



NYC Parks
GreenThumb

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Dear Gardeners,

The [2021 Edition of the GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook](#)¹ is intended to be a resource for community gardeners and the general public by answering frequently asked questions regarding a variety of topics, including event planning, construction work, accepting donations, selling garden produce, tree pruning, garden bylaws, and much more. The handbook aggregates many, but not all, GreenThumb, NYC Parks, New York City, and New York State best practices, policies, and laws that govern community gardens in the GreenThumb network, and helps gardeners in stewarding active and safe GreenThumb community gardens that bring neighbors together. Gardeners have helped to inform policies, guidelines, and protocols included in this Handbook, and GreenThumb is grateful for the immense time and grassroots effort community gardeners put into making gardens beautiful, productive, and community-centric for more than 40 years. In an effort to support gardeners in creating and sustaining these thriving public spaces, the Handbook is available to all garden members and members of the public in digital form on [our website](#)² and will soon be available at the same link in multiple languages.

As we complete this update to the GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook, the world continues to suffer with the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has significantly impacted New York City government and many of our partners, leading to operational and programming changes, including to some of the resources included herein. While we hope that these impacts are temporary, we encourage you to visit the [GreenThumb website](#)³ for the latest updates related to COVID-19.

Please visit the official [City of New York COVID-19 Citywide Information Portal](#)⁴ for more information on testing, food assistance, housing, and much more.

The summary attached to this letter outlines policies that have been clarified, added, or changed since the 2019 edition of the GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook. Please do not hesitate to reach out to your Outreach Coordinator if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Carlos Martinez

¹ greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/news.html?news_id=502

² greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/publications.html

³ greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/news.html?news_id=468

⁴ nyc.gov/covid19



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2021 Handbook Updates:

- P. 3: Added COVID-19 acknowledgement indicating that some programs in the Handbook may be temporarily on pause. Added link to COVID-19 policy updates on the [GreenThumb website](#)⁵.
- P. 6: Added to the glossary: cubic yard, Dept. of Environmental Protection, licensee, registered community garden group. Updated the definition of “Community Garden” to refer to stewardship by volunteers.
- P. 9: Gardeners are no longer required to attend a workshop before requesting supplies. Gardeners must request supplies through a Materials Request Form available through their Outreach Coordinator.
- P. 16: Separated License and Registration Requirements chapter into two separate chapters, one for gardens under Parks and one for gardens under all other jurisdictions. For gardens under Parks:
 - Under “Licensing and Registration Packet” changed updates to membership from annual to “upon request” or every 4 years with relicensing.
 - Under “Maintain a safe and attractive garden space” added “Maintain clear lines of sight into the garden from the sidewalk to help ensure public safety and promote a sense of openness to the community.”
 - Under “Host public events,” clarified that garden groups under Parks must obtain prior approval of events via the [Events Request Form](#)⁶
 - New section: “Ensure that the garden is stewarded by neighborhood volunteers: GreenThumb community gardens are stewarded by groups of volunteers from the community. All Licensees must adhere to all terms of the License, including membership and bylaws, regardless of whether the Garden is affiliated with a school, church, non-profit, or other organization. Organizations that have existing bylaws that are not specific to the community garden must prepare separate bylaws for the garden space. All neighbors must remain welcome to join GreenThumb gardens as members, and to participate in decision-making and governance as outlined in the License and garden’s bylaws. Membership may never be conditioned upon membership in an external organization.”
 - Under “Have primary and secondary garden contacts sign the License Agreement,” added “Signers of the License Agreement must be individual members of the garden group, not an incorporated organization, and signers do not assume authority over the garden; group governance and decision-making structures are decided by the garden group.”
 - Added clarifying language on liability. This is the same language that was included in Chief of Staff & Assistant Commissioner for Community Outreach and Partnership Development Sam Biederman’s letter to gardeners during the 2019 relicensing.
 - Added updated images of required signage
- P. 23: Safe Soil Gardening Requirements chapter: Added new section on requirements for purchasing bulk soil.
- P. 28: Garden Structures
 - Removed language about running electricity from a neighboring building
 - Clarified process about pursuing internal water
 - Clarified that permission to install electricity is rare – removed language about coordinating with ConEd
 - Added: “Gardeners may perform basic carpentry without requiring a construction permit: for example building raised beds, installing pathways, laying gravel, shoring up garden structures, and minor landscaping work, such as building a low brick planting area.”

⁵ greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/news.html?news_id=468

⁶ bit.ly/GTEventForm



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- P. 32: Updated Hydrant permitting instructions as per Dept. of Environmental Protection's request.
- P. 34: Tree Care, Pruning, and Removal
 - Added clarification on tree care process from NYC Parks Forestry
 - Added "Self-seeded ("volunteer") trees under 6" in diameter may be removed by gardeners. GreenThumb encourages gardeners to remove of young saplings of invasive trees such as Siberian elm, mulberry, Norway maple, and ailanthus (tree of heaven) as soon as they are spotted."
- Animals
 - P. 37: Dogs: Updated GreenThumb policy to: "If a garden group wants to prohibit garden access to pets in its bylaws, they should contact their GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator and request updated NYC Parks sign for the garden. Gardens may not prohibit service animals under any circumstances as per federal, state, and local law."
 - P. 38: Feral Cats: Consolidated language on feral cats in community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.
 - P. 38: Chickens
 - Added proposal template to appendix with updated questions
 - Added new policy to require that the soil that chickens have access to in their coops/runs be clean of contaminants. Similar to the existing growing food in raised beds requirement.
 - P. 40: As per the Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene, we added quails to the list of fowl that aren't allowed in GreenThumb gardens
 - P. 40: Bees: We are no long accepting new proposals for new beehives that are within 1.5 miles of a [Forever Wild](#)⁷ natural area, following new NYC Parks-wide policy
 - P. 44: Rabbits: Domesticated rabbits are now prohibited from being kept in all GreenThumb gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.
 - P. 46: New section on service animals
 - P. 48: Rats
 - Added: Do not encourage bird or cat feeding and post signage for the general public to discourage it.
 - Added: Concrete pads are now required under new sheds, gazebos, and other structures to prevent rat harborage.
- P. 52: Ponds: New proposal template added to appendix
- P. 54: Events
 - We have a new [Event Request Form](#)⁸
 - Added: Events that do not require the GreenThumb Event Request Form:
 - Any event held by or in partnership with GreenThumb, including Open Garden Day, staff-led workshops, GreenThumb-led volunteer days, Art in the Garden, and similar events.
 - Activities typically associated with the routine operation and maintenance of a garden, including garden meetings, garden workdays, internal garden events, and other activities related to the obligations of the license.
 - Updated language for third party events: The garden group may receive requests from non-members and external organizations to host birthday parties and other private events at the garden. The garden group can develop a process for how to handle these, including an application form, decision-making process, event criteria, etc., and may accept or reject such requests at their discretion. For any event hosted or co-hosted at the garden by a third party, you must still obtain prior written approval from GreenThumb through the [Event Request Form](#).
 - Added that garden groups are permitted to have two fundraisers per year, with prior GreenThumb approval. A fundraiser might be a one-off fundraising event, or an ongoing

⁷ nycgovparks.org/greening/nature-preserves

⁸ bit.ly/GTEventForm



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ticketed series (such as a yoga class), as long as it falls outside of the garden's Open Hours.

- Added "security deposits" to the list of types of funds a garden can't explicitly ask for with an event
- **P. 58: Handling Money, Donations, and Sales**
 - Under Fundraising, added: "Fundraisers to support the ongoing operation and maintenance of the garden that occur on-site within the garden can be held twice each year with prior written approval from GreenThumb. Fundraisers that occur outside of the garden or online can be held at any time and do not require GreenThumb notification or approval."
 - Under Grants, added: "For very large grants, participatory budgeting, capital funding, and discretionary funding for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction, you must submit a written plan to your Outreach Coordinator for feasibility review before submitting a grant proposal or funding request. We will do our best to work with you to help improve your garden!"
 - Under Elected Official Discretionary Funding, added: "If you plan to seek discretionary funding for a community garden under NYC Parks jurisdiction, be sure your new project aligns with GreenThumb policy outlined in this handbook and please speak with your Outreach Coordinator to see how GreenThumb can help."
 - Under Selling Agricultural Products, added:
 - "The sale of food on public sidewalks is overseen by various City agencies. Please contact your Outreach Coordinator, who can help you research which agency to ask for permitting."
 - "GreenThumb community gardens on NYC Parks property can serve as distribution sites for externally grown produce distributed via Community-Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs). Please note, however, that community gardens may not serve as the site of any financial transactions for CSAs unless all of the produce was grown on-site at a GreenThumb community garden or prior written approval has been provided by NYC Parks."
 - Added information about NYC Parks Temporary Use Authorization (TUA) and concessions. Added the specific forms related to TUA to the appendix.
- **P. 74: Writing and Amending Bylaws**
 - Removed "Rules for members/visitors" as a requirement for GreenThumb garden bylaws
 - Created a new "Bylaws Requirements Checklist" to clarify what is required, encouraged, and discouraged in GreenThumb garden bylaws
- **New Chapters:**
 - P. 64: Smoking and Marijuana Policy
 - P. 65: Fire Policy
 - P. 81: Emergency and Unexpected Situations
 - P. 82: Mental Health Resources
 - P. 84: Resources for People Experiencing Homelessness