar days, or within an alternative timeframe specified by the Garden Plot Coordinator, risk having their garden plot reclaimed. No refunds are given for reclaimed plots.

6. *Plot Return Policy*

- a) Gardeners may return their plots at any time by contacting the Garden Plot Coordinator at 703-642-0128.
- b) Garden plot renters may not give away or sublet their rented plot to other renters. All garden plot trades or plot rental terminations must be managed by the Garden Plot Coordinator.
- c) Fees are not returned or prorated if a garden plot is returned early or if it is reclaimed.

7. *Safety*

- a) Renters garden at their own risk.
- b) Since all plot locations are in public parks, the public cannot be banned from these areas. FCPA assumes no responsibility for any loss or damage to personal property, plants or produce at the Garden Plots.

- c) Should you observe illegal activities, such as theft, alcohol use, malicious damage, etc., please contact the Fairfax County Police Department at 703-691-2131. You may file a report at the Fairfax County Police Department website: <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/reportcrime/>

Please be a responsible member of the Garden Plot community while enjoying the benefits of gardening in the Garden Plot Program. If you have any questions, please contact the Garden Plot Coordinator, Patricia Dietly, at Patricia.Dietly@fairfaxcounty.gov or 703-642-0128.



If accommodations or alternative formats are needed, please call 703-324-8563 at least 10 working days before event. TTY 703-803-3354

A Fairfax County, VA Publication 2017