

COMMUNITY GARDENING IN FAIRFAX COUNTY



What is a community garden?

A community garden can be either a piece of land or a planting area on a rooftop, gardened collectively by a group of people. Community gardens use either individual or shared plots on private or public land for growing herbs, fruits, flowers, vegetables or ornamental plants. Anyone can run a community garden: schools, places of worship, neighborhood associations, non-profit organizations, private landowners, clubs, community agencies and municipalities.

What are the benefits?

Community garden programs offer many benefits especially for citizens in both urban and suburban areas. These benefits include:

Beautification. Community gardening turns urban eyesores into vibrant green space, which can improve the quality of life for everyone in the neighborhood – not just the people that actually tend the garden.

Fresh Produce. Community gardens can provide fresh, nutritious produce for many families that couldn't otherwise afford it, improving their diet and overall health. Some gardeners donate what they have grown to local food pantries, shelters and hospitals.

A Cleaner Environment. Plants in community gardens add oxygen to the air and help reduce air pollution. They also absorb rainwater, reducing the amount of runoff that runs through neighboring land and streets. This decreases the amount of pollutants that enter rivers and lakes in the community.

Stronger Families and Communities. Tending of community gardens gives residents a chance to connect with their neighbors and feel more personally invested in the places they live, building a sense of ownership and belonging.

Educational Opportunities. Working in a community garden is educational for kids and adults for basic gardening skills and nutrition and provides an opportunity to learn about other cultural food differences within their community.



How do I begin?

When establishing a community garden, you may contact Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Office (NVSWCD) at 703-324-1460. This agency can also assist with preparing a district-approved Soil and Water Quality Conservation Plan for the garden.

Where can I locate a community garden?

Site planning is critical to developing a successful community garden.

Good Locations

- Relatively flat lands exposed to plenty of sunlight
- Water accessible
- Deep high-quality soil without large debris
- Close to residents who want to take part in the garden

Bad Locations

- Steep sloping land
- Chesapeake Bay Resource Protection Areas (RPAs)
- Wetlands
- Outside Fairfax County Zoning setback limits

Tips for how a community garden can be a good neighbor

Hours of operation: Standard gardening hours are limited to the hours between 7 a.m. and dusk.

Gardening equipment: Traditional gardening equipment should be used to maintain your plot, such as: trowels, hand fork, claw or cultivator, hoe, hand pruner, watering can, shovel or spade, wheelbarrow and gloves. For time limitations for the use of gasoline powered or mechanized equipment please refer to the Fairfax County noise ordinance. Visit www.fairfaxcounty.gov and search "noise ordinance".

Signage: Please check with Zoning Administration for the guidelines in your zoning district.

Establishing, managing and maintaining your community garden

- You may need to strip compacted soils. You can use a tiller but should only do so in the spring and fall.
- Apply a layer of organic material (e.g. mulch or compost) after tilling to help prepare soil.
- Use mulch and compost to assist with weed control, soil enrichment, soil moisture and temperature retention.
- Use boxed planting beds and mulched borders to assist with erosion control and maintain soil nutrient quality.
- Prevent erosion along paths between planting beds by using wood chips or heavy geotextile fabric as ground cover.
- Apply commercial fertilizer based on soil test recommendations.
- Apply pesticides according to the label instructions – be sure to use the appropriate product for the specific pest.
- Plant warm/cool season cover crop at the end of a growing season to suppress weeds, add nutrients to soil, reduce erosion and protect water quality.

What permits do I need?

Your garden may require a zoning permit which may also include a Soil and Water Quality Conservation Plan, depending on location and size. Larger gardens, such as those >10,000 square feet, may be subject to additional erosion and sediment controls or other county ordinances. You may contact the **Department of Zoning Administration at 703-324-1314** for further assistance.

Are storage structures allowed?

- Storage structures are allowed in the community garden, total square footage of all structures can not exceed 250 square feet.
- Building permits are not required for these structures (e.g. sheds or greenhouses) under 256 square feet.
- Retaining walls may require a building permit. You may contact the **Permit Application Center at 703-222-0801** with questions.

Contacts

Zoning Setbacks and Permits: Zoning Administration | Department of Planning and Development | 703-324-1314
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/about-us/zoning-administration-division

Soil and Water Quality Conservation Plans: Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District | 703-324-1460
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/Soil-Water-Conservation

Nonprofit Assistance: Nonprofits/Places of Worship Coordinator | Department of Land Development Services | 703-324-1780
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/plan2build/assistance-places-worship-and-nonprofit-community-groups

Fairfax Food Council | 703-246-8404
www.fairfaxcounty.gov/food-council



A Fairfax County, Va., publication | July 2019

This document is available in an alternative format upon request.

For reasonable accommodations, please call Land Development Services at 703-222-0801, TTY 711.