

Best Practices for Community Gardening during COVID-19 (updated 4/8/2020)

The content below has been collected from greening partners and other community gardening programs across the country who are working quickly to comply with public health official's guidance and requirements.

Personal Hygiene

Protect yourself and others from COVID-19. Remember to cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or the corner of your elbow. Regular hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds should be done: before and after eating; after sneezing, coughing, or nose blowing; after touching face, hair, cellphone and/or clothing; after using the restroom or portable toilet; before handling food; after touching or cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated; and after using shared equipment and supplies. It is not recommended to use homemade hand sanitizer, vodka, vinegar, tea tree oil and other natural products as they are not effective and may give false sense of security. DOHMH now recommends that all New Yorkers wear a face covering when outside of their home to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

Sanitizing Tools

Your best protection is to use your own gloves and tools. But if you need to use common tools, get a spray bottle and fill with a 1-part bleach, 10-parts water mix to sanitize garden gates, locks, shared tools, water spigots, hoses, compost bins, garden carts, latches and knobs on sheds, work spaces and other frequently touched spots for the benefit of fellow gardeners. Use diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol or other [EPA-approved products](#) or [DEC list of products](#) registered in New York State identified as effective against COVID-19. Lightly spray tools after use. Keep in mind that porous and pitted surfaces such as wood, will not be totally sanitized by this process. To sanitize the handles of the tools soaking them is most effective, not spritzing or wiping.

Portable Toilet (port-a-potty)

Make sure to provide access to the rental company in order to have portable toilets clean and well maintained. Post signs and remind gardeners to wash their hands or to use hand sanitizer after use. Garden groups should make sure to provide hand sanitizer inside portable toilets. Please remember to clean and disinfect port-a-potty inside and out on a regular basis.

Social Distancing

Observe physical distancing by staying 6 feet apart between all people at all times. It is critical to identify and protect gardeners at high risk, including people over 60, people with compromised immune systems, and people with underlying, ongoing, health conditions. If you are a gardener at high risk, please contact your fellow gardeners to help plant and cultivate the plots for you during this crisis. If any gardener is feeling sick, this gardener should not be visiting the garden.

Food safety

Currently there is no evidence of food or food packaging being associated with transmission of COVID-19. Unlike foodborne gastrointestinal (GI) viruses like norovirus and hepatitis A that often make people ill through contaminated food, SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19, is a

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virus that causes respiratory illness. Foodborne exposure to this virus is not known to be a route of transmission. Like other viruses, it is possible that the virus that causes COVID-19 can survive on surfaces or objects. For that reason, it is critical to follow the 4 key steps of food safety to prevent foodborne illness: clean, separate, cook, and chill. Do not eat, chew gum, smoke, use tobacco, spit, while in the growing, processing, and/or food handling area.

Keeping the spirit of community gardening going

There are a number of online resources where you continue to experience, learn, and share about community gardening. In addition, GreenThumb Outreach Coordinators have written a toolkit, [Resources for Remote Information Sharing & Group Work](#) detailing easy and free ways that gardeners can communicate with each other remotely during these difficult times.

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FAQ about COVID-19 for Community Garden Groups
(updated 3/31/2020)

1. Can gardens continue hosting food distribution programs?

New York State issued a [statement](#) that farms growing food, farmers' markets and farm stands (Fresh Food Boxes and CSAs included) are essential businesses, and are therefore not restricted by the state's guidance for mass gatherings and workforce reductions. Please follow the practices developed by GrowNYC to ensure social distancing of 6 feet apart and clean market environments:

- Only producers and their staff should handle products. Customers must not touch any produce or products until after they have purchased. Consider pre-packaging produce into bags
- All producers should wear protective gloves
- All producers should sanitize their stands regularly, primarily wiping down tables, terminals, cash boxes, etc.
- Tents should be spaced at least 10 feet apart to reduce congestion, ideally more
- All farm stands should use vinyl or plastic table covers for easy sanitizing
- No sampling of products
- No selling of apple cider by the cup
- All market staff and producers must stay home if they are sick
- Hand sanitizer should be available at market manager stations
- Encourage customers to social distance, cover their coughs, not touch their faces, and stay home if they are sick by posting signage such as [this one](#) throughout the market, also available in multiple languages [here](#).

For additional guidance, please see guidance for food retailers [here](#). Additional information about COVID 19 and DOHMH resources can be found [here](#)

2. What products can be used for disinfection?

Cleaning of soiled areas must be completed prior to disinfection to ensure the effectiveness of the disinfectant product. Use the [DEC list of products](#) registered in New York State identified as effective against COVID-19. This list corresponds to those

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identified by the EPA.

If these products are unavailable, disinfect surfaces using an EPA- and DEC*- registered disinfectant labeled to be effective against rhinovirus and/or human coronavirus. If these commercial products are unavailable, it is also acceptable to use a fresh 2% chlorine bleach solution (approximately 1 tablespoon of bleach in 1 quart of water). Prepare the bleach solution daily or as needed.

Label directions must be followed when using disinfectants to ensure the target viruses are effectively killed. This includes adequate contact times (i.e., the amount of time a disinfectant should remain on surfaces to be effective), which may vary between five and ten minutes after application. Disinfectants that come in a wipe form will also list effective contact times on their label.

For disinfectants that come in concentrated forms, it is important to carefully follow instructions for making the diluted concentration needed to effectively kill the target virus. This information can be found on the product label.

3. How can gardeners sanitize their shared tools during the COVID-19 crisis?

Your best protection is to use your own gloves and tools. But if you need to use common tools, get a spray bottle and fill with a 1-part Clorox, 10-parts water mix to sanitize garden gates, locks, and tools for the benefit of plants and fellow gardeners. Lysol is also a decent disinfectant for tools. Lightly spray tools after use. Keep in mind that porous and pitted surfaces such as wood, will not be totally sanitized by this process. To sanitize the handles of the tools soaking them is most effective, not spritzing or wiping.

4. How can community gardeners minimize the chance of spreading the COVID-19 virus?

- Be mindful of frequently touched spots such as locks and gates, water spigots, hoses, latches and knobs on sheds, shared tools and work spaces etc.
- Wear gloves and disinfect these high-touch spots to prevent the possible spread of the virus. Use diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol or other [EPA-approved products](#).
- Have hand sanitizer and soap readily available in the garden.
- Maintain social distance of six feet from others at the garden.
- Do not hold social gatherings at the garden.
- Thoroughly [wash all produce you harvest from the garden](#).

5. How can community gardeners practice social/physical distancing?

Gardeners must practice social or physical distancing, and conduct proper cleaning and sanitizing procedures, including:

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- Regular hand washing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds should be done:
 - Before and after eating.
 - After sneezing, coughing, or nose blowing.
 - After touching face, hair, cellphone and/or clothing.
 - After using the restroom or portable toilet
 - Before handling food.
 - After touching or cleaning surfaces that may be contaminated.
 - After using shared equipment and supplies.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with tissues or the corner of your elbow.
- Dispose of soiled tissues immediately after use.