

# GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook



**NYC Parks**  
GreenThumb



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# How to Read the GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook

The April 2019 Edition of the GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook answers frequently asked questions regarding a variety of topics, including accepting donations, selling garden produce, tree pruning, and garden bylaws. The handbook is a one-stop-shop for all GreenThumb, NYC Parks, New York City, and New York State policies and laws that govern community gardens in the GreenThumb network.

GreenThumb is grateful for the immense time and effort community gardeners put into making these spaces beautiful, productive, and community-centric and who have helped inform policies, guidelines and protocols included in this handbook. In an effort to create and sustain these thriving public spaces, this handbook is available to all garden members and members of the public in digital form in our website.

## Community Gardens under NYC Parks vs. non-Parks gardens

Community gardens that are under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks are subject to NYC Parks rules and regulations, whereas community gardens that are privately owned, under a land trust, or under a different city, state, or federal agency, are not. We do our best in this Handbook to be clear when a policy or law applies only to gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction. For a complete set of rules and regulations for community gardens under jurisdictions other than NYC Parks, please confer with the respective City or State agency, land trust, or property owner.

## Chapter Set-up

Each chapter of this handbook has all or some of these standard sections, with some exceptions:

- Introduction
- Guidelines
- GreenThumb policy
- NYC Parks Policy
- NYC and NY State Law

This is meant to differentiate between GreenThumb policy and protocol, which is often just for community gardens under NYC Parks, and additional laws that regulate community garden practices.

## Translation Requests

You may request to have the GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook translated into any language through your Outreach Coordinator.

## GreenThumb Overview

NYC Parks GreenThumb is proud to be the nation's largest urban gardening program, assisting over 550 gardens and over 20,000 volunteer gardeners throughout New York City on 100 combined acres of open space. GreenThumb gardens create hubs of neighborhood pride while providing a myriad of environmental, health, economic, and social benefits to the neighborhoods in which they thrive. Additionally, GreenThumb supports a growing network of over 750 school gardens through the Grow to Learn citywide school garden initiative.

The majority of GreenThumb gardens were abandoned lots transformed by volunteers into green spaces for relaxation, socializing, and growing food, or a combination. These community gardens are managed by neighborhood residents with GreenThumb support. Together GreenThumb and community gardeners make the city safer, healthier, stronger, and more sustainable.

GreenThumb's mission is to support New Yorkers to strengthen their neighborhood through community gardening by providing the resources needed to steward these valuable spaces.

### **GreenThumb has three teams that supports gardeners and gardens:**

#### **Community Engagement**

GreenThumb's Community Engagement Team is the first point of contact for our network of community and school gardens. Outreach Coordinators assist gardeners with community organizing and development. They also help garden groups with special projects and connect gardeners with a variety of available resources. In addition, our Youth Programming and School Garden Coordinator gives support to school gardens through the Grow to Learn citywide school garden initiative and administers the Youth Leadership Council, our annual volunteer program that engages youth in civic engagement and beautification projects at community gardens throughout the city.

#### **Operations**

GreenThumb Operations is our boots-on-the-ground team that provides material and operational support to both community and school gardens in addition to handling property management issues. You may find them delivering clean topsoil and lumber, preparing new garden sites for planting, making repairs, caring for trees in gardens, or inspecting conditions in gardens. The Operations team manages deliveries and seasonal supply distributions that provide gardens with the materials they need to grow.

#### **Planning & Programs**

GreenThumb's Planning and Programs Team lays the groundwork for GreenThumb's long-term success and provides gardeners access to the skills, support, and resources needed to flourish. In addition to leading GreenThumb's effort to expand our reach and impact, this team oversees the annual GreenThumb GrowTogether conference, Harvest Fair, Open Garden Day NYC, and other large events and programs. They also host 150+ workshops and numerous volunteer projects. The Planning and Programs Team implements grants and produces quarterly publications that advertise GreenThumb's programs to gardeners and the general public. They oversee data analysis and complicated projects such as new garden builds and provide a variety of services to community gardeners.

# Glossary of Terms and Definitions

**Active Member** – While all garden groups define membership differently, GreenThumb generally understands an “active member” to be someone who regularly participates in the upkeep of the garden, attends garden meetings, and/or helps the garden hold open hours.

**Animal Nuisance** – As defined in the NYC Health Code, animal nuisances include, but are not limited to, “animal feces, urine, blood, body parts, carcasses, vomitus and pervasive odors; animals that carry or are ill with contagious diseases communicable to persons or other animals; and dangerous dogs. A beekeeping nuisance shall mean conditions that include, but are not limited to, aggressive or objectionable bee behaviors, hive placement or bee movement that interferes with pedestrian traffic or persons residing on or adjacent to the hive premises; and overcrowded, deceased or abandoned hives.”

**Borough-Block-Lot (BBL) Number** — BBL numbers identify the locations of buildings or properties, also known as tax lots. The borough number (1-5) indicates the borough, block number (1 to 5 digits) indicates the city block; the lot number (1 to 3 digits) indicates the lot within the block.

**City of New York (City)** – The government of New York City.

**Community Board (CB)** — A local representative body selected by the Borough President and City Council Members within that Community District. Zoning changes, building permits and other land-use issues come before the CB for review, including the creation of a new garden. CBs are organized in committees; community gardening matters are usually discussed in the Parks and Environmental committees/subcommittees.

**Community Garden** – Publicly accessible open space that is stewarded collectively by a group of people. These spaces may use shared or individual plots and may grow botanical plants, fruits, and or vegetables. Community gardens and the gardeners who steward them contribute to the environmental sustainability, public health, and community resiliency of their neighborhoods and cities.

**Department of Sanitation (DSNY)** — The city agency charged with waste collection and disposal. DSNY also assists with major cleanups for garden sites coordinated through GreenThumb. The NYC Compost Project is a project of DSNY.

**Fiscal Sponsor** — An organization that receives grants or funds on behalf of a group that does not have the ability to do so. These organizations are typically registered as 501(c)(3) nonprofits and are tax-exempt. Local nonprofits or greening partner organizations are sometimes able to act as a fiscal sponsor on behalf of a community garden group.

**Garden Contacts** — A GreenThumb garden group’s liaisons with GreenThumb. GreenThumb requires every garden to provide a primary and secondary contact that will serve as contact people. Both contact people must provide current phone numbers, mailing addresses, and email addresses, which may be shared with the public for membership inquiries.

**Good Standing** - A GreenThumb registered and/or licensed community garden group that operates in compliance with the GreenThumb Registration Agreement and/or License Agreement and does not have any outstanding violations.

**Greening Partner** — Nonprofits, grassroots organizations, botanical gardens, and other organizations that provide events, workshops, materials, and other support for community gardens.

**GreenThumb Garden Group (“garden group”)** – A group of individuals that collectively receives support from GreenThumb to care for a community garden that is registered with GreenThumb.

**GreenThumb Garden Recognition Awards** – Since 2016 GreenThumb has been honoring GreenThumb garden groups and partners for their hard work and dedication through the GreenThumb

Garden Recognition Awards. Gardeners can submit nominations for a variety of award categories in the summer through the program guide or the GreenThumb website.

**GreenThumb Operations** — Formerly known as Land Restoration Project (LRP), GreenThumb Operations is an integral part of GreenThumb, taking on largescale projects such as soil and lumber delivery, fence construction and repair, tree planting and pruning, pathway construction and repair, and other tasks to support the operation and maintenance of GreenThumb gardens.

**Grow to Learn** — The Grow to Learn citywide school garden initiative for NYC. Established in 2010 by GrowNYC, the Mayor's Fund, and GreenThumb, Grow to Learn is managed today through a partnership between GrowNYC, NYC Parks GreenThumb, and the Department of Education's Office of School Food. Grow to Learn provides the ongoing resources, technical assistance, and training to get learning gardens growing in every NYC school.

**Land Trust** — Many community gardens are on properties owned by a land trust, which is an organization that conserves and stewards land for a specific purpose, often stated in the organization's mission. In NYC, several land trusts own the property underlying community gardens, to be preserved as community-managed open space in perpetuity. Land trusts in New York City include The New York Restoration Project (NYRP), Brooklyn Queens Land Trust (BQLT), Manhattan Land Trust (MLT), Bronx Land Trust (BLT), and Brooklyn Alliance of Neighborhood Gardens (BANG). Land trusts provide gardens on their property with technical support and organizing assistance, such as environmental education and programming. Many land trust gardens are registered with GreenThumb.

**License Agreement** — The GreenThumb License Agreement ("License") grants a GreenThumb Garden Group on property under NYC Parks jurisdiction legal permission to garden on NYC Parks property. The signatories of the four year license agreement must operate in accordance with the agreement and the garden governance as indicated in the group's bylaws.

**Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)** — GreenThumb requires garden groups on property that is not under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks to sign an MOA. The MOA insures that the garden group agrees to adhere to certain minimum requirements in operating an open and accessible community garden in exchange for receiving free support from GreenThumb

**Open Hours** — Licensed and/or registered GreenThumb Gardens must remain open and accessible to the public for a minimum of 20 hours per week during the official GreenThumb garden season from April 1st through October 31st. A sign with a schedule indicating at least ten of those twenty hours a week must be posted on the garden gate. For garden groups operating under the GreenThumb License Agreement, GreenThumb Gardens must be open for at least 5 hours each weekend (Saturday and Sunday) during the season. Posted hours can be changed with reasonable notice to GreenThumb.

**Outreach Coordinator (OC)** — First point of contact at GreenThumb for community gardeners. Each OC is responsible for communicating and sharing information with the garden contacts on a geographic basis. OCs visit all gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction at least once each year to complete site inspections. They also facilitate workshops, plan and manage events, and assist gardeners by coordinating supply deliveries, supporting garden group development and organizational structure, and providing technical assistance. For a staff directory, please check the GreenThumb website. GreenThumb also plays a role with school gardens through its partnership with Grow to Learn.

**Parks Enforcement Patrol (PEP)** — PEP personnel are uniformed, shielded (with NYC Special Patrolman and New York State Peace Officer status) officers who provide security and safety in city parks, provide information about Parks rules to park patrons, and safeguard Parks wildlife and facilities. PEP officers are empowered to enforce the NYS Penal Code, NYC Health Code, and NYC Parks Rules & Regulations. PEP officers are responsible for protecting City property under NYC Parks' jurisdiction and ensuring safety for people who use it. They may be contacted regarding violations or offenses that occur at NYC Parks gardens and parks. To report an issue to PEP, call 311. In case of an emergency, please dial 911.

**Primary and Secondary Contacts** – please see “Garden Contacts.”

**Program Guide** — Quarterly guides produced and distributed by GreenThumb that include information about upcoming GreenThumb and greening partner events, workshops, supply distributions, gardening news, and other gardener services.

**Registration Packet** — Annual forms that all GreenThumb garden groups are required to complete to continue to receive support from GreenThumb, regardless of land jurisdiction.

**School Garden** – Educational garden managed by a school. School gardens may register with the Grow to Learn citywide school garden initiative for NYC. Grow to Learn has Outreach Coordinators who are the main points of contact for school gardens in NYC.

# General Information

## Contact Information

- **Phone:** (212) 602-5300
- **Email:** [greenthumbinfo@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:greenthumbinfo@parks.nyc.gov)
- **Website:** [nyc.gov/parks/greenthumb](http://nyc.gov/parks/greenthumb)
- **Facebook:** GreenThumbNYC
- **Instagram:** @greenthumbgrows
- **Twitter:** @greenthumbgrows

## Gardening Support

GreenThumb gardens in good standing are eligible to receive various gardening supplies and resources throughout the year.

### Soil, Compost, Wood Chips, and Mulch

Gardens can request soil, compost, mulch, wood chips, and/or clean fill from GreenThumb. To receive a soil and/or lumber request form, one member of the garden must attend any workshop led by GreenThumb. GreenThumb will then follow up with the garden's primary and secondary contacts to schedule a delivery, which could take several weeks or even months, depending on the availability of the materials and staff. Please note that these deliveries are "bulk deliveries," meaning the material will be in a pile, not in bags, unless otherwise noted by GreenThumb Operations or your Outreach Coordinator.

MATERIAL		
Type	Description	Purpose
<b>Soil</b>	Topsoil is a mix of sand, silt, and clay, with some organic matter	Use this to fill your raised beds and other growing areas. The minerals provide structure, drainage, and nutrients, while the organic matter supplies additional nutrients and water retention.
<b>Compost</b>	Decomposed organic matter. High in nutrients and beneficial microbes.	Incorporate some DSNY compost into your raised beds to add nutrition and boost soil life. Compost can also help prevent the uptake of heavy metals into your fruit and vegetable plants.
<b>Composted Horse Manure</b>	Composted horse manure	High in nitrogen, this compost can be a great fertilizer for plants. Subject to availability.
<b>Mulch</b>	Finely ground wood chips	Keep your perennial plants healthy by adding mulch to the surface of the surrounding soil to prevent weed growth and keep the soil moist.
<b>Woodchips</b>	Woodchips (large chips, not fine mulch)	Cover your paths with woodchips (at least 3 inches deep) to keep dust down and prevent exposure to heavy metals. Also a great bulking agent for compost! 1 cubic yard will cover 100 square feet 3 inches deep.

<b>Clean Fill PUREsoil NYC</b>	Low-nutrient soil	Clean fill is good for filling holes or leveling the garden and has no nutritional value for plants. It can be amended with compost to produce a growing medium. Managed under the Mayor’s Office of Environmental Remediation’s (MOER) PUREsoil NYC program, clean fill is excavated from deep below the ground during building construction in NYC. More information on the use of clean fill can be found at <a href="http://nyc.gov/oer">nyc.gov/oer</a> . If you are interested, please contact your Outreach Coordinator directly.
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<b>BULK SOIL/COMPOST/MULCH DELIVERIES</b>		
<b>Half Load</b>	3 cubic yards	Fills three to four raised beds measuring 8 feet by 4 feet, or covers 325 square feet of pathway 3 inches deep
<b>Full Load</b>	6 cubic yards	Fills six to eight raised beds measuring 8 feet by 4 feet, or covers 650 square feet of pathway 3 inches deep
<b>Double Load</b>	13 to 14 cubic yards	Fills 14 to 16 raised beds measuring 8 feet by 4 feet, or covers 1,500 square feet of pathway 3 inches deep <div style="text-align: right;">  <p data-bbox="1166 1136 1409 1169">Photo by GreenThumb</p> </div>

### Lumber

Gardens can request untreated lumber from GreenThumb to build raised beds or other projects. Lumber requests require attendance at any workshop led by GreenThumb, not including special events like supply distributions and Harvest Fair. If you have a larger project that requires more lumber, speak with your Outreach Coordinator to determine availability.

### Supply Distributions

There are two larger, seasonal supply distributions each year – one in the spring and one in the fall. Gardens’ registration and license agreement must be current and the garden group must be in good standing to pick up supplies.

Supplies we have given out in the past include:

**Spring:** Garbage bags, shovels, hoes, rakes, hoses, wheelbarrows, and other gardening equipment

**Fall:** Icebreakers, garbage bags, calcium chloride, snow shovels

Please note that materials vary each year and are subject to availability.

## **Supplies at GreenThumb Workshops**

Some supplies are distributed at our workshops throughout the year. Workshops are listed in the quarterly GreenThumb Program Guide, which can be found on our website, social media, and at GreenThumb events. You can also request to receive a printed copy in the mail through a form on our website. Workshops are also listed in the GreenThumb events calendar on the website.

Sample supplies offered at workshops have included books, seed starting materials, season extension equipment, trellising equipment, hand pruners, and other gardening supplies.

## **Plant Material**

GreenThumb offers community gardeners a limited amount of free plants once a year in the spring at our annual GreenThumb Plant Distribution. Each registered community garden group in good standing may pick up a variety of vegetable, herb, and native plant starts to share amongst their fellow gardeners, subject to availability.

Keep an eye out for plant sales and giveaways by other greening partner organizations, including GrowNYC, Butterfly Project NYC, Bronx Green-Up of the New York Botanical Garden, New Yorkers for Parks, and New York Restoration Project. GrowNYC has an annual plant sale, Butterfly Project NYC and Bronx Green-Up offer free native plants, New Yorkers for Parks offers free daffodil bulbs, Brooklyn Botanic Garden offers bulbs and other plants to community gardens registered in their alliance, New York Restoration Project offers free trees through Million Trees NYC, and more.

If your garden has a special request for plants that fall outside of these opportunities, please talk to your Outreach Coordinator to determine if GreenThumb can help.

## **DSNY Compost Give-Backs**

DSNY offers compost give-backs through the NYC Compost Project where gardeners can apply to receive pallets of bagged or bulk compost at their gardens. Look out for the application each January and/or February at [nyc.gov/getcompost](http://nyc.gov/getcompost). A pallet includes 60 40-pound bags. Various greening partners distribute these bags if you need less than a pallet. GreenThumb typically distributes bags of compost at the Spring Supply Distribution, and some gardens host an annual compost give-back in the spring and the fall.

## **Public Programs**

### **GreenThumb GrowTogether Conference**

Since 1984, GreenThumb has kicked off the growing season with our annual GreenThumb GrowTogether conference. The conference is a full day of speakers, workshops, hands-on activities, and networking, and is a great opportunity to see old friends and meet community gardeners from all across the city.

### **GreenThumb Harvest Fair**

Each fall since 1979, GreenThumb has celebrated the hard work that NYC community gardeners commit to making their gardens spaces of abundance. This annual celebration honors community gardeners and greening partners from across the City for their work and gives them the opportunity to show off their harvest. Like a block party, the GreenThumb Harvest Fair is a family friendly event with hands-on workshops, recreation activities, and crafts.

### **GreenThumb Open Garden Day NYC**

Each summer since 2018, GreenThumb encourages community gardeners to open their gates to the public on the same day with free activities, tours, performances, educational workshops, volunteer days, and more. Open Garden Day NYC inspires members of the public to learn about and join a community garden in their neighborhood.

## **GreenThumb Workshops**

Throughout the year, GreenThumb offers workshops on a variety of topics from introductory to advanced gardening, composting, carpentry, herbalism, community organizing, group structure, fundraising, and more. Check the GreenThumb website or sign up for our mailing list to receive our quarterly program guide, which includes all of GreenThumb's workshops and special events. With advanced notice, GreenThumb may be able to provide language accessibility services at GreenThumb workshops and events.

## **Technical Assistance**

GreenThumb has a team of Outreach Coordinators that offers garden groups technical assistance and organizing support. Outreach Coordinators can help garden groups organize workdays and volunteer events, develop processes and bylaws for garden governance, connect with information and resources, navigate GreenThumb rules and regulations, build membership, and establish new garden groups.

## **Portable Toilets**

As a GreenThumb garden group in good standing, you are eligible to rent a portable toilet through GreenThumb at a discounted rate. Delivery, pick-up and maintenance are provided by the portable toilet vendor, but it is the responsibility of the garden group to communicate with the vendor about delivery. GreenThumb accepts portable toilet requests twice annually, with due dates communicated by Outreach Coordinators.

## **Waste Management**

### **Organic Waste**

If there is debris in your garden that is compostable (leaves, branches, plants), then please compost it on-site or sign up for DSNY organics collection service. You can contact the NYC Compost Project to learn how to set up an on-site composting operation ([nyc.gov/compostproject](http://nyc.gov/compostproject)).

If you are in a neighborhood that has DSNY curbside organics collection service, you can enroll your garden to receive convenient curbside collection service ([on.nyc.gov/request-organics](http://on.nyc.gov/request-organics)). Once you have submitted all the proper paperwork, DSNY will provide the garden with brown bins with a latching lid that can be lined with a clear plastic liner for you to compost your yard waste, leaves, grass clippings and garden trimmings. You can also place food waste in your brown bin.

### *Woody Debris*

Gardeners enrolled in organics collection can set out their woody debris in bundles of 2 feet by 4 feet or smaller and this material will get composted by DSNY. If you have a large amount of woody debris that is bigger than a 2 feet by 4 feet bundle, or are not enrolled in DSNY curbside organics collection, you can request a pick-up from NYC Parks at 311 or [nycgovparks.org/services/forestry/wood-debris-removal](http://nycgovparks.org/services/forestry/wood-debris-removal). Note that due to the Asian longhorned beetle, residents in Brooklyn and Queens must call 311 or schedule an appointment with the NYC Parks to dispose of wood debris that is more than a half-inch in diameter, including tree prunings and firewood.

### *Fall Leaves*

Leaves make a great addition to compost! However if your garden does not yet have a compost system, you can do the following:

If your garden receives organics curbside collection, you can place leaves and yard waste directly in your brown organics bin. Yard waste that does not fit in the brown bin can be set out in a paper lawn and leaf bag or in an unlined container labeled "Yard Waste Only". Do not put leaves in plastic bags. Leaves in plastic bags will be collected as garbage. DSNY offers free leaf bag events, and paper leaf bags are available at many hardware stores.

If your neighborhood does not receive curbside organics collection, please check the DSNY website to determine if your community district will get fall leaf collection.

## **Inorganic Waste**

### *One Time Pickups*

If your debris cannot be composted (garbage, bricks, metal, etc.), you will need to make arrangements with GreenThumb and/or DSNY to have it picked up. If you are planning a garden cleanup day, please contact your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator at least six weeks before the event takes place to make arrangements. Please have everything sorted and bagged in heavy, black plastic bags and placed at the curb before the scheduled pickup time.

If someone else dumps debris in your garden, call 311 immediately to report it and ask for it to be picked up. You can also report dumping through the NYC 311 app. Always record the "request number" that they give you for your records. Please contact your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator if dumping becomes a recurring issue.

It can also be helpful to make a personal connection with the sanitation workers in your neighborhood. Find out who picks up debris in your neighborhood, then introduce yourself to that person and explain how the GreenThumb gardening program works. Invite the sanitation workers to come and visit your garden. Remember that reaching out not only helps to strengthen the community, but it helps to ensure the continued success of your garden. Your Outreach Coordinator may be able to introduce you to the right contact people.

### *Ongoing Pickups*

Garden groups that need ongoing curbside pickup of their garden waste should contact DSNY. Requests for collection services can be sent via email to [newservice@dsny.nyc.gov](mailto:newservice@dsny.nyc.gov) or by mail to:

NYC Department of Sanitation Attention: New Service  
125 Worth Street, Room 700  
New York, NY 10013

The service request should include the following information:

1. Full address of the garden, including block and lot numbers
2. Name and daytime phone number of a contact person
3. A copy of the garden's GreenThumb License Agreement
4. A letter from GreenThumb stating the current registration status of the garden

Requests for collection services can also be submitted online at:  
[www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/contact/request-collection-service](http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/contact/request-collection-service).

The applicant will be notified of the scheduled start date of services and the days of collection approximately two weeks after the Collection Office receives the request with all the required documents. For additional information, please contact the Collection Office at (646) 885-4830.

For more information on DSNY, please refer to their website: [nyc.gov/dsny](http://nyc.gov/dsny).

## License and Registration Requirements

Garden groups must execute (sign) several documents in order to become and remain eligible for support from GreenThumb.

	<b>Registration Packet</b>	<b>License, lease, or other written agreement</b>	<b>Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)</b>
<b>What this document is</b>	The GreenThumb registration packet ensures that we have up-to-date information about your community garden and allows us to evaluate whether your garden group meets GreenThumb's requirements for receiving support.	Written permission for the garden group to garden on the site ensures that GreenThumb knows that it is supporting a group that has permission to operate there	The MOA ensures that the garden group agrees to adhere to certain minimum requirements in operating an open and accessible community garden in exchange for receiving free support from GreenThumb
<b>When this document is signed</b>	Every four years, with annual updates to the membership section required	Every four years	Every four years
<b>Gardens on property under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks</b>	Required by GreenThumb	GreenThumb requires that gardens on NYC Parks property execute the GreenThumb License Agreement	Not required by GreenThumb, as this is covered in the GreenThumb License Agreement
<b>Gardens on property under the jurisdiction of other New York City agencies</b>	Required by GreenThumb	GreenThumb requires an executed license agreement from the agency that has jurisdiction over the property	Required by GreenThumb
<b>Gardens on property under the jurisdiction of other non-NYC governmental agencies</b>	Required by GreenThumb	GreenThumb requires an executed license agreement or other written permission from the governmental entity that has jurisdiction over the property, demonstrating that they permit the site to be gardened by the garden group	Required by GreenThumb

<b>Gardens on property under the jurisdiction of land trusts</b>	Required by GreenThumb	GreenThumb requires written documentation from the land trust that they: 1) have ownership of the property, 2) permit the site to be gardened by the garden group, and 3) approve of GreenThumb providing support to the garden	Required by GreenThumb
<b>Gardens on property that is otherwise privately-owned</b>	Required by GreenThumb	GreenThumb requires written documentation from the property owner that they: 1) have ownership of the property, 2) permit the site to be gardened by the garden group, and 3) approve of GreenThumb providing support to the garden	Required by GreenThumb

## Registration

All gardens, regardless of jurisdiction, must complete a registration packet every four years, with annual updates to the membership section before the start of the growing season at the request of the garden's Outreach Coordinator.

A complete registration packet includes:

- Full contact information for all garden members: phone number, mailing address, and email address.
- Copies of all keys and/or codes for combination locks for interior fences or storage structures. Copies of keys and/or combination lock code for exterior garden gate(s) if a daisy chained lock is not possible.
- Complete GreenThumb Garden Registration.
- A copy of the garden's bylaws - required for gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction and encouraged for all other gardens.
- If the garden is not under NYC Parks jurisdiction, written proof that the garden group has permission to garden on the property and a signed copy of the MOA.

## Licensing

To remain in good standing and be eligible for relicensing, all GreenThumb garden groups on lots under NYC Parks jurisdiction must execute the GreenThumb License Agreement and:

**Post correct signage** — All GreenThumb gardens must post a sign provided by GreenThumb with information about the program and contact information. Gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction must post the NYC Parks sign provided by GreenThumb.

**Post and maintain open hours** — All community gardens must be open to the public at least 20 hours per week from April 1st through October 31st, though gardeners are encouraged to keep gardens open as much as possible. Gardens must be open for at least 5 hours each weekend (Saturday and Sunday) during the season. At least 10 of the 20 public hours must be consistent from week-to-week and be clearly posted on the garden's gate. Gardens must be open at the posted times. If you are unable to make your own sign, we are happy to make a sign for you - please ask your Outreach Coordinator.

**Maintain an active garden membership** — All GreenThumb gardens must have an active and inclusive membership, and the group must have a process for accepting new members. A complete list of garden members, including mailing addresses and phone numbers, must be given to GreenThumb with garden registration annually. GreenThumb uses this information internally and will never share it. Updates to the garden membership list can be sent to your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator by mail or email.

**Maintain a safe and attractive garden space** — Be creative. Your garden is a reflection of your community, and we hope that you will have fun with garden design and layout. However, we do ask that you follow a few simple requirements:

- All vegetables and herbs must be grown in raised beds that are filled with clean soil lined with landscape fabric. Please see the Soil Safe Requirements chapter of this Handbook for more information.
- Keep sidewalks, walkways, and curbs inside and adjacent to the garden clean and free of snow, ice, garbage, and plant debris.
- Remove all trash, debris, and personal items from your garden in a prompt manner. Remember, it's easier to get rid of garbage than the rats it will attract!
- Keep all sources of water (barrels, rainwater harvesting systems, etc.) covered. Standing water attracts mosquitoes.
- Ensure that all structures (gazebos, casitas, sheds, etc.) built inside a community garden are in compliance with GreenThumb and the Department of Building's guidelines. You must contact your Outreach Coordinator before building any structure in the garden. For more information on these guidelines, refer to the Structures section in the GreenThumb Handbook.
- Keep all fences, raised beds, tables, benches, chairs and other items clean and well maintained.
- Keep all tools tidy, in secure storage areas such as sheds or locked toolboxes.

**Maintain the garden as open public space** – GreenThumb gardens are open and accessible to the public. They are inclusive spaces regardless of age, race, citizenship status, skin color, disability, gender, gender identity, marital status, national origin, pregnancy, religion, sexual orientation, and military or veteran status. Your garden should be a welcoming space and have a clear process in place for accepting new members.

**Host public events** — All gardens must host at least two public events per year. Garden groups are required to let your Outreach Coordinator know about your event(s). We can post your event(s) on GreenThumb's website and the Parks Calendar if you'd like. If planned far enough in advance, sometimes we are able to include garden events in our quarterly program guide. Please see the Events chapter of this Handbook for more information.

**Secure the garden when not in use through the use of a daisy chain interlocking lock system or as otherwise directed and approved by GreenThumb** — If GreenThumb deems the garden gate to not be suitable for a daisy chain interlocking system, then the garden, at its own expense, shall provide GreenThumb with the combination or two copies of all keys to all locks used at the garden, including entry ways and storage facilities. Failure to do so will result in GreenThumb removing any such locks.

GreenThumb needs to be able to get inside your garden in the event of an emergency, or for deliveries and inspections. For community gardens under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks, GreenThumb reserves the right to cut locks if necessary.

Gardens may continue using their own locks and keys for garden gates, and will no longer be required to provide keys to GreenThumb every time the lock and/or keys are changed out. Instead, gardens will now be required to lock their garden lock through a lock that has been provided by GreenThumb (as in the image to the right). GreenThumb will maintain sole access to that lock. This is how Parks will maintain access to the garden.



**Have primary and secondary garden contacts sign the License Agreement** — Community gardens under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks must sign a GreenThumb license agreement in order to operate. For gardens on property under other city, state, or federal agencies, you must present GreenThumb with a signed copy of the GreenThumb MOU as well as a signed license agreement or other written permission demonstrating that they permit the garden group to use the land as a garden. This permission letter, document, or license agreement should include a detailed outline setting the parameters of use agreed upon between the group and property owner.

**Assumption of risk** - Twice each year, the garden group should instruct members that a community garden involves activities that pose risks of serious bodily injury and even death, including but not limited to, engaging in strenuous physical activities, using (or being in the presence of others using) garden equipment, constructing raised gardening beds, snow removal, and walking on uneven walkways. Licensee shall post a sign approved by GreenThumb at the Garden explaining these risks and that members understand and assume them whenever they are in the garden.

## **Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)**

Community gardens that are not under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks will be required to sign an MOA that states that the garden group agrees to:

- Design and install a plant garden for the benefit of the surrounding community.
- Remain open and accessible to the public 20 hours per week from the period of April 1st to October 31st annually, and make best efforts to maintain five total hours of public access during weekends (Saturday and Sunday).
- Host at least two free community events each season.
- Send a representative to at least one GreenThumb-sponsored event per year.
- Post a sign on the external fence of the Garden indicating the name of the group, a contact name and number, that the garden is open to new members, and indicating the hours during which the garden is open to the public.
- Make gardening plots and/or membership at the garden available to the public on a first come first serve basis, through the use of a waiting list if necessary, and will make best efforts to include members of the public who wish to join even when plots are not available.

If the garden group agrees to these minimum requirements:

- GreenThumb will provide to the garden limited amounts of basic gardening materials and supplies, including soil, lumber, and gardening tools.
- GreenThumb will provide to the garden programming and technical assistance, including but not limited to group development support, networking events, resource fairs, and educational workshops.
- GreenThumb may host workshops at the garden from time to time, with advance agreement of the garden.

## Signage

The following types of signs are required and may be provided by GreenThumb:

- **NYC Parks Sign** — For community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction, GreenThumb provides a sign that explains that the garden is registered with GreenThumb, as well as rules and/or related information in multiple languages.
- **GreenThumb Sign** – For community gardens that are not under NYC Parks jurisdiction, GreenThumb provides a sign that explains that the garden is registered with GreenThumb.
- **Open Hours Sign** — A sign with garden’s weekly schedule of open hours for the growing season (April 1st to October 31st). Your Outreach Coordinator can make one upon request. This sign must include garden contact information. Open hours signs are required at all gardens registered with GreenThumb.
- **Assumption of Risk Sign** - A sign that instructs members that a community garden involves activities that pose risks of serious bodily injury and even death, including but not limited to, engaging in strenuous physical activities, using (or being in the presence of others using) garden equipment, constructing raised gardening beds, snow removal, and walking on uneven walkways. Your sign must be approved by GreenThumb before posting, or your Outreach Coordinator can provide you with pre-approved language.

Please contact your Outreach Coordinator if your signs are damaged or missing.



## Site Inspections

Once a year during the growing season, GreenThumb Outreach Coordinators conduct site inspections of the gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction. Outreach Coordinators evaluate a number of factors related to garden maintenance, such as the state of fencing and sidewalks, the quality of structures, the general appearance of the garden, living conditions of any animals, as well as factors pertaining to group dynamics, including whether or not garden groups possess bylaws or a sufficient number of members. This process ensures that garden groups are able to operate safely and function in accordance with the GreenThumb License Agreement and applicable NYS and NYC laws and regulations, and helps GreenThumb understand the needs of the gardeners. GreenThumb may conduct additional site inspections as deemed necessary.

Your Outreach Coordinator can provide you with a complete list of what they will be looking for at a site inspection. As part of the site inspection process, the following categories of items, if present, will be evaluated and documented:

- Infrastructure (fences, gates, sidewalks, retaining walls, utilities)
- Structures (casitas, gazebos, stages, storage, composting, seating, etc.)
- Landscape (trees, art, plants, open space, paths, etc.)
- Maintenance
- Animals
- Group Development
- Encroachment and illegal egress
- Compliance with the GreenThumb License Agreement

Following site inspections, your Outreach Coordinator will communicate the feedback with your garden group, and request that your group come up with a plan to address anything of concern. Please note that GreenThumb may issue formal violations for areas of noncompliance with the GreenThumb License Agreement.

## Serious Violations and Consequences

Garden groups that are determined by GreenThumb to be unable or unwilling to address and rectify violations will be at risk of having their License Agreement terminated by GreenThumb, and their access to the garden revoked.

Garden members who are accused of serious violations including but not limited to breaking the law or the GreenThumb License Agreement will be investigated and appropriate action will be taken by NYC Parks.

## Safe Soil Gardening Requirements

Growing food in urban soils can be a challenge, and it is important that all food grown in GreenThumb gardens is done in the safest manner possible. Soil contamination comes from a variety of sources, including historic use of leaded gasoline, garbage dumps, old building materials that may contain peeling paint, air and water pollution, and other sources. Visit Cornell's Healthy Soils, Healthy Communities website for more information: [blogs.cornell.edu/healthysoils/](https://blogs.cornell.edu/healthysoils/).

### GreenThumb Policies:

GreenThumb follows the framework for understanding urban soils outlined in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) document *Reusing Potentially Contaminated Landscapes: Growing Gardens in Urban Soils*.<sup>1</sup> Minimize the likelihood of heavy metals entering your food by adhering to these GreenThumb requirements:

- Grow any fruits and vegetables that are available for human consumption using best practices that minimize the likelihood of contact with potentially contaminated soil. This includes growing all fruits and vegetables in raised beds and placing barriers (like landscape fabric) between these areas and the surrounding soil. Alternative methods for meeting this requirement may be considered and are subject to approval by GreenThumb. Please contact your Outreach Coordinator for next steps.
- Keep all play areas, seating areas, pathways, and other areas with exposed soil covered in mulch (i.e. wood chips), grass, or another ground cover. This prevents dust migration and splash back on crops, and protects against human exposure when gardening.
- Every fall or spring, fill each raised bed back to the top with a couple inches of compost and spread a couple inches of new woodchips over the garden paths.
- GreenThumb will use reasonable efforts to assist the garden group in complying with this requirement, subject to the availability of resources.

For free lumber, soil, compost, wood chips, and mulch, you can pick up request forms at any GreenThumb workshop. In addition to the requirements above, GreenThumb recommends:

- Add organic matter such as compost to your soil. Organic particles may bind with metals and help prevent them from being absorbed by your plants.
- Keep pH levels close to neutral and make sure drainage is adequate. This helps to assure that the contaminants don't move in your soil. Your ideal pH level is between 6.5 and 6.8. If soils contain heavy metals, a pH closer to 7.0 is better.
- Wear gloves when gardening and thoroughly wash hands after gardening. Shake off any excess soil from boots and clothes before going home.
- Thoroughly wash produce and peel root vegetables before eating.

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<sup>1</sup> Download a copy of this document at [epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-03/documents/urban\\_gardening\\_fina\\_fact\\_sheet.pdf](https://epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-03/documents/urban_gardening_fina_fact_sheet.pdf)

## Building Raised Beds:

A raised bed is a wood frame built with untreated lumber that gardeners can fill with clean topsoil and compost. They can be single, double, or even triple height, which ensures that fruit and vegetable crops have enough space for their roots to grow and can make gardening easier to access for gardeners with mobility issues.

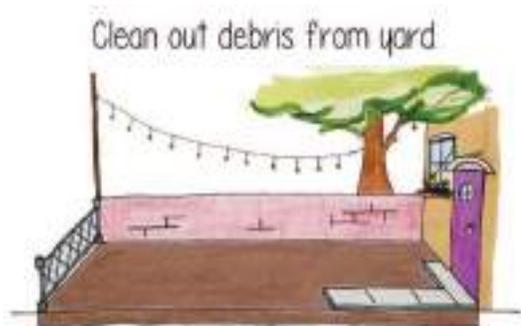
### Materials:

- **Lumber:** GreenThumb provides garden groups with untreated lumber for building raised beds and other garden projects. You can fill out the request form at any GreenThumb workshop to request lumber for the garden. If you are sourcing your own lumber, be sure not to use pressure-treated lumber, as it contains arsenic and other toxins.
- **Landscape fabric:** Ask your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator if we have this in stock. Otherwise, you can get this material at any hardware or garden store. Lining the raised bed with landscape fabric provides a barrier between the clean topsoil in the raised bed and the potentially contaminated soils below. Landscape fabric can also aid in the durability of the raised bed.
  - If you are using landscape fabric, make sure you have scissors and either a staple gun or landscape fabric staples.
- **Tools:** You will need the following to assemble your raised bed:
  - Saw
  - Hammer and nails, or power drill and screws
  - Level
  - Shovel and/or spade
  - Measuring tape
  - Stakes, string, and a mallet
  - Staple gun
- **Soil:** Fill out the request form at any GreenThumb workshop to request topsoil, compost, or a mix of both. Your garden group can also fundraise to purchase its own soil from a Parks-approved vendor.

### Assembly:

Mark off the area where the raised bed will go. You can use four stakes at each corner with string tied between them. This is a helpful practice for building multiple raised beds at once, to make sure you are leaving enough space in the pathways for wheelbarrow (24 inches) and wheelchair (36 inches) access, and to make sure you have enough space to carry out your design.

1. Level the soil by smoothing it out with a hard rake, and remove any weeds.



Drawings by Clarisa Diaz, WNYC

2. Lay down your landscape fabric and use landscape fabric staples one foot apart to secure it in place
  - a. For one raised bed, the landscape fabric should exceed the boundaries of the raised bed by a few inches.
  - b. For multiple raised beds side-by-side, you can cover the whole area at once. If you are pursuing this option, make sure the edges of landscape fabric overlap one another by several inches. Another option is to use a staple gun to line the raised bed once it's built.



3. Cut your lumber and build your bed! For one 8 foot x 4 foot raised bed, you will need three boards of 8 foot lumber: two for the long sides, and one to cut in half for the short sides.
  - a. You can remove the stakes/string if you are assembling the bed in place.
  - b. We find that the buddy system works best for bed assembly. One person can hold a corner in place, while the other connects the boards using a hammer and nails or a power drill and screws.
    - i. If using a power drill, pre-drill your holes so that your lumber does not split.
  - c. You should make this a double raised bed if you plan to grow root vegetables or any vegetables with deep roots such as tomatoes, kale, collards, corn, and squash. A single-level raised bed is fine for herbs and baby leafy greens such as arugula.
    - i. Build a second raised bed with the same dimensions as the first one.
    - ii. Place it on top of the first raised bed.
    - iii. Add a 2 inch x 4 inch piece of lumber (or any scrap untreated lumber) to each corner. Make sure the two beds are flush with one another and secure to the corner posts.



4. Once your raised bed is assembled, place it in its final spot if you have not already done so.
5. Use the level to see if it is even. If it's not even, use stones, bricks, or excess soil to raise up a low corner or edge.
6. Fill the raised bed with soil. The soil should be flat and level with the top of the raised bed. One cubic yard of soil will fill one 8 foot x 4 foot raised bed.



Drawings by Clarisa Diaz, WNYC

### **Maintenance:**

It is best practice to add a few inches of compost to top off your raised bed at the start or end of each season. It is important to keep the soil level full to the top of your raised bed so that your plant roots have enough space to grow and do not grow into the underlying soil. This practice also helps to replenish nutrients in the soil after growing delicious vegetables all season long! If the soil levels in your bed gets too low, it may be necessary to fill it with a soil and compost mix, not just compost.

Fill containers to the top with clean soil



Drawings by Clarisa Diaz, WNYC

### **Pathways and Open Spaces:**

Pathways, seating areas, and other open spaces in the garden should be covered with mulch such as wood chips. This keeps the dust down and helps to avoid your clean raised bed soil from being contaminated when the wind blows. Mulch also helps build organic matter in the underlying soil, binding up contaminants and making them unavailable for the plants to take up.

The first year you add mulch to the bare soil in your garden, you should add a depth of 3 inches for mulch (finely ground, somewhat broken down wood chips) or 6 inches of fresh wood chips. After that, you can top off the paths each year with 1-2 inches.

You can fill out the request form at any GreenThumb workshop to request mulch or wood chips.

### **Additional Resources:**

To learn more about safe soil practices, check out the following resources:

- Cornell University Healthy Soils, Healthy Communities - [blogs.cornell.edu/healthysouls/](https://blogs.cornell.edu/healthysouls/)
- Cornell Waste Management Institute's Dept. of Crop & Soil Sciences: [cwmi.css.cornell.edu/soilquality.htm](https://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/soilquality.htm)
- NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene - [www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/urban-gardening.page](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/urban-gardening.page)
- NYC Urban Soils Institute - [usi.nyc](https://usi.nyc.gov/)
- NYC Compost Project - [www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/our-work/reduce-reuse-recycle/community-composting](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dsny/site/our-work/reduce-reuse-recycle/community-composting)

# Garden Structures

Structures such as casitas, greenhouses, sheds, and gazebos can help a community garden have space for gatherings and relaxation, extend their gardening season, and store supplies.

## Structures and Buildings

### GreenThumb Policy:

The policy in this section is required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

- GreenThumb garden groups under NYC Parks must submit plans for new garden structures to their Outreach Coordinator for approval.

### NYC Law:

All structures built in community gardens must meet requirements as issued by the Department of Buildings:

Regardless of zoning district, greenhouses or gazebos constructed by NYC Parks, or other authorized agent, on city-owned land used as “vest pocket” gardens may be treated similar to accessory buildings for open parking lots as outlined in NYCBC S.27-297 (d). Such structures may be constructed with combustible material and work permits shall not be required if such structures are:

- not more than one story
- not more than 10 feet in height (greenhouses are limited to one story or 15 feet above the adjoining grade, whichever is less, as per Section 23-44(b) of NYC Zoning Code)
- not more than 150 square feet in area
- set back at least six feet from the lot line
- non-occupiable spaces only, such as storage if the structure is enclosed; and occupiable spaces for resting with seating if the structure is open on all sides (similar to bench seating in gazebos)

Sheds must be:

- no more than 120 square feet
- unobstructive of any required window
- set back 3 feet from the property line.

Gardens with structures out of compliance with the above guidelines must obtain building permits from the Department of Buildings or modify their structures as necessary to meet the above guidelines.

## Utilities

### GreenThumb Policies:

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

- If the garden group wishes to run electricity or water from a neighboring building into the garden, the garden group must first submit to their Outreach Coordinator a written agreement between the garden group and the landlord/property owner of the building stating the garden group’s permission to do so. You must then get written permission from GreenThumb.

- If the garden wishes to install internal water access, the garden group must:
  - Talk to your Outreach Coordinator about your options and how much it might cost – this can cost tens of thousands of dollars. You can talk to your elected officials about discretionary funding for water installation.
  - For community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction, if GreenThumb approves your plan and the garden group has secured funding, installation happens through NYC Parks Capital. NYC Parks will turn the water on in the spring and off in the fall. The garden will not be required to pay for it.
- For community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction, if the garden wishes to install internal electricity, the garden group must:
  - Talk to your Outreach Coordinator and get written permission from GreenThumb
  - If getting permission from GreenThumb, get a contractor, who will get a construction permit to install electricity
  - Con Ed and the garden group will sign a legal agreement that absolves NYC Parks of responsibility for paying for the electricity. The garden group is responsible for these payments.
  - Secure funding for the installation and ongoing utilities payments

## **Property Management**

NYC Parks has a responsibility to ensure that all public open space under its jurisdiction is safe and accessible. Part of this responsibility includes actively managing the properties, the boundaries of the lots, and appropriate access. This section applies only to community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

### **Encroachment and Egress**

As part of GreenThumb's property management responsibilities, we are working to prevent and correct encroachment and illegal egress issues at all community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

#### *Encroachment*

Encroachment occurs when a property owner builds on or extends a structure onto their neighbor's land or property. Encroachment can also describe the unlawful, gradual crossing of legal boundaries, such as a building extending on to neighboring private or public land, or beyond the building line of a road or street. For example, scaffolding built within a community garden's boundaries that is for a neighboring building is an encroachment.

#### *Illegal egress*

Illegal egress occurs when a private entrance is built from private property onto public property. For example, a private gate along the fence that separates a community garden from a private backyard is an illegal egress.

### **Construction Permits**

In some cases, Parks may allow a contractor or other entity working on an adjacent property to perform work that impacts a garden. These permit agreements will be made on a case-by-case basis and require approval from the GreenThumb Director, the Parks Borough Chief, and Parks Permit Office. GreenThumb will work with the garden group to minimize and correct disruption and damage to the garden.

#### *GreenThumb Policies:*

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

- Under no circumstances should a contractor be allowed to perform work in a community garden under NYC Parks jurisdiction before obtaining a Parks Construction Permit.

- Garden members who interact with a contractor or developer should get their contact info and information about the project and let their Outreach Coordinator know as soon as possible.
- Take pictures of the garden prior to any potential activity and document any damage that has occurred.
- Any accidents in, or damage to, a garden under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks requires the completion of an incident report. Please contact your Outreach Coordinator to receive additional copies of the incident report.
  - Gardeners should not attempt to correct any damage caused by a contractor without contacting GreenThumb for advice and documenting the damage first.
- After obtaining a Parks Construction Permit, contractors must contact GreenThumb before accessing or performing work within a GreenThumb garden. GreenThumb will schedule a site visit with the garden group, contractors, and GreenThumb staff to develop a plan to minimize disruption and damage to the garden.
- Contractors may not dump in GreenThumb gardens. If a contractor breaks this policy:
  - Obtain contractor contact information and Department of Buildings work permit numbers.
  - Make a complete inventory of damaged or destroyed property.
  - Take pictures to document if anything gets destroyed, including structures, raised bed beds, trees, shrubs, perennial plants, and furniture.
  - Call 311 or use the NYC 311 app to report the dumping. Write down the “request number” that you receive from 311 for your records.
  - Alert your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator, who will complete an incident report.
- Contractors who damage gardens will be required to:
  - Clean up and remove all fallen debris
  - Immediately remove all construction materials from the garden
  - Refill any excavation with clean fill
  - Replant all damaged plant material
  - Fix and/or replace any damaged structures

*NYC Law:*

- Contractors may not erect any scaffolding inside, in front of, or attached to the garden without a Parks permit under any circumstances.

**Information for Contractors:**

This section is for community gardeners to share with contractors who have questions about the NYC Parks construction permitting process.

**In order to perform construction work in or near a community garden under NYC Parks jurisdiction, contractors must:**

- **Submit a project scope and design to the NYC Parks Interagency Coordination Office at [Interagency@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:Interagency@parks.nyc.gov).**  
The Interagency Coordination Office will work with GreenThumb to seek approval for the project and ensure compliance with GreenThumb protocol for access to and communication with community gardens.

If you are not sure whether your project requires a Parks Construction Permit, NYC Parks offers and encourages review of projects in their scoping phase (even before any plans or drawings have been developed), as well as review for permitting when a project is closer to final design. Please email our Interagency Coordination office at the email address above if you have any questions about whether your project would require a construction permit, and include electronic copies of your scoping documents and preliminary designs.

- **Apply for an NYC Parks Construction Permit** at [nycgovparks.org/permits/construction](https://nycgovparks.org/permits/construction).  
If you are with an entity (government agency, utility, public authority, public benefit corporation, private developer/contractor, or otherwise) that seeks to perform work or secure access through property under Parks jurisdiction, you must apply for a Parks Construction Permit. Permits are required for any project that affects community gardens under the Parks jurisdiction. Work includes not only construction, but also staging, storage, surveying, soil boring, and access through community gardens.
- **Apply for a Tree Work Permit** at [nycgovparks.org/services/forestry/tree-work-permit](https://nycgovparks.org/services/forestry/tree-work-permit).  
If your project may impact a tree under Parks jurisdiction, you may need a Tree Work Permit in addition to a Construction Permit. In a case where both permits apply, if your project is near a tree, NYC Parks will not issue a Construction Permit until you have first obtained a Tree Work Permit.
- **Additional Permit Requirements**  
In addition to the Parks Construction Permit and Tree Work Permit, additional permits, including permits from the NYC Department of Buildings, the NYC Department of Transportation, or the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, may also be needed before your project can begin. You will also be responsible to satisfy any relevant environmental review requirements (e.g. CEQR, SEQRA, or NEPA) before proceeding. Please review all local, state, and federal regulations related to your project.
- **After Construction**  
When the project is complete, GreenThumb will conduct a site visit with the contractors and garden group to assess any damage, and, if necessary, pursue restitution.

Please email our Interagency Coordination office at [Interagency@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:Interagency@parks.nyc.gov) if you have any questions about whether your proposed project area affects assets under Parks jurisdiction or control.

## Hydrant Access

Registered GreenThumb gardens in good standing are able to get a hydrant permit from the NYC Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to access water from a nearby fire hydrant to irrigate their plants. It is a good idea to introduce yourself to the local fire department workers in your neighborhood. Explain to them that you will be accessing the hydrant to water a GreenThumb community garden. Let them know when you will begin to access the water (in the spring) and let them know when you plan to be finished for the season (in the fall). If you need your hydrant uncapped, present your hydrant permit to your fire department and they can do this for you.

### GreenThumb Policies:

Each year, GreenThumb mails out a letter to garden contacts with instructions on obtaining a Hydrant Permit, and a list of DEP offices that will issue you a permit.

- Provide the letter and envelope from GreenThumb to the DEP office to obtain your permit and reduced pressure zone device (RPZ).
- The RPZ is required when using the hydrant, and must be returned back to the DEP office annually, by October 31, in order to receive a permit and device again the following year. If you lose the RPZ, you must purchase a new lead-free device from a hardware store.
- Send a copy of your permit to GreenThumb and keep a laminated copy at the garden.
- Show your permit to your Outreach Coordinator to receive a hydrant wrench and hydrant adaptor, if available and if your garden does not have these items already.

This process can take time, especially as the season progresses, so we recommend doing this as soon as possible. Hydrant Permits must be obtained each year and cannot be shared or transferred, including construction sites.

GreenThumb generally hosts educational workshops in the spring related to water use and conservation. Some gardens may be eligible to receive a rainwater harvesting system from GreenThumb. If you are interested in learning more about rainwater harvesting, you can visit GrowNYC's website at [grownyc.org/openspace/rainwater-harvesting](http://grownyc.org/openspace/rainwater-harvesting).

### DEP Borough Offices:

#### **Bronx:**

Bureau of Customer Service  
Bronx Borough Office  
1932 Arthur Avenue, 6th Fl.  
Bronx, New York 10457  
(718) 466-8460

#### **Manhattan:**

Bureau of Customer Service  
Manhattan Borough Office  
1250 Broadway, 8th Fl.  
New York, New York 10001  
(212) 643-2215

#### **Staten Island:**

Bureau of Customer Service  
Staten Island Borough Office  
60 Bay Street, 6th Fl.  
Staten Island, New York 10301  
(718) 876-6831

#### **Brooklyn:**

Bureau of Customer Service  
Brooklyn Borough Office  
250 Livingston Street, 8th Fl.  
Brooklyn, New York 11201  
(718) 923-2647

#### **Queens:**

Bureau of Customer Service  
Queens Borough Office  
96-05 Horace Harding  
Expressway, 1st Fl.  
Queens, New York 11373  
(718) 595-4619

## To Attach a Hose to your Hydrant:

1. Get a DEP Hydrant Permit from any DEP office
  - a. You or your garden's GreenThumb contacts will receive a letter in the mail from GreenThumb each February. Bring both the letter and the envelope it came in to the DEP office listed on the letter.
  - b. You should also pick up an RPZ at the DEP office while you're getting the Hydrant Permit. You must return the RPZ back to the DEP office by October 31 if you want to keep acquiring Hydrant Permits each year. Do not lose an RPZ! But if you lose it, you can buy a replacement at most hardware stores: 3/4" Back Siphonage Protection, or online at watts.com (SKU# 0792088)
  
2. With your garden group, decide upon a set location to store the hydrant wrench, RPZ, and adaptor. These items should always be returned to the same location so the group knows where to find them.
  
3. Attach the hose to the hydrant
  - a. Attach a hose nozzle to the end of the hose
  - b. Using the hydrant wrench, attach the hydrant adaptor to the hydrant
  - c. Attach the RPZ to the hydrant adaptor
  - d. Connect the hose to the hydrant adaptor
    - i. TIP: Tie plastic bags around the connections to reduce spraying on to the sidewalks.
    - ii. TIP: Don't drag the male end of the garden hose on the sidewalk or street. This will degrade the exposed threads and cause leaks.
    - iii. TIP: Hose washers can help reduce leakages.
    - iv. TIP: Look both ways before crossing the street!
  
4. Open the hydrant
  - a. Step on the hose nozzle while you're turning on the hydrant to hold it down
  - b. Open the hydrant until you hear the "hiss" of air.
  - c. Turn only a QUARTER of a turn for your water and then stop. That's it. Otherwise the water pressure might be too high for your hose.
  
5. Return the hydrant wrench back to its storage location for safe keeping



Photos are screenshots from the 6BC Botanical Garden's how-to video, used with permission. Learn more on their website: [6bcgarden.org/how-to-water-the-garden](http://6bcgarden.org/how-to-water-the-garden)

# Tree Care, Pruning, and Removal

GreenThumb gardeners are encouraged to prune small shrubs, bushes, and fruit trees in their gardens. Pruning is important for tree health, however it must be done safely and correctly.

## GreenThumb Guidelines:

- The garden group should decide on a plan for tree care and pruning. Designate at least two co-pruners who will oversee the garden's pruning needs.
- Pruning should always happen with at least two people: one to prune, and one to double check which cuts to make and ensure safe practices.

## GreenThumb Policies:

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

- Garden groups must get written permission from GreenThumb to plant new trees and remove existing trees, even if damaged, diseased, or dead.
- No gardener may cut, remove, root slice, or otherwise damage a tree inside the community garden or street tree adjacent to the site without prior authorization from GreenThumb and NYC Parks Forestry.
- If you want to prune your garden's trees yourself, you must first take a tree pruning course. Gardeners who have completed the Citizen Pruner Course offered by Trees New York ([treesny.org](http://treesny.org)) or another recognized pruning training such as Bronx Green-Up's certification ([nybg.org/gardens/bronx-green-up](http://nybg.org/gardens/bronx-green-up)) may handle basic pruning needs in the garden. This includes dead, diseased, or crossing branches. Please submit a copy of your certification to your Outreach Coordinator if you plan to prune trees in the garden.
- All pruning in the garden must be completed on the ground – no climbing trees or ladders in order to prune unless the garden group has brought in a licensed professional. Any arborist hired by a garden group requires a permit from NYC Parks prior to performing any work in the garden.

## NYC Parks Forestry Protocol:

All GreenThumb gardeners must follow this protocol for trees within the garden, immediately adjacent to the garden, and any neighboring street trees.

- **Tree Service Requests** - [nyc.gov/parks/trees](http://nyc.gov/parks/trees)

NYC Parks prunes street trees every seven years through the block pruning program. However, if you see an emergency tree condition (i.e. a hanging branch or precariously damaged tree), please submit a request through the NYC Street Tree Map ([nyc.gov/parks/treemap](http://nyc.gov/parks/treemap)), the NYC Parks website ([nyc.gov/parks/trees](http://nyc.gov/parks/trees)), or call 311.

For trees on city-owned property, gardeners can request tree service through their Outreach Coordinators, who will then work with GreenThumb Operations and NYC Parks Forestry to determine next steps. Service requests include dealing with damaged and fallen trees, dead tree and stump removal, woody debris removal (in neighborhoods affected by the Asian longhorned beetle), street tree planting, and illegal tree work and damage. Tree damage incidents include physical injuries to the tree such as root cutting, limb pruning, and trunk or stem injury (including affixing signs to trees). Tree damage may also occur if the environment around the tree is impacted, such as soil damage due to the stockpiling of heavy materials under the tree, and compaction caused by pedestrian foot traffic and vehicles compressing the soil. Compaction prevents water and oxygen filtration and can eventually lead to the death of the tree.

- **Parks Tree Removal Protocol**

The urban forestry mission of NYC Parks is to preserve, protect and enhance the park, street and forest trees under its jurisdiction. It is the policy of NYC Parks to avoid the removal of trees wherever possible. There are only four situations in which a tree under the jurisdiction of Parks may be removed: (1) if the tree is dead, (2) if the tree is irreversibly diseased, (3) if the tree presents a hazard and (4) if there is an unavoidable conflict between the tree and a construction project. NYC Parks has a clear removal policy for trees that are dead or impacted by deadly pests and diseases such as Dutch elm disease, Asian longhorned beetle, emerald ash borer, and oak wilt. These trees will be inspected and managed either through removal or treatment.

If your tree matches any of these conditions, you can put in a request for tree removal at [nyc.gov/parks/trees](http://nyc.gov/parks/trees), call 311, or ask your Outreach Coordinator to put in a request for you.

- **Construction-Related Tree Removal Permit Requests**

Trees under NYC Parks jurisdiction, including community gardens, can only be removed with a Tree Work Permit from NYC Parks. Construction-related tree removal requests are submitted to Parks by contractors, developers, private homeowners, and other public agencies involved in building projects in New York City. For more information on construction related permit requests, visit [nycgovparks.org/services/forestry/tree-work-permit](http://nycgovparks.org/services/forestry/tree-work-permit).

## **NYC Law:**

- NYC Parks Rules and Regulations regarding trees derive from Title 56 of the Rules of the City of New York. The tree removal standard reads:

§ 1-04(b)(1)

- (i) No person shall cut, remove, or destroy any trees under the jurisdiction of the Department without permission of the Commissioner. Violation of this subparagraph constitutes a misdemeanor punishable by not more than six months imprisonment or by a fine of not more than \$15,000, or by both. For purposes of this subparagraph, "destroy" shall include, but not be limited to, kill, carve, prune, or inflict other physical damage to the tree.
- (ii) No person shall deface or write upon any trees under the jurisdiction of the Department.
- (iii) No person shall deface, write upon, sever, mutilate, kill or remove from the ground any plants, flowers, shrubs or other vegetation under the jurisdiction of the Department without permission of the Commissioner

In some cases of arboricide, when a tree has been removed either by accident or design before an inspector for Parks has been able to evaluate its condition, the City may calculate restitution payments, to be paid by the responsible party.

## **Additional Resources:**

- Submit a Tree Service Request - [nycgovparks.org/services/forestry](http://nycgovparks.org/services/forestry)
- Learn more about New York City's Urban Forest - [nyc.gov/parks/trees](http://nyc.gov/parks/trees)
- Trees New York Citizen Pruner Certification - [treesny.org/](http://treesny.org/)
- Bronx Green-Up at the New York Botanical Garden - [nybg.org/gardens/bronx-green-up/events/](http://nybg.org/gardens/bronx-green-up/events/)
- Community Greening at Brooklyn Botanic Garden - [bbg.org/community](http://bbg.org/community)
- Queens Botanical Garden - [queensbotanical.org](http://queensbotanical.org)

# Animals in the Garden

Community gardens offer many benefits to our neighborhoods, and these quiet green spaces can be the perfect habitat for local wildlife and other animals. This section lays out citywide policies to maintain a safe and healthy community garden while welcoming desired animals. References under the “Additional Resources” sections are informational only and do not represent GreenThumb policy. Please seek out help from your Outreach Coordinator who will be able to provide technical support or put you in touch with an expert in the field if your garden group has questions about animals in the garden.

## Domesticated Animals

Animals are permitted to be kept in the garden only in compliance with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), NYC Parks regulations ([nycgovparks.org/rules](http://nycgovparks.org/rules)), all applicable city, state, and federal law, GreenThumb policies listed in the License Agreement and in this Handbook, and any applicable best practices. Any violation of the city rules will result in a GreenThumb violation and possibly a fine. No domesticated animal kept in a GreenThumb community garden may cause nuisance conditions, and it is the gardeners’ responsibility to maintain them safely and in accordance with city, state, and federal law.<sup>2</sup>

NYC Health Code Article 161.02 defines animal nuisances as including, but not limited to:

“animal feces, urine, blood, body parts, carcasses, vomitus and pervasive odors; animals that carry or are ill with contagious diseases communicable to persons or other animals; and dangerous dogs. A beekeeping nuisance shall mean conditions that include, but not be limited to, aggressive or objectionable bee behaviors, hive placement or bee movement that interferes with pedestrian traffic or persons residing on or adjacent to the hive premises; and overcrowded, deceased or abandoned hives.”

If the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene receives a complaint, a DOHMH inspector will come to assess the property. Roosters and other illegal animals such as turkeys and geese (other than wild turkeys and geese who might visit your garden on their own) will be taken from the garden and the group may be fined.

### Dogs

#### *GreenThumb Policy:*

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

- As per NYC Parks rules, garden groups in gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction may not prohibit dogs in their bylaws or posted garden rules. If you have specific questions about dogs please reach out to your Outreach Coordinator.

#### *New York State Law:*

- Only properly licensed dogs who have been vaccinated for rabies may enter GreenThumb gardens.
- Dogs must wear collars with valid license tags.

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<sup>2</sup> Many of these rules can be found on the NYC Parks website at [nycgovparks.org/rules](http://nycgovparks.org/rules).

The Rules of the City of New York outline many of these rules in the following sections:

- Title 24: Title IV: Environmental Sanitation: Article 161 - Animals
- Title 24: Title II: Control of Disease: Article 11 - Reportable Diseases and Conditions
- Title 56: Section 1-04: Prohibited Uses

- Dogs must be on a leash that is 6 feet long or less. Dogs must be under the control of their owner. It is a GreenThumb violation and illegal to leave a dog unattended in a garden.
- Dog waste must be cleaned up and disposed of promptly and properly.

*Additional Resources:*

- For more information about dogs in NYC Parks: [nycgovparks.org/facilities/dogareas](http://nycgovparks.org/facilities/dogareas)

**Feral Cats**

Feral cats wander in and out of our community gardens. The sterilization of feral cats helps to control feral cat populations and lessen occurrences such as fighting, mating, and males spraying foul-smelling urine. This pursuit requires a group effort by individuals, community garden groups, programs, and agencies. Please recognize that it is a public health issue to have feral cats in the garden. When feral cats defecate in and around vegetable beds it creates a health hazard. Gardens may prohibit feeding of feral cats at their discretion in their bylaws.

*Supportive Organizations:*

Take a free TNR workshop or online course to become certified in how to trap, sterilize, and manage feral cats. With this certification you can become eligible for free spay/neuter procedures, rabies vaccinations, low-cost veterinary support, transportation of trapped cats from your neighborhood, and other resources.

- NYC Feral Cat Initiative (Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals)

NYCFeralCat.org  
[info@NYCFeralCat.org](mailto:info@NYCFeralCat.org)  
 (212) 330-0033

- Neighborhood Cats

neighborhoodcats.org  
[headcat@neighborhoodcats.org](mailto:headcat@neighborhoodcats.org)  
 (212) 662-5761

*Additional Resources:*

- Alley Cat Allies [alleycat.org/community-cat-care/](http://alleycat.org/community-cat-care/)
- Humane Society [humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/pets/feral-cats/overview-caring-comm-cats.pdf](http://humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/pets/feral-cats/overview-caring-comm-cats.pdf)
- Best Friends Community Cat Care Handbook [bestfriends.org/resources/community-cat-programs-handbook-stray-and-feral-cats-resource](http://bestfriends.org/resources/community-cat-programs-handbook-stray-and-feral-cats-resource)
- Cornell Feline Health Center – Toxoplasmosis in Cats [vet.cornell.edu/departments-centers-and-institutes/cornell-feline-health-center/health-information/feline-health-topics/toxoplasmosis-cats](http://vet.cornell.edu/departments-centers-and-institutes/cornell-feline-health-center/health-information/feline-health-topics/toxoplasmosis-cats)

**Chickens**

Chickens can make a great addition to a community garden. They are great companions, can help your garden with weeding and fertilization, and lay eggs! This section covers the basic rules and regulations for keeping hens in NYC. For more in-depth information about how to raise chickens, see the resources section at the end.

*Guidelines:*<sup>3</sup>

Garden groups should carefully consider whether or not to raise chickens in the garden – they require a considerable investment of time and money, and someone must take care of the chickens every day.

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted with permission from the *Just Food City Chicken Guide, Fourth Edition*.

Maintenance responsibilities include:

- Chickens need food and water daily.
- Eggs must be collected daily.
- The coop needs to be cleaned regularly.
- Sometimes chickens get sick or need extra care. This takes extra time.
- While chickens can be inexpensive, chicken feed does cost money. You will need to be able to buy chicken feed so your chickens get the right nutrients.
- Take extra care during heat waves to make sure your chickens stay cool. Make sure you select breeds of chickens that are winter hardy and that your chickens' water doesn't freeze as temperatures drop.

Space:

- You will need to build a shelter for your chickens, called a coop, with a protected outdoor area attached to the coop, which is called a run. Please see the GreenThumb policies below for size requirements.
- Chickens eat soil and insects when they peck in the ground as part of their diet. Make sure the soil in and around the coop is clean and from a trusted source.



Sample chicken coop design from the Just Food City Chicken Guide. The enclosed area is the coop, and the open area, walled with hardware cloth or wire mesh, is the run. Image courtesy of Just Food.

#### *GreenThumb Policies:*

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction and encouraged for everyone else.

- Everyone in the garden should have a chance to weigh in on a chicken coop. Propose this idea at your garden's membership meetings and be sure the project follows the protocol for new ideas outlined in your garden's bylaws.
- Before adding chickens to your garden, you must submit a written plan to your Outreach Coordinator for approval. Approval is not guaranteed. Your plan must include:
  - Description of how the garden group proposed and decided upon this new project
  - Coop and run plan or drawing with dimensions and a materials list
  - Plan for caring for the chickens' health
  - List of who will be taking care of the chickens and their background with chicken care. The primary chicken caretaker(s) should have experience keeping chickens or completed a training or apprenticeship in chicken care.
- You must have a coop (hen house) and a run (enclosed, dedicated outdoor space) for your hens.
- Your chicken coop should provide 2-4 square feet for each hen. Your run should have 4 square feet per large hen or 2 square feet per bantam (small) hen.
- You must clean up after your hens regularly. It is illegal to allow your hens, or any other legal animals, to create any nuisance conditions. These include excessive noise, foul odors, or any other condition that constitutes a health or safety hazard.
- You must have a plan for taking care of the chickens on a daily basis.
- GreenThumb does not allow the raising of chickens for sale or slaughter in community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

#### NYC and New York State Law:

- No roosters or turkeys
  - It is illegal and a GreenThumb violation to keep roosters and turkeys. If you do have a rooster or turkey in your garden you must relocate it. If you are unable to do so on your own you must notify GreenThumb and we will work with the Department of Health to have the roosters or turkeys removed.
- Nuisance conditions
  - Hens are legal to keep as long as they do not cause nuisance conditions. If your neighbors notice nuisance conditions (i.e., foul smells, flies, vermin, and/or excessive noise) coming from your garden, you could encounter penalties. If your neighbors complain to the City, DOHMH inspectors will be sent out to inspect your chickens, which may result in fines.
- Coop size
  - You may build a structure for your chickens without obtaining a building permit, as long as it is under 150 square feet.
- Humane treatment
  - Under New York State law, you may not be cruel to your animals, which means you may not fight your chickens or abandon them, and you must give them food and water. You also may not sell or give away baby chicks (two months or younger) in any quantity less than six and without providing proper brooding facilities.<sup>4</sup>
- Selling eggs
  - Community gardeners can sell surplus produce, including eggs, only if the proceeds go back into the garden. You are permitted to sell the eggs from your hens without a permit<sup>5</sup>, but not live animals or meat. According to New York State Law, you need to make sure they are labeled with the egg size if you are selling eggs grown by someone else, although GreenThumb recommends sizing and labeling your eggs anyway. For more information on regulations for selling eggs, please visit Section 191.3 of Article 13-A of the Agriculture and Markets Law on the New York State Agriculture and Markets website.<sup>6</sup>

#### Additional resources:

- The *Just Food City Chicken Guide* - ask your Outreach Coordinator for a copy
- Books on raising chickens:
  - Damerow, Gail. *Storey's Guide to Raising Chickens*. Pownal, VT: Storey, 2010.
  - Damerow, Gail. *The Chicken Health Handbook, 2nd Edition: A Complete Guide to Maximizing Flock Health and Dealing with Disease*. Pownal, VT: Storey, 2015.
  - Kilarski, Barbara. *Keep Chickens! Tending Small Flocks in Cities, Suburbs, and Other Small Spaces*. Story Publishing, North Adams, Ma.. 2003.
- Informational website: [mypetchicken.com](http://mypetchicken.com)

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<sup>4</sup> New York State's Agriculture and Markets laws: [agriculture.ny.gov/AI/Laws\\_and\\_Regulations.html](http://agriculture.ny.gov/AI/Laws_and_Regulations.html).

<sup>5</sup> Farmers' Market Federation of New York – Market Managers' Checklist: [nyfarmersmarket.com/wp-content/uploads/Vendor-Permit-Requirements.pdf](http://nyfarmersmarket.com/wp-content/uploads/Vendor-Permit-Requirements.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> New York State regulations for selling eggs: [agriculture.ny.gov/FS/general/04circs/Circular854\\_eggs.html](http://agriculture.ny.gov/FS/general/04circs/Circular854_eggs.html)

## Parrots, Pigeons, and Other Birds

### *GreenThumb Policies:*

- Pigeons and parrots are not allowed to be kept as pets or in coops in GreenThumb community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

### *New York State Law:*

- Turkeys, ducks, geese, roosters, and other fowl are illegal to keep as pets in NYC.<sup>7</sup> As such, they may not be kept in GreenThumb gardens.

## Bees

Beekeeping with honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) is legal in NYC and has become a popular activity in all five boroughs - in community gardens, backyards, rooftop farms, schools, and even some restaurants.

### *Guidelines for getting started keeping bees:*<sup>8</sup>

1. Everyone in the garden should have a chance to weigh in on a beehive. Propose this idea at your garden's membership meetings and be sure the project follows the protocol for new ideas outlined in your garden's bylaws.
2. Identify a site within the garden that everyone agrees upon.
3. Talk to your garden's neighbors. You are likely to have neighbors who are skeptical or even fearful of your beekeeping plan. A little bit of information can go a long way to ease their worries.
  - a. Honeybees make great neighbors. They are quiet and among the tidiest creatures alive. Honeybees' entire purpose is to be productive and loyal to their hive and queen, so they will not stray except when going out to forage for pollen.
  - b. Honeybees are not yellow jackets, and will only sting if they are about to be crushed.
  - c. An average hive can produce a surplus of 20–50 pounds of honey per season, depending on the maturity of the hive and the season's nectar flow.
  - d. NYC requires that they have a notice on file of the address for the hive, but no permit is needed. There are no other requirements, but the City reserves the right to move the hive if it becomes a nuisance.
  - e. If any problem occurs, the hive can be donated to a local farm or another community garden.
4. Come up with a process for maintaining the hive. Who are the caretakers? How often will the caretakers check the hives, and how will they schedule hive checks so as to not open the hives when other members are in the garden or neighbors are enjoying their yards? How can other members learn how to become caretakers? How will information about how the hives are doing be communicated to the rest of the membership? What happens to the honey once it's harvested?
5. Fundraise! Installing a beehive from scratch can cost over \$1,000.
6. Order materials and bees and install the hive!

### *GreenThumb Policies:*

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction and encouraged for everyone else.

- Before adding bees to your garden, you must submit a written plan to your Outreach Coordinator for approval. Approval is not guaranteed. Your plan must include:
  - Information on how the garden group proposed and decided upon this new project.

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<sup>7</sup> NYC Health Code Articles 161.01b[11] and 161.19

<sup>8</sup> This section has been adapted with permission from the toolkit by Q Gardens in Brooklyn:

[citizensnyc.org/sites/default/files/public-attachments/resource/12\\_steps\\_to\\_start\\_a\\_community\\_beekeeping\\_project\\_-\\_q\\_gardens.pdf](https://citizensnyc.org/sites/default/files/public-attachments/resource/12_steps_to_start_a_community_beekeeping_project_-_q_gardens.pdf)

- A hive plan or drawing with dimensions and a materials list.
- A plan for caring for the bees' health and ongoing maintenance.
- A plan for outreach to neighboring buildings.
- A list of who will be taking care of the bees and their background with bee care. Make sure the primary bee caretaker(s) have experience keeping bees, have taken beekeeping classes with organizations such as [nycbeekeeping.org](http://nycbeekeeping.org), [bees.nyc](http://bees.nyc), or [brooklyngrangefarm.com/honey](http://brooklyngrangefarm.com/honey), or have apprenticed for at least one full year with a beekeeper at another garden.
- Locate your beehives appropriately. The hives should get direct sunlight at least in the morning, if not all day, and have a nearby source of water. Avoid locations that are close to main garden pathways or near a neighboring property. The hives should be as far from sidewalks as possible.
- Fence off your beehives with posts and netting, chicken wire, or another barrier, to prevent visitors from accidentally walking into the hive's immediate vicinity. The fence should be at least 3 feet away from the hives on all sides.
- Post signage on the hive fence alerting passersby to the presence of a beehive. We also encourage educational signage about honey bees.
- Community gardeners can sell honey if the proceeds go back into the garden.

*NYC and New York State Law:*

- First you must register your hives with New York State at [agriculture.ny.gov/PI/PI-134B.pdf](http://agriculture.ny.gov/PI/PI-134B.pdf). Submit a copy of this form to your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator for the garden's files.
- Once you're registered with New York State, you must register your hives annually by May 31 each year with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) at [www1.nyc.gov/nycbusiness/description/beekeeper-registration](http://www1.nyc.gov/nycbusiness/description/beekeeper-registration). Submit a copy of this form to your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator for the garden's files. According to New York City Health Code Article 161.01 sec. 12,

“all persons keeping honey bees (*Apis mellifera*) must file a notice with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene using the form linked to above. Beekeepers must also use appropriate practices to avoid creating a beekeeping nuisance. Article 161.02 describes a nuisance as conditions that include, but not limited to, aggressive or objectionable bee behaviors, hive placement or bee movement that interferes with pedestrian traffic or persons residing on or adjacent to the hive premises; and overcrowded, deceased, or abandoned hives.”

- NYC Beekeeping Operating Requirements:
  1. Beekeepers must maintain bee colonies in movable-frame hives that are kept in sound and usable condition. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene will inspect beehives upon complaint.
  2. Beekeepers must provide a constant and adequate water source for the bees.
  3. Beekeepers must locate hives on a site so that the movement of the bees does not become a nuisance.
  4. Beekeepers must be able to respond immediately to control bee swarms and to eliminate nuisance conditions.
  5. Beekeepers must update the registration information the NYC Department of Health has on record for their hive(s) within 10 days of any changes. On the Beekeeper Registration form, select "Revision".
- You do not need a license for selling honey as long as you do not purchase the honey from others for repackaging, and do not combine honey with any other substance such as flavorings.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For more information, visit [agriculture.ny.gov/FS/general/maple\\_syrup\\_honey.html](http://agriculture.ny.gov/FS/general/maple_syrup_honey.html)

### *Additional Resources:*

- NYC Beekeeping Meetup Group - [nycbeekeeping.org](http://nycbeekeeping.org)
- NYC Beekeeping Association - [bees.nyc](http://bees.nyc)
- Cornell University Master Beekeeper Program - [pollinator.cals.cornell.edu/master-beekeeper-program](http://pollinator.cals.cornell.edu/master-beekeeper-program)
- Cornell University General Beekeeping Resources - [pollinator.cals.cornell.edu/resources/general-beekeeping-resources](http://pollinator.cals.cornell.edu/resources/general-beekeeping-resources)
- New York Police Department (NYPD) Bee Unit – if you witness a bee swarm, you can call 311 to reach the NYPD officers who are trained and equipped to relocate a swarm of honeybees. They are also on Twitter at @NYPDBees!

### **Turtles**

Please see the section of this Handbook on Ponds and Water Features for more information about GreenThumb policy on water features.

#### *NYC and New York State Law:*

- You can keep domesticated or store-bought turtles in your garden, but gardeners may not keep native, wild turtles, including snapping turtles. For a list of native wild turtles visit [dec.ny.gov/animals/7479.html](http://dec.ny.gov/animals/7479.html).
- It is illegal to buy or sell any turtle that is 4 inches or shorter due to risk of salmonella infection.
- Any turtles kept in the garden may not create nuisance conditions.
- Domesticated or store-bought turtles may not be released into the wild outside the garden.
- Red-eared sliders are considered by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to be an invasive species and may not be released into ponds, streams, lakes, or sewers outside the GreenThumb garden.<sup>10</sup> If you need to relocate a turtle, contact GreenThumb or a local pet store.

### **Rabbits**

Domesticated rabbits are legal as pets in NYC. They are allowed in gardens as long as they are kept in an appropriate pen or hutch and do not cause “nuisance conditions.” Wild rabbits may not be kept as pets, though they may stop by your garden for a visit!

#### *GreenThumb policies:*

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction and encouraged for everyone else.

- Before adding rabbits to your garden, you must submit a written plan to your Outreach Coordinator for approval. Approval is not guaranteed. Your plan must include:
  - Information on how the garden group proposed and decided upon this new project
  - Plan or drawing with dimensions and a materials list for the hutch
  - Plan for caring for the rabbits’ food, litter, and health, including play and quality time with caretakers, since domesticated rabbits are social creatures
  - List of who will be taking care of the rabbits and their background with rabbit care
- Domesticated rabbits need to be sheltered in a hutch to protect them from the elements as well as predators. The hutch must be at least 8 feet x 3 feet x 3 feet per rabbit to give your rabbit(s) space to move around. It must be well-ventilated, secure, and roofed with water-proof material.
- Rabbits need food, water, and social attention and/or play time daily.
- The hutch needs to be lined with newspaper, straw, or other bedding, and cleaned regularly.
- Rabbits may need to move indoors during the winter if it gets too cold or during the summer if there is a thunderstorm - have a plan for this.

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<sup>10</sup> New York State regulations for selling eggs: [dec.ny.gov/animals/99141.html](http://dec.ny.gov/animals/99141.html)

*New York State Law*<sup>11</sup>:

- You must provide proper food and drink to your rabbits, and not abandon them.

### **Fish and Aquaponics**

Gardens with GreenThumb-approved and well-maintained water features may keep koi and other small fish. Aquaponics is an agricultural practice that combines aquaculture (farming fish, crayfish, etc.) with hydroponics (growing food plants in a nutrient-rich water solution instead of soil) for the mutual benefit of both the fish and the plants; fish waste feeds the plants and the plants filter the water for the fish.

Please see the Ponds and Water Features section of this Handbook for more information on protocol for the installation of ponds and other water features.

*Guidelines for aquaponics*<sup>12</sup>:

- Everyone in the garden should be in agreement about installing an aquaponics system. Propose this idea at your garden's membership meetings and be sure the project follows the protocol for new ideas outlined in your garden's bylaws.
- Maintain healthy water quality:
  - pH: 6.0 - 8.5
  - Total ammonia nitrogen: 0.5 - 1 mg/l
  - Temperature for growth: 70° - 90° Fahrenheit
  - Temperature for spawning: 77° - 86° Fahrenheit
  - Dissolved Oxygen: > 5ppm

*GreenThumb policies:*

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction and encouraged for everyone else.

- Before adding fish or aquaponics to your garden, you must submit a written plan to your Outreach Coordinator for approval from GreenThumb. Approval is not guaranteed. Your plan must include:
  - Drawing with dimensions and a materials list.
  - Plan for ongoing maintenance, how gardeners will be trained, and who will have access to the fish. The plan should show that you have researched proper care of the type(s) of fish that you plan to have in the garden.
  - Plan for harvesting and distributing any fish meant for eating.
- Ponds or water features with small fish or other pond wildlife must be at least 3.5 feet deep. Koi need at least 20 square feet in area.
- All ponds or water features must have a pump to aerate the water. Solar panels are a great option for powering your pump.
- All ponds must have a fence or barrier (thick shrubs, stone wall, etc.) with a child-proof gate
- Gardeners must post visible signage around and close to the pond with the following rules:
  - Visitors must supervise any children and dogs they bring to the garden
  - Dogs (and people) are prohibited from swimming in the pond
  - Fishing is prohibited
  - This water is not potable for human consumption
  - Any additional rules up to the garden's discretion: no throwing coins, no trash, etc.

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<sup>11</sup> New York State laws around animal care and animal cruelty: <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/AGM/A26>

<sup>12</sup> Adapted from the Aquaponics Toolkit from Oko Farms: [growtolearn.org/resource/aquaponics-toolkit-oko-farms/](http://growtolearn.org/resource/aquaponics-toolkit-oko-farms/)

### State Law<sup>13</sup>:

- Koi (*Cyprinus carpio*) and goldfish (*Carassius auratus*) are considered by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to be an invasive species and may not be released into ponds, streams, lakes, or sewers outside the GreenThumb garden. If you need to relocate fish, contact GreenThumb or a local pet store.
- Harvesting fish for edible consumption is regulated by state and federal law.

### Additional Resources:

- Cornell Cooperative Extension resource list: [ccenassau.org/gardening/water-gardens](http://ccenassau.org/gardening/water-gardens)
- Aquaponics Toolkit from Oko Farms: [growtolearn.org/resource/aquaponics-toolkit-oko-farms/](http://growtolearn.org/resource/aquaponics-toolkit-oko-farms/)

## Wildlife

New York City is full of wildlife. Chances are, throughout the season, many critters will pay your garden a visit. For detailed information about deer, raccoons, coyotes, mallards/ducks, red-tailed hawks, and more, visit [nyc.gov/wildlife](http://nyc.gov/wildlife).

It is a GreenThumb violation to feed any wild or stray animal (except birds). Feeding birds can also draw rats, so it is recommended to keep bird feeding areas tidy and limited to squirrel-proof feeders that hang from trees or structures.

### Raccoons

Since 2014, the City of New York has been cooperating with the federal government to vaccinate raccoons on Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Queens against rabies. For more information on dealing with raccoons, visit [nyc.gov/wildlife](http://nyc.gov/wildlife).

### Deer

White-tailed deer are herbivores, which means they eat plants. Sometimes, the plants in a garden are more appealing to deer than the plants in nearby natural areas. For more information, visit [nyc.gov/wildlife](http://nyc.gov/wildlife).

### Squirrels

One of the most annoying garden pests, squirrels are famous for taking a bite out of a tomato and then walking away. Here are some tips for dealing with squirrels in the vegetable garden from the University of Massachusetts Amherst Center for Agriculture, Food, and the Environment ([ag.umass.edu](http://ag.umass.edu)):

- Small domes or cages made of fine mesh (1/2 inch to exclude chipmunks) wire can protect individual plants or small rows until the plants, or crops, mature.
- Plant extracts such as capsicum (hot pepper or cayenne powder), garlic, mustard oils, and others, which repel based on taste or skin irritation
- Remove nearby resources that attract wildlife: bird feeders, bird baths, pet food, watering bowls, and unsecured garbage containers.
- Enclose compost that includes fruit and vegetable scraps in pest-proof bins.

### Rats

The bane of every New Yorker, rats sometimes find their way into community gardens. There are many precautions gardeners can take to prevent rats, as well as courses of action for if and when they show up. Information for this section was derived from DOHMH materials. For more information, visit [nyc.gov/rats](http://nyc.gov/rats).

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<sup>13</sup> New York State regulations on invasive species: [dec.ny.gov/animals/99141.html](http://dec.ny.gov/animals/99141.html)

## *Prevent Rats*

Rats seek out places to live that provide them with everything they need to survive: food, water, shelter and safe ways for them to get around. Rats like to build nests or burrows in the earth and prefer traveling along the same paths over and over—often using walls, fences, and bushes to find their way.

- Keep the garden tidy. Debris and garbage piles are perfect hiding and nesting spots.
- Compost bins must be lined with 1/4 inch hardware cloth. An enclosed elevated tumbler can also be used for the first step of composting. Most importantly, an actively managed compost bin is disruptive to rats!
- Keep bare soil covered. You can use wood chips, gravel, mulch, and more.
- Talk to your neighbors! Are they storing their trash properly in hard plastic or metal bins with tight fitting lids?
- Store all garbage in hard plastic rat-resistant containers with lids. Rats eat your garbage.
- Consider removing all trash cans from the garden and instituting a “carry in, carry out” policy for all members and visitors. Otherwise, provide enough trash containers to handle all of the garden’s trash. Any exposed trash will attract rats.
- Keep landscaped areas around your property free of tall weeds and trim shrubs that are close to the ground. Keep a plant-free zone 16 inches to 24 inches along fence lines, interior structures and neighboring buildings.
- Check for cracks or holes in the foundation of your building, sidewalk, and under doors and repair them by filling and sealing them.
- Prune low limbs off of shrubs and vegetables up to 8 inches off the ground to discourage burrowing.

## *Look for Evidence*

- Rats come out at night, so walk around outside with a flashlight after dark. This will help you see where rats are going, so you can check for burrows when it gets light.
- Look for places where rats live. Most rats live in nests or burrows. Burrows are holes in dirt or concrete from 1-4 inches wide, with smooth edges. Burrows can be found under bushes and plants. They will often have an entrance and exit hole.
- Look for droppings. Droppings are often found close to garbage.
- Look for holes and gnaw marks on wood and plastic garbage cans.

## *Clean Up*

Cleaning up and getting rid of clutter is an easy and effective way to prevent rats.

- Wash away droppings and track marks. Rats communicate and attract each other through their urine and droppings. Sweep up droppings, and clean up dark greasy track marks. Wash down the area with water and a mild bleach solution (one part bleach, 10 parts water).
- Get rid of clutter. Clutter gives rats lots of places to hide, sleep, nest and reproduce. Remove (and recycle) piles of newspapers, paper bags, cardboard and bottles. Store items away from walls and off the ground.
- Control weeds and shrubs. Rats are often found in burrows under bushes and plants. Keep tall grass, bushes, shrubs, and mulch away from building foundations. Pull out ivy around burrows. Keep ground bare 6 inches from buildings, and trim under shrubs. Make space between plants, and avoid dense planting. Keep gardens free of weeds and trash.

### *Starve Them*

Rats only need one ounce of food each day. Don't make your garbage their food.

- Manage your garbage. Bring garbage cans and bags to the curb as close to pickup time as possible. Leaving them out overnight invites rats. Make sure you have enough garbage cans to hold trash between pickups. Use hard plastic or metal cans with tight-fitting lids.
- Keep food away. Don't put food out for stray cats, pigeons, or squirrels.

### *Shut Them Out*

Rats chew holes into buildings, and can squeeze through cracks and holes as small as a half-inch. To keep rats out for good, seal all holes and cracks in garden structures. Use 1/4 inch hardware cloth for chicken coops and compost bins.

Finding burrows in your garden? Close them up! You can fill them with stalite, a type of gravel made from slate, or collapse burrows in soil by filling with soil and tamping down with a shovel, or by stepping on them. You can also use mortar or cement to fill gaps and holes in cement and paved areas. Cover large holes with metal lathe or screening, then seal with mortar or cement.

### *Wipe Them Out*

Rodent bait is an effective way to wipe out rats, but applying these poisons is a job for professionals. For all GreenThumb community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction, rodent abatement is handled by GreenThumb Operations and/or DOHMH. Visits from these crews will include inspection, instruction on integrated pest management (IPM), steps that you the gardener can do, and baiting as appropriate. Talk to your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator for more information on this option. If your garden group wishes to hire a professional, you must first get approval from GreenThumb on your vendor.

## Winter Maintenance Tips

As the winter months get closer, we encourage all garden groups to develop a winter management plan for any animals, water features, and rainwater harvesting systems, as well as a snow removal plan to ensure that you have a process in place to quickly remove snow and ice when it comes. If your garden group would like assistance in developing a plan, please contact your Outreach Coordinator. Maintenance of our gardens reflects on us all as members of the gardening community.

### Sidewalks

Clearing snow and ice from the sidewalks in front of gardens after a winter weather event is the responsibility of all gardeners under NYC Parks. Gardens not under NYC should check with their property owner. Keeping pedestrian corridors in front of gardens clear and passable is not only important to keeping members of your community safe, but it's also the law. A failure to clear the sidewalks in front of gardens located on City-owned property is a violation of the GreenThumb license agreement and of the NYC Administrative Code.

#### Guidelines:

Best practices for clearing the sidewalk of snow and ice:

- A group of people is recommended, not just one person.
  - If a larger sidewalk length adjoins the garden, it will require a larger group to clear the snow.
  - If a smaller sidewalk length adjoins the garden, it will require a smaller group to clear the snow.
- Take breaks! Lift at the knees, not your back! Know what is too much for you. Pace yourself when shoveling snow and do not do it alone.
- Spread salt conservatively after first round of shoveling, a little goes a long way.
  - If there is a layer of ice, let salt melt ice and then shovel it off sidewalk.
- If temperatures are below 20°F or the ice gets too thick, salt will not be as effective. You can use an ice breaker instead.
- The sidewalk should have a path through the snow that is 3 feet wide as per Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) design guidelines.

#### GreenThumb Policies:

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

- Garden groups must have a group plan for keeping sidewalks safe following snow storms
  - Which individuals will respond to snow storms? Who will respond when? GreenThumb recommends sharing the load - it should not be the same person every time.
  - Who can be on call to help shovel if there's more snow than usual? Make a back-up plan.
- GreenThumb garden groups under NYC Parks jurisdiction that do not clear sidewalks of snow and ice following DSNY regulations below are subject to a GreenThumb violation.



Shoveling snow at Jardin de la Roca. Photo by Salvador Dominguez, GreenThumb community gardener at Jardin de la Roca.

## **NYC Law:**

- Follow DSNY regulations for sidewalk maintenance following a snow storm:
  - Snow must be cleared within four daylight hours after the snow stops. If the snow stops falling between:
    - 7:00 a.m. – 4:49 p.m. – you must clear the snow within four hours
    - 5:00 p.m. – 8:59 p.m. – you must clear the snow within fourteen hours
    - 9:00 p.m. – 6:59 a.m. – you must clear the snow by 11:00 a.m.
  - Keep the fire hydrants clear of snow, ice and other debris

## **Garbage**

### **GreenThumb Policy:**

- Garbage and debris may end up in the garden or on the sidewalk. The garden group is still responsible for maintaining and cleaning the garden throughout the winter.

## **Open Hours**

### **GreenThumb Policy:**

- Between November 1st and March 31st, your garden is not required to be open to the public, but it can be.

## **Additional Winter Considerations**

- Maintain any domesticated animals that live in the garden, including chickens, in a safe and healthy manner. Continue to feed them daily, spend time with them, change their litter, and ensure that their water does not freeze during periods of low temperatures.
- Maintain proper care of water features, irrigation systems, and rainwater harvesting systems, to make sure pipes don't freeze, and any fish or turtles have a healthy habitat.
- Locks and hinges benefit from WD-40 in the winter to prevent sticking.
- Clean up the garden as the season comes to a close each fall. Clean and sharpen tools, organize the tool shed, remove any diseased or pest-infested plant residue so that they don't over-winter, top off your raised beds with compost and your pathways with woodchips, and take down any temporary trellises.

## Ponds and Water Features

Ponds can be tranquil, beautiful additions to a community garden when maintained properly and safely. They are also a lot of work. If your garden group has the capacity and ability to build and maintain a pond or water feature safely, please follow the requirements below.

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction and encouraged for everyone else.

### GreenThumb Policies:

- All ponds must have a pump to aerate the water.
  - Solar panels are a great option for powering your pump.
- All ponds must have a fence or barrier (thick shrubs, stone wall, etc.) with a child-proof gate or other appropriate barrier (36 inches tall) to ensure public safety.
- Ponds with small fish or other pond wildlife must be at least 3.5 feet deep.
  - Koi need at least 20 square feet in area.
- Garden groups must post visible signage around and close to the pond with the following rules:
  - Visitors must supervise any children they bring to the garden.
  - Dogs must be supervised in the garden at all times.
  - Swimming in the pond is prohibited (including dogs).
  - Fishing is prohibited.
  - This water is not potable for human consumption.
  - Any additional rules up to the garden's discretion: no throwing coins, no trash, etc.

### GreenThumb Protocol for Pond Installation:

- Everyone in the garden should have a chance to weigh in on a pond. Propose this idea at your garden's membership meetings and be sure the project follows the protocol for new ideas outlined in your garden's bylaws.



Pond at La Plaza Cultural surrounded by a slate barrier | Photo by Ariana Arancibia, GreenThumb.



Pond with appropriate safety features at Green Oasis Community Garden in Manhattan | Photo by Ariana Arancibia, GreenThumb.

- Submit a plan to your Outreach Coordinator. Your plan should include:
  - Description of how the garden group proposed and decided upon this new project
  - Drawings of the planned pond, including any fencing, plantings, and signage
  - A list of building materials
  - Safety considerations
  - A pumping system to aerate the water
  - Any plans for wildlife, including fish
  - Plans for avoiding mosquitoes
  - Plans for ongoing maintenance: Keeping the water clean, monitoring ammonia/nitrate levels, cleaning debris, maintaining the pump, monitoring for mosquitoes and algae, problem solving, etc.
- Your Outreach Coordinator will review your plan with GreenThumb policies and schedule a site visit.
- Your final design and proposal will be reviewed for safety, legal compliance, and borough operations considerations. Please be advised that not all ponds and water features will be approved - different sites have different considerations, and we will do our best to work with you on your idea.

## Events

Events are a fun way to involve the community, get to know your neighbors, and increase membership. Past events at community gardens around the city have included art shows, movie nights, live music, children's Halloween celebrations, farmers markets, harvest festivals, volunteer events, poetry readings, and more.

### GreenThumb Policies:

For registered GreenThumb community gardens under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks:

The GreenThumb license agreement requires that all gardens located on property under NYC Parks jurisdiction host at least two free community events each year and that gardens notify GreenThumb in advance. All events must be consistent with GreenThumb's mission and must receive prior written approval from GreenThumb.

All NYC Parks community gardens must submit a list of all planned community events within the Garden to their Outreach Coordinator quarterly for review and approval, by the following dates:

- **March 1:** For events proposed for April 1 – June 30
- **June 1:** For events proposed for July – Sept. 30
- **September 1:** For events proposed for Oct. 1 – Dec. 31
- **December 1:** For events proposed for Jan. 1 – March 30

For the purposes of this Handbook, a "planned community event" that requires the prior approval of GreenThumb shall mean any activity that:

- Requires any of the Approvals outlined below, or
- Results in the garden's closure to the general public during the garden's scheduled 20 open hours, or
- Invites in members of the general public as part of a planned community activities not related to the general operation and maintenance of the garden, or
- Any other event identified by NYC Parks as requiring prior approval

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 do not require notification to, or approval of, GreenThumb. Please note that submission does not equal approval, and approval timeframes differ depending on the complexity of the event, so please submit event requests as soon as you are aware of a possible event. Please note that processing times can vary for approvals and events should be submitted as soon possible in advance of the proposed date, but no later than the schedule outlined above, and that the submission of requests for approval does not guarantee that the event will be approved. The event is not approved until you receive an explicit written approval from GreenThumb, without which you are prohibited from holding the event.

**Late additions:** For any event that has not yet been scheduled as of the relevant submission date above, gardens must notify their GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator as soon as the event is scheduled.

In addition, gardens must obtain any and all other necessary approvals, permits, or other authorizations required by any federal, New York State or City laws, rules, regulations and orders applicable to any aspect of the operation of the event, including, but not limited to, any required Police Department amplified sound permit; Fire Department permit; Buildings Department permit; City and State Department of Health permit; or New York State Department of Environmental Protection permit. Upon request, GreenThumb will attempt to identify the required approvals, but it is the responsibility of each garden to

obtain any and all necessary approvals. Some instances where events, as defined above, may require additional approvals include:

- Third-party events: For any event hosted or co-hosted at the garden by a third party (i.e., not the licensed garden group), you must obtain prior written approval from GreenThumb.
- Open flames or use of generator: For any event that involves any open flame or heating element, or the use of certain generators, you must obtain prior written approval from NYC Parks and the appropriate permit(s) from FDNY.<sup>14,15</sup>
- 20 attendees or more: For any event with more than twenty expected attendees, you must obtain prior written approval from NYC Parks, and you may require additional approval from Department of Buildings for events with large attendance. Garden workdays, group meetings and other internal Garden events and operations do not require prior written approval.
- Amplified Sound: For any event with amplified sound, you must obtain an amplified sound permit from NYPD.<sup>16</sup> GreenThumb can issue a letter to garden groups in good standing that you can take to your local precinct to obtain a sound permit if needed.
- Exchange of Funds: For any event where goods or services are proposed to be sold, or revenues are otherwise generated, including but not limited to admission fees and/or ticket sales, you must obtain a Temporary Use Authorization (TUA) from the NYC Parks Revenue Division.<sup>17</sup> Please note that the sale of produce grown in the Garden is permitted as per the License and does not require prior approval.
- Filming & Photography: For any event involving commercial filming or photography, you must obtain a Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment permit in addition to prior written approval from NYC Parks.<sup>18</sup>

A list of New York City permits related to events can be found on the Citywide Event Coordination and Management Office website.<sup>19</sup> It is the responsibility of Gardens to obtain any and all required permits and/or approvals. Please notify your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator when you submit requests for approval.

Additionally:

- Unless an event is a fundraiser that has been permitted in writing by NYC Parks and/or GreenThumb in advance, as outlined in the license, groups may not refer to expected donations, required donations, recommended donations, ticket fees, or similar language. Please see the *Handling Money, Donations, and Sales* chapter of this Handbook for additional details.
- Garden groups can accept unsolicited individual cash and in-kind donations.
- GreenThumb encourages garden groups to build relationships with their elected officials. If the garden group would like to host an event related to a political campaign, they are required to get a Parks Special Events Permit.

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<sup>14</sup> FDNY Open Flame Permit: [www1.nyc.gov/site/fdny/business/all-certifications/per-openflames.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/fdny/business/all-certifications/per-openflames.page)

<sup>15</sup> FDNY Generator Permit: [www1.nyc.gov/site/cecm/permitting/new-york-city-fire-department.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/cecm/permitting/new-york-city-fire-department.page)

<sup>16</sup> NYPD Amplified Sound Permit: [www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/services/law-enforcement/permits-licenses-permits.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/services/law-enforcement/permits-licenses-permits.page)

<sup>17</sup> NYC Parks Temporary Use Authorization FAQ: [nycgovparks.org/pagefiles/76/TUA-FAQ.pdf](http://nycgovparks.org/pagefiles/76/TUA-FAQ.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Film & Photography Permit: [www1.nyc.gov/site/mome/permits/permits.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/mome/permits/permits.page)

<sup>19</sup> Citywide Event Coordination and Management: [www1.nyc.gov/site/cecm/permitting/supporting-permitting-agencies.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/cecm/permitting/supporting-permitting-agencies.page)

## NYC Law:

In addition to the permits listed above:

- **Citywide Event Coordination and Management:** Links to several agencies who issue permits - [www1.nyc.gov/site/cecm/permitting/supporting-permitting-agencies.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/cecm/permitting/supporting-permitting-agencies.page)
- **Street Closure**  
The Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO) issues permits for street festivals, block parties, farmers' markets, commercial or promotional events, and other events on the city's streets, sidewalks and pedestrian plazas. To apply for a street closure permit, visit [nyc.gov/sapo](http://nyc.gov/sapo) or call (212) 788-0025. This can take several months – start at least six months early.

## How GreenThumb can support:

- Attend one of our event planning workshops to learn simple, quick and easy steps to organize garden events and host smooth, fun-filled activities in your community garden.
- If you're not sure which approvals you need, you can reach out to your Outreach Coordinator for guidance.
- We can post announcements of garden events on GreenThumb's website and social media channels. Submit your event through the Event Listing Request Form at [nyc.gov/parks/greenthumb](http://nyc.gov/parks/greenthumb) to be listed on the GreenThumb online events calendar, and we'll post it as long as we receive it at least three weeks in advance.
- Tag us in your social media outreach about the event and we will repost on our social media platforms.
  - Facebook: GreenThumbNYC
  - Instagram: @greenthumbgrows
  - Twitter: @greenthumbgrows
  - Hashtag: #greenthumbgrows
- After you've had your event, send us pictures! We can post them on social media or include them in our printed publications.
- If your group is particularly interested in having a GreenThumb workshop or event take place at your garden, or if you have a great idea for a new workshop, talk to your Outreach Coordinator. We are always open to new ideas!

## Planning suggestions:

- Think about the “Who, What, Where, When, Why and How” of your event
- Make a project plan or timeline
- Start planning at least four months in advance. This gives you enough time to initiate planning, notify GreenThumb (according to the timeline above), reach out to the community for support and assistance (two months prior), promote the event in person and through social media (three weeks), prep for the day (one or two days prior), carry the event through (day of), and debrief on how it went (one day to one week later).
- Make flyers for distribution in your neighborhood, post an announcement on your garden gate, and make announcements at local churches, community board, schools, and community garden meetings. Ask if you can post flyers at local cafes, grocery stores, laundromats, and bodegas.
- Reach out to local press and community blogs to see if they would like to cover your work and the impact it is having.
- Consider creating email groups, websites, and Facebook pages as a way to do outreach.
- Get together a pre-event checklist and make sure all volunteers and event planners have clear roles.

## Art in the Gardens

The GreenThumb Art in the Gardens program works with artists and gardeners who are interested in creating public art in GreenThumb community gardens. Through ongoing reviews of proposals, processed by GreenThumb and NYC Parks Arts & Antiquities, and targeted Requests for Proposals (RFPs), GreenThumb supports the collaboration of garden groups and artists to bring more art to NYC community gardens.

GreenThumb seeks to cultivate collaborative relationships and partnerships between local artists and community gardeners for the creation of a wide range of art pieces. Murals, sculptures, performances, experimental art, music, and poetry all have a place in community gardens – and we hope to be the glue that brings them together.



Mural by Meg Minkley, entitled "Fiesta Forever," on a shed at Powers Street Garden in Brooklyn | Photo by artist Meg Minkley.

### GreenThumb Guidelines:

- If your garden group is interested in hosting a public art piece or you are an artist looking to connect with a community garden for a project, and you would like more information about the Art in the Gardens program, please contact your Outreach Coordinator.
- Garden groups can decide how active they want to be in the development of the artwork. Gardeners can actively seek out artists and/or design their own art proposals. Groups can also express their interest in hosting art at the community garden and GreenThumb can connect artists with the garden. In this case, the garden group would help review proposals and select an artist that aligns with the vision of the garden group.
- The artist and garden group should work together to identify or design artwork for the garden, as well as the timeline for installation, exhibition, and removal (if applicable).

### GreenThumb Policies:

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

- Everyone in the garden should have a chance to weigh in on an art installation or performance event. Propose this idea at your garden's membership meetings and be sure the project follows the protocol for new ideas outlined in your garden's bylaws.
- Garden groups on community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction must follow the Parks protocol for art installations outlined below. GreenThumb may issue RFPs for new artwork in community gardens, which will have their own protocol.
- Garden groups may host one-off performances (such as music, theater, and poetry) at the garden. Please inform your Outreach Coordinator about such events so they can help you make sure you're following the right protocol and permits, and help with promotion. Please see the Events chapter of this handbook for more information.

- All art installations in community gardens registered with GreenThumb, regardless of jurisdiction, must be pre-approved by GreenThumb. Issues of particular concern for us include safety and durability of the artwork and its suitability to the site. To apply for approval, please submit the following via e-mail to your Outreach Coordinator at least 6 months prior to the intended installation date:
  - A written description of the proposed artwork, including: title, medium, dimensions, weight, and installation timeline.
    - If proposing the installation of existing work, include photographs of artwork, as well as reference to human scale (i.e. include a person in the photo).
    - If proposing a new work, include working drawings or photographs of a maquette to scale.
  - A description of the garden group's decision making process and/or the garden group's approval of the artwork in writing.
  - Proposed duration and exhibition period.
  - Proposed location in the garden for the installation.
  - Artist's statement and resume.
  - Installation budget, including a description of the sponsoring organization or other method of financing.
  - Include the name, email address, and phone number of the contact people: the artist or the partnering arts organization, as well as the garden contact.
  - Up to ten images of the artist's previous work. All images must be clearly labeled with the name of the artist, title of the work, media, and dimensions.

The proposal can come from the artist and/or the garden group. Upon receiving the submission, GreenThumb will review the application packet and follow up with any further questions and requirements to move forward.

## NYC Parks Policies:

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction.

### Permits

#### *Performances*

- If you plan on having amplified sound at the performance, you are also required to apply for an NYPD Sound Permit at the garden's police precinct.
- Obtain any necessary clearances or permissions for the use of intellectual property, including but not limited to musical or other performance rights for the stage.

#### *Artwork*

- All temporary public artworks and murals are subject to the NYC Parks Arts & Antiquities office's temporary public art guidelines and permitting. Learn more at [nycgovparks.org/art-and-antiquities](http://nycgovparks.org/art-and-antiquities) and contact them at [artandantiquities@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:artandantiquities@parks.nyc.gov) with any questions.
- All murals on Parklands and NYC Parks property (items purchased by GreenThumb like sheds, gazebos, etc.) are only permitted for 1 year. After the year, the artist waives their rights to the work.
- All proposals for pieces of art that are not murals may be for only up to one year. Any installations that are meant to stay in the garden longer than one year have to go through a competitive process with the Mayor's Office Public Design Commission.
- If the installation of the art piece requires scaffolding or the use of heavy machinery (like a cherry-picker, excavator, or forklift) the artist must have insurance coverage for all participants that are going to be using the scaffolding or machinery and may need to obtain a Parks Construction Permit.

- Some projects may need to obtain the approval of the local community board. GreenThumb recommends informing the community board about the project either way.
- Following the approval of a proposal, NYC Parks Arts & Antiquities will issue a formal public art license agreement between NYC Parks and the artist and/or sponsoring organization.
- Exhibitors are responsible for costs associated with the installation and removal of the artwork, and cover fabrication, labor, supervision, insurance, and maintenance of the artwork throughout the exhibition, as well as site remediation to restore the garden back to the condition it was in before the art installation.
- When exhibiting in a community garden under NYC Parks jurisdiction, the artist assumes responsibility for funding the project, as well as for obtaining insurance and site restoration. Other artist responsibilities include:
  - Propose high quality art that follows any guidelines outlined in the request for proposals, if applicable.
  - Provide funding for fabrication, installation, maintenance, insurance, security deposit, deinstallation, and site restoration.
    - The sponsoring/exhibiting organization for the public art project will be required to provide a certificate of insurance covering general liability for the duration of the exhibition.
  - Obtain necessary insurance policies naming the City of New York as additional insured. Some projects may require technical reports prepared by a licensed engineer.
  - A security deposit, which will be returned to the exhibitor upon restoration of the site.
  - Oversee installation of artwork (tools, materials, and equipment not provided by Parks).
  - Coordinate any press releases or events with NYC Parks Press Office.
  - Monitor and maintain the artwork during the display period.
  - Oversee deinstallation of artwork and site restoration.
  - Grant NYC Parks the right to a royalty-free, perpetual license to use any depictions of the artwork for non-commercial purposes (credit will be given to the exhibitor).
  - For murals on adjacent privately owned buildings, the artist is required to submit a letter of support from the private building owner along with the above mentioned submission requirements.

## **Additional Resources:**

- Learn more about the NYC Parks permitting process for art installations at [nycgovparks.org/art-and-antiquities/temporary-guidelines](https://nycgovparks.org/art-and-antiquities/temporary-guidelines)
- How community gardeners can find artists, funding, and other types of support
  - Borough Arts Councils - [www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/cultural-funding/artists.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/cultural-funding/artists.page)
  - Local university arts programs
  - Nearby museums or cultural organizations
  - Please also see the chapter on Handling Money in this handbook
- How artists can find community gardens
  - Look for community gardens on the GreenThumb website: [nyc.gov/parks/greenthumb](https://nyc.gov/parks/greenthumb)
  - Connect with the community garden you are interested in performing in by either stopping by during their open hours or by contacting the Outreach Coordinator for the garden. You can find our Staff Contact List on our website: [http://greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/staff\\_list.html](http://greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/staff_list.html).

# Community Garden Design

## GreenThumb's Community Planning Program

### Purpose

GreenThumb's Community Planning Program is an inclusive planning tool that enables community gardeners to envision the garden as public space and have a facilitated design through a collaborative placemaking process. The goal of the program is to work with community gardeners to design new gardens on vacant land or to reactivate existing gardens.

### Eligibility

Only registered GreenThumb community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction are eligible to participate in the community planning program. Established garden groups may request community planning support, however, this program is intended for the development of new community gardens and the reactivation of existing garden spaces. Garden groups with a strong membership and decision making processes will be given priority. Your Outreach Coordinator can help your garden group engage with neighbors to build support.

### Process

If your garden group is interested in participating in the community planning process, please contact your Outreach Coordinator. Subject to available resources, if the garden group meets the eligibility criteria, a selected group of gardeners will commit to three meetings to discuss the goals and priorities of the community garden group. The meetings will consist of activities that will engage members in a facilitated but inclusive design process.

### Results

At the end of the three community planning sessions, GreenThumb will create schematic drawings that reflect important concepts and ideas pulled from each meeting. The drawings can be used by the garden group as a guide for how to move forward with building out the garden. They may also use this schematic when applying to various opportunities to get the funds needed to build out the garden, including discretionary funding from elected officials, in-kind, and monetary grants.

Subject to the availability of resources, GreenThumb may be able to do one of the following:

- Connect the garden group with a greening organization who can help build out sections of the garden according to the design.
- Coordinate with our Operations team to help build out sections of the garden, depending on capacity.
- Coordinate a volunteer day around specific projects related to the design.

# Starting a New Community Garden

## GreenThumb's New Garden Initiative

### Purpose

In alignment with the Walk to a Park Initiative of NYC Parks, GreenThumb's New Garden Initiative strives to achieve a community garden within a 10 minute walk of every residence in NYC. Through this initiative, GreenThumb supports community groups turning vacant lots into community gardens and aligns with NYC Parks mission of equitable access to quality public green space.

### Eligibility

Anyone can start a community garden. We recommend starting with a group of at least ten garden members to collectively plan and steward this new space. To register with GreenThumb, you must have written permission from the property owner to use the lot as a community garden.

### Process

If you are interested in starting a new garden, you can follow the following steps. Please contact GreenThumb for more information or with any questions.

## How to Start a Community Garden

	ACTIONS	WHY?	SUPPORT	TIPS
LAND	<b>1</b> Identify Vacant Lot	It's important to find a home for a community garden	Living Lots NYC by 596 Acres GreenThumb	City-owned lots are best, but first check out existing gardens
	<b>2</b> Note Block, Lot Number	This is the best way to identify a site	Oasis NYC NYC Department of Finance Digital Tax Map	Search by address, then check "location report" for block and lot
	<b>3</b> Check Availability	We must know if the site is suitable before we move forward	GreenThumb	If pursuing a private lot, make sure you have the owner's consent first
COMMUNITY	<b>4</b> Gather Members	Community gardens need to have at least 10 members	Local organizations, libraries, after-school programs, etc.	Find folks who represent the community
	<b>5</b> Draft Proposal	This shows everyone that your group is organized	Citizens Committee for New York City GreenThumb	Include the who, what, when, where, why, and how
	<b>6</b> Seek Support	Support is key	Community Boards	Attend meetings, especially the Parks sub-committees

# Hosting Volunteer Groups in the Garden

## GreenThumb Volunteer Program

### Purpose

GreenThumb's Volunteer Program matches a range of corporate, school, and other groups with gardens in need of volunteers. Volunteer groups can help strengthen community groups by weeding, planting flowers, bulbs or shrubs, garden clean ups, building raised beds, providing general maintenance within the gardens, and other special projects. By working with gardens, volunteers can participate in sustainability, valuable place-making, and enriching the cultural fabric of NYC.

### Eligibility

Any community garden registered with GreenThumb is eligible for support with a volunteer day, subject to availability of staff and resources.

### Process

The GreenThumb Volunteer Program brings tools, materials, and volunteer groups to community gardens all over the city for one-time and recurring workdays. Volunteer days usually last from two to three hours and bring from five to 200 people at a time. Volunteers are asked to bring their own gloves, water, snacks, bug spray, and trash bags. GreenThumb coordinates with garden groups to provide other necessary tools and materials.

If you are a garden group seeking to host volunteers, please reach out to your Outreach Coordinator. If you represent a group looking to volunteer in a community garden, please contact GreenThumb at (212) 602-5300 or [greenthumbinfo@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:greenthumbinfo@parks.nyc.gov). You will be asked to complete a short application.

# Sustainable Pest and Disease Management

Pests and plant diseases are inevitable when gardening. Planting flowers for beneficial insects, avoiding the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, and giving each plant the space and attention it needs to thrive are just a few of the ways you can prevent and mitigate these issues when they arise.

## GreenThumb Policies:

The policies in this section are required for community gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction and encouraged for everyone else.

- GreenThumb does not use any pesticides - organic, inorganic or otherwise - in the course of operating and maintaining its community gardens, except for targeted rat baiting in problem areas. All GreenThumb pest control practices follow Integrated Pest Management<sup>20</sup> (IPM) guidelines.
- GreenThumb discourages pesticide and herbicide use by GreenThumb gardeners. IPM best practices support preventing pest and disease issues as much as possible through the use of row cover, intercropping, and other methods, as well as the use of low impact, organic materials such as neem oil, soap spray, and diatomaceous earth.
- GreenThumb encourages the use of compost and other organic soil amendments rather than chemical-based fertilizers. Many non-organic commercial fertilizers are harmful to the beneficial organisms that live in soil.

## Additional Resources:

- EPA, "Introduction to Integrated Pest Management." [epa.gov/managing-pests-schools/introduction-integrated-pest-management](https://www.epa.gov/managing-pests-schools/introduction-integrated-pest-management)
- Cornell Cooperative Extension Organic Production Guides - [nysipm.cornell.edu/organic\\_guide/](https://nysipm.cornell.edu/organic_guide/)
- New York State Integrated Pest Management - [nysipm.cornell.edu/](https://nysipm.cornell.edu/)
- Brooklyn Botanic Garden Educational Resources - [bbg.org/gardening](https://bbg.org/gardening)
- Cornell Cooperative Extension – Garden Based Learning: Troubleshooting: [gardening.cals.cornell.edu/garden-guidance/troubleshooting/](https://gardening.cals.cornell.edu/garden-guidance/troubleshooting/)

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<sup>20</sup> EPA, "Introduction to Integrated Pest Management." [epa.gov/managing-pests-schools/introduction-integrated-pest-management](https://www.epa.gov/managing-pests-schools/introduction-integrated-pest-management)

## Role of Garden Contacts

Because there are so many volunteer gardeners (currently more than 20,000), GreenThumb requires each registered garden to designate two people to serve as contacts for the garden. Garden members should appoint garden contacts that are trustworthy, reliable, and comfortable with using technology. The garden contact positions (primary and secondary) do not grant the appointed garden members any position of leadership or authority; garden leadership is decided by the garden group as outlined in their bylaws. Contacts simply communicate between GreenThumb and the garden group. If GreenThumb needs to contact your garden group for any reason, including emergencies, we will call or email the contact people first. It is their responsibility to pass information along to the rest of the garden group, as well as their responsibility to pass information regarding the garden group to GreenThumb.

When garden contacts change, be sure to have both the previous contact people and the new contact people speak with your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator. We need to keep our contact information as accurate and up-to-date as possible. We ask that both garden contacts reside in NYC to ensure that GreenThumb has reliable access.

The process for designating contact people should be outlined in your garden bylaws (see the Writing and Amending Bylaws chapter).

### **Responsibilities of garden contacts include:**

**Fill out required paperwork** — A garden contact may need to sign a license agreement and/or fill out a registration packet on behalf of the garden group.

**Send a membership list to your Outreach Coordinator as part of the annual registration packet** — A garden contact should ensure that GreenThumb has an up-to-date list of garden members, complete with addresses and telephone numbers. This list is for GreenThumb's internal use only. We will never share it with anyone unless compelled to do so by law.

**First point of contact for members of the public who contact GreenThumb about the garden** — If someone is interested in joining a garden, bringing their students to the garden, having a birthday party or event in the garden, etc., GreenThumb will direct that person to the garden's contacts. A garden contact should be able to explain the garden's membership procedure and any additional relevant rules that the garden has to govern the use of the space.

**Receive and share information from GreenThumb** — GreenThumb sends all information about supply distributions, forms, information requests, special events, workshops, and more to the two garden contacts. It is the responsibility of the garden contacts to share this information with the rest of the garden members.

**Communicate concerns of the garden group to GreenThumb** – Communication goes both ways. If the garden group has any issues or concerns, the garden contacts should reach out to their Outreach Coordinator.

## Writing and Amending Bylaws

Bylaws are mutually agreed upon rules and procedures that a garden group creates in order to regulate its current and future practices for the day-to-day operations and governance of the garden. A garden's bylaws are where the group establishes, in writing, various garden responsibilities among group members, protocol for bringing in new members, changing garden leadership, handling finances and disputes, planning events, and any other activities the group takes on.

Bylaws are decided on democratically as a garden group and may change and evolve over time. As the group changes in size, membership, and purpose, take a pragmatic approach in assessing your bylaws, recognizing that the group's needs and wishes evolve over time.

Your group may want to re-examine its bylaws every year or so, for example at an annual meeting at the start of each spring. Decide if the current group is in agreement with the bylaws as currently written or if they would like to propose any specific amendments. There should be a process written into the bylaws that states how they may be amended by the group.

Each member of the garden group should receive a copy of the bylaws when they join. We recommend asking each new member to read and understand the bylaws carefully, then sign off on them, indicating that they are willing to adhere to the stated rules of the garden. Problems that often arise within the garden group can often be prevented in the garden's bylaws; please see the Resolving Conflict in the Community Garden chapter of this handbook for more tips on maintaining a cohesive garden group. All bylaws must align with the garden's license agreement.

### Bylaws Requirements:

GreenThumb now requires all community garden groups under NYC Parks jurisdiction to submit copies of their bylaws to their Outreach Coordinators as a prerequisite to being licensed and to receive resources. We offer workshops on group structure and bylaws multiple times per year (Organizing for Garden Success workshop series), and we encourage you and members of your garden group to attend these workshops in order to help the group prepare its bylaws. This is a great opportunity to bolster the strength of your group through a shared understanding of membership rights and responsibilities, rules and procedures, governance structure, and how the group makes decisions. Please connect with your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator for more details.

#### At a minimum, your bylaws must include the following (but are not limited to):

- The garden's mission
- Membership (how to join, rights and responsibilities after joining, protocol if a member is unable to pay dues)
- Decision-making process
- Leadership structure, requirements, and election procedures, including selecting garden contacts for GreenThumb
- Process for changing the bylaws in the future
- How the garden group handles finances, conflicts, and disputes
- Rules for garden members (i.e., what gardeners are allowed and not allowed to do) and procedures for what occurs if a garden member does not comply with the rules of membership

GreenThumb has developed a Bylaws Worksheet in five languages to help get your garden started, as well as a Bylaws Template. To download these materials, please visit [tinyurl.com/GreenThumbBylaws](http://tinyurl.com/GreenThumbBylaws).

### Additional Resources:

- Citizens Committee for NYC offers trainings and workshops on group structure and community organizing as part of their Neighborhood Leadership Institute series - [citizensnyc.org](http://citizensnyc.org)
- The American Community Gardening Association offers many free resources on its website for managing community gardens, including this list of Sample Garden Rules: <https://communitygarden.org/resources/sample-garden-rules/>

# Bylaws Outline

This worksheet covers a broad outline of what GreenThumb requires in the bylaws of garden groups through a series of questions. Once complete, this worksheet will form a foundation for the group's bylaws that will satisfy GreenThumb's minimum requirements; you can always add more to the bylaws than what is included in this worksheet. Please complete the worksheet with your garden group. If your group needs resources on how to facilitate this conversation, please attend a GreenThumb bylaws workshop and/or ask your Outreach Coordinator for materials.

1. **Mission:** The purpose of the garden.
  - Why is the garden important?
  - What value does it bring to the community?
  - What does the group hope to achieve?
  
2. **Membership Procedures**
  - How does one become a member of the garden? What are the requirements?
  - Is there a fee to become a member, and what is the alternative to monetary payment if a member cannot afford the dues?
  - If one becomes a member, what are the requirements for maintaining membership?
  - What rights do members have?
  - What is the protocol for revoking membership?
  - Are there garden plots? If so, how do they work?
  
3. **Decision Making**
  - How does the group make decisions?
  - Is there a minimum number of members required in order to vote and pass proposals?
  - How are decisions communicated to the rest of the group?
  - How often does the group meet?
  
4. **Garden Leadership**
  - Is there a steering committee or other elected leadership group of the garden?
  - What are the positions that make this up?
  - How are its members selected?
  - Are there special requirements for qualifying as a potential member of the garden leadership?
  - Do they have term limits?
  - How do they make decisions?
  - How often do they meet?
  - Are garden leadership meetings open to the general garden membership? How are these meetings communicated to the group? How are minutes/notes from meetings communicated to the membership?
  - What are the requirements/responsibilities of steering committee members?
  - If a garden leadership member does not meet the requirements/responsibilities required of them, how are they reviewed? Are they removed if necessary?
  - Are there additional committees such as membership, finance, events, compost, or general maintenance? What are the roles and responsibilities of these committees?

5. **Amendments**

- How does the group amend the bylaws?
- Once amendments to bylaws are proposed and voted upon, how is this communicated to the group?
- In order for amended bylaws to be valid and incorporated, how far in advance must they be communicated to the group before a vote takes place?

6. **Conflict and Disputes**

- How does the garden handle conflicts or disputes?
- What if one garden member accuses another garden member of breaking the rules?

7. **Finances**

- How are the garden's financial records maintained?
- How are these records communicated to the rest of the group?
- How are financial decisions made by the group and approved?

8. **Member Rules**

- What are the rules of membership; i.e. what must gardeners do?
- What are gardeners not allowed to do?
- What is the recourse of the group if a member is not complying with the rules of membership?

# Problem Solving 101

Below are just a few of the more common problems that occur in community gardens, with suggestions for resolving them.

## **There's a car, truck, trailer, motorcycle, or other motorized vehicle in the garden.**

Cars, trucks, trailers, motorcycles, and other motorized vehicles may not be parked or stored in a community garden at any time. Ask the vehicle's owner to remove the vehicle immediately. If the vehicle appears to be abandoned, call 311 to report the abandoned vehicle and alert your Outreach Coordinator.

## **Someone is using or selling illegal drugs in the garden.**

If you see someone selling or using drugs in or near your garden, call the New York Police Department (dial 911 in an emergency, 311 in a non-emergency) or call your local precinct. They'll take it from there. Do not ever place yourself in a dangerous position. Please let GreenThumb know if you witness this behavior in the garden.

## **Someone is drinking alcohol and/or smoking in the garden.**

Inform the individual that public drinking is prohibited in gardens by New York State law, and that smoking in public spaces under the jurisdiction of any city agency is prohibited in city law. Point to the rules on the garden sign from NYC Parks, or make a "Garden Rules" sign if your garden is not under NYC Parks jurisdiction. If the offending individual is a garden member, consult your group's bylaws as to the proper course of action. If a garden member repeatedly breaks the law, it is appropriate to expel that member.

## **Someone is storing personal items in the garden.**

Personal items (items not used to maintain the garden) may not be stored in a GreenThumb garden. If someone is storing personal items in the garden, ask that person to remove them. If the items are known to be abandoned, recycle them or throw them away. If the items are large, call the Department of Sanitation (dial 311 and ask for the Department of Sanitation) or call GreenThumb to arrange for a pickup.

## **Someone stole something from the garden, someone was hurt in the garden, or someone vandalized the garden.**

Report the incident to your local police precinct and request a police report. Then inform your Outreach Coordinator, who will ask you to complete an Incident Report. Please take photos to document any damage to the garden.

## **Garden members are not allowing public access to the garden.**

GreenThumb gardens must be open to the public. If your garden group is not allowing public access to the garden (in the form of 20 open hours per week from April 1st through October 31st), you risk losing your garden privileges and termination of the garden license. If you are unable to create a waterproof "Open Hours" sign, you can call GreenThumb and we will create a laminated sign for you. You are responsible for ensuring that the garden is open when you say it will be open.

## **Garden members are not allowing new members to join the garden.**

GreenThumb gardens must have a system in place for accepting new members. Even if there are no plots available for new members to enjoy individual growing space, you may place interested members on a waiting list, and have new members help with taking care of communal areas, event planning, communications, carpentry projects, meeting facilitation, grant writing, and much more. There is a lot of work to be done in a community garden outside of individual plots. As garden beds become available, you can then offer them to individuals on the waiting list.

## **The people in your community are not attending the garden's events.**

A successful event involves thoughtful planning, creative advertising, and (to be honest) delicious food. Posters, flyers, newsletters, and social media are all good ways to let people in your community know what's going on. GreenThumb is more than happy to help spread word about your event on our website and social media platforms – submit a request through our website. We also recommend reaching out to

local news, blogs, and organizations that are active in your neighborhood. Remember that New York City is filled with people from many different backgrounds. It is part of a community garden's responsibility to make everyone in that community feel welcome—regardless of age, race, citizenship status, skin color, disability, gender, gender identity, marital status, national origin, pregnancy, religion, sexual orientation, and military or veteran status.

**Your GreenThumb sign is missing or has been damaged.**

Contact your Outreach Coordinator and we will arrange for a new one to be posted.

**There are rats in the garden.**

Rats seek out places to live that provide them with everything they need to survive: food, water, shelter, and safe ways for them to get around. Keep the garden tidy – debris and garbage piles are perfect hiding and nesting spots. Close any burrows that you find with stalite, a type of gravel made from slate, or collapse burrows with a shovel or hoe. For more information, check out the Rats section in the Animals chapter of this Handbook.

## Handling Money, Donations, and Sales

If your garden group is seeking to collect dues, apply for grants, raise funds, or accept monetary donations, you will need a secure place to put the funds where they can also be monitored. Groups raising a lot of funds often register as not-for-profit organizations in order to be able to receive tax-exempt status. However, because of the paperwork and fees involved, groups operating on a smaller scale often use a fiscal sponsor to handle donated money, or accept small donations without offering tax-exemption to the donor.

Please note that GreenThumb reserves the right to audit garden financial records for gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction at any point. Please keep your records up to date. All gardens on city-owned property must regularly share financial reports with the garden membership and show financial records to garden members upon request.

### Accounting

Your garden's bylaws should have clear protocols outlining how funds are accepted and disbursed, and how financial records are communicated to the garden's membership. Under the GreenThumb license, garden groups are allowed to accept membership dues, but cannot require them for membership. As an alternative, some garden groups offer the options of sliding-scale dues and/or in-kind service in the form of extra volunteer time. Some garden groups have clearly defined rules about petty cash, or when a purchasing decision needs to go to a vote by either the membership or the steering committee. How your garden group chooses to manage funds is up to you, and should be clearly documented in the bylaws and followed by everyone in the garden.

### Fundraising

Garden groups can raise funds solely to support the operation of the garden. These funds can come from membership dues, grants, farmers' markets, and more.

#### Individual Donations

GreenThumb community garden groups can accept donations in the form of membership dues, online fundraising campaigns, and unsolicited donations at events, but cannot require monetary payment for garden membership. Garden groups may accept only unsolicited donations to the garden unless they have approval from NYC Parks in advance. For policies around fundraising events, please see the *Events* chapter.

Online fundraising (sometimes called crowdsourcing) is a great idea to raise money for small projects such as a new compost bin or a rainwater harvesting system. There are many platforms out there such as [gofundme.org](http://gofundme.org) and [ioby.org](http://ioby.org), which offer varying levels of service at various fees. Research which one is the right one for your garden group's needs.

ioby offers fundraising tips and webinars on their website [ioby.org](http://ioby.org), and often partners with GreenThumb on workshops at the annual GreenThumb GrowTogether conference and throughout the year.

#### Grants

Garden groups may apply for grants to support their work. Some grants offered by NYC-based organizations do not require a garden group to have a fiscal sponsor or 501(c)3 status, which makes them great places to start. Many grants have specific purposes, such as for composting, increasing your outreach capacity, or growing more food. Partnerships for Parks ([cityparksfoundation.org/about-partnerships-for-parks](http://cityparksfoundation.org/about-partnerships-for-parks)) and Citizens Committee for NYC ([citizensnyc.org](http://citizensnyc.org)) are long-time supporters of

NYC community gardens and can help your group craft your grant proposal. Ask your Outreach Coordinator for additional tips about where to get started.

### Fundraising Events

For information on hosting ticketed and fundraising events in the garden, please see the *Events* section of this Handbook.

### Elected Official Discretionary Funding and Parks Equity

Build a relationship with your elected officials, including your city councilmembers and borough president, so that they know about the garden and can lend their support. Your councilmember may be able to offer discretionary funding for garden improvements and infrastructure.

### Selling Agricultural Products

Garden groups are allowed to sell fruits, vegetables, herbs, eggs, honey, and other agricultural products grown in the garden solely for the purposes of supporting the operation of the garden. Additional items may be sold if the garden group gets a permit from the Revenue Division of NYC Parks. Avoid making health claims on all products – the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) regulates health claims as part of their regulation of medicine. All sales must be in compliance with all applicable city, state, and federal laws, rules, and regulations.

The NYC Zoning Resolution permits community gardens to sell food they grow inside the garden on the same lot. See the FAQ page at [nyc.gov/agriculture](http://nyc.gov/agriculture) for information about how zoning affects the sale of agricultural products.

The sale of food on public sidewalks is overseen by the Street Activity Permit Office,<sup>21</sup> but not affected by zoning.

Item	Can GreenThumb Garden Groups under NYC Parks jurisdiction sell this item?	New York State <sup>22</sup> and Federal Law
Fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs	Yes	No license required if raw and uncut
Plant starts	Yes	No license required if the plant starts were grown by a licensed nursery. If you are growing the starts yourself, and you are a non-profit, you can register as a licensed nursery, and have your fee waived. Contact your Outreach Coordinator for more information.
Eggs	Yes	No license required
Honey	Yes	No license required as long as nothing is added to the honey and the honey wasn't purchased elsewhere
Fish	Yes, with written approval from GreenThumb	Fish can only be sold whole over ice directly to the consumer.
Meat	No	Licensing dependent on type of meat. Please see the Farmers' Market Permit/License/Certificate Checklist <sup>15</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Farmers' Market Permit/License/Certificate Checklist:

[www1.nyc.gov/site/cecm/permitting/permit-types/farmers-markets.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/cecm/permitting/permit-types/farmers-markets.page)

<sup>22</sup> Many of these state laws can be found in the *Farmers' Market Federation of New York Market Managers' Checklist* at [nyfarmersmarket.com/wp-content/uploads/Vendor-Permit-Requirements.pdf](http://nyfarmersmarket.com/wp-content/uploads/Vendor-Permit-Requirements.pdf)

Homemade fruit jam	Yes, with written approval from GreenThumb	Only with a Home Processor License <sup>23</sup>
Homemade sauces, salsas, pickles, and anything that needs refrigeration	Yes, with written approval from GreenThumb	These items must be produced by someone with a 20-C license in a certified commercial kitchen in order to be eligible for sale. <sup>24</sup>
Dried herbs and flowers for cooking, teas, etc.	Yes, with written approval from GreenThumb	These items must be produced by someone with a 20-C license <sup>25</sup>
Homemade herbal skincare for external use – salves, soaps, etc.	Yes, if using herbs grown in clean soil in the garden	No license required as long as you are not using color additives or any prohibited or harmful chemicals. <sup>26</sup> The garden would need a valid NYS Sales Tax Permit. Registered 501(c)3 non-profits are eligible for exemption.
Dried flowers and herbs not for human consumption	Yes	No license required except for a valid NYS Sales Tax Permit. Registered 501(c)3 non-profits are eligible for exemption.
Cut flowers	Yes	No license required except for a valid NYS Sales Tax Permit. Registered 501(c)3 non-profits are eligible for exemption.
Cannabis/Hemp	No	New York State does not allow the growing of cannabis or hemp, nor its sale outside of designated medical marijuana dispensaries.

### Additional Resources

- For more information about starting urban agriculture businesses, visit [nyc.gov/agriculture](http://nyc.gov/agriculture).
- For resources on record keeping, visit [farmingconcrete.org](http://farmingconcrete.org).
- For more information on starting farmers' markets in gardens under NYC Parks jurisdiction, visit [nycgovparks.org/permits/farmers-market](http://nycgovparks.org/permits/farmers-market)

<sup>23</sup> New York State Home Processor Registration information sheet:  
[agriculture.ny.gov/FS/consumer/FSI-898D\\_Home\\_Processor.pdf](http://agriculture.ny.gov/FS/consumer/FSI-898D_Home_Processor.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> New York State information and definitions regarding Food Establishment and Food Processor Licenses:  
[agriculture.ny.gov/FS/general/license.html](http://agriculture.ny.gov/FS/general/license.html)

<sup>25</sup> NY State Ag & Markets is looking to change this policy to allow dried herbs to be sold without a license.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) laws and regulations for cosmetics:  
<https://www.fda.gov/Cosmetics/GuidanceRegulation/default.htm>

## Resolving Conflict in the Community Garden

Conflict happens, even in the most cohesive garden groups or with the best of friends. Take the time to build an inclusive culture in your community garden and establish a policy within your garden group for how you handle conflicts. Garden protocol for conflict can be written into the garden's bylaws (see the Writing and Amending Bylaws chapter for detailed information).

Your garden group is its own entity, which gives you flexibility in how your group governs itself. This also means your group is responsible for handling internal conflict. GreenThumb does not involve itself in garden variety disputes. Many conflicts arise out of misunderstandings, miscommunication, and a lack of cohesive garden policies. GreenThumb community gardens are inclusive spaces regardless of age, race, citizenship status, skin color, disability, gender, gender identity, marital status, national origin, pregnancy, religion, sexual orientation, and military or veteran status, and must be maintained as open public spaces.

The best thing your garden group can do to prevent conflict altogether is to take the time to collectively write cohesive bylaws. The garden bylaws are a set of rules and guidelines that the group must follow. Your bylaws should include garden rules, protocol for what happens when someone breaks the rules, and everything from member rules and responsibilities to your garden's leadership structure. They can also hold your garden's mission statement, vision for your community, and shared values such as diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and sustainability.

If everyone in the garden signs on to the bylaws, then you have a built-in structure for handling conflict when it comes up, and can refer to the bylaws when conflicts arise. For more about bylaws, visit the Writing and Amending Bylaws chapter of this handbook.

Sometimes resolving a conflict can go beyond the capacity of the garden group. If this is the case, we encourage you to seek mediation. There are **free** mediation centers across the city:

- Brooklyn and Manhattan: New York Peace Institute: [nypeace.org/mediation/](http://nypeace.org/mediation/)
- Bronx: Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution: [imcr.org](http://imcr.org)
- Queens: Community Mediation Services: [mediatenyc.org](http://mediatenyc.org)
- Staten Island: NYC Center for Interpersonal Development: [nycid.org](http://nycid.org)

Most mediation centers allow and even encourage parties of a conflict to attend alone first for a one-on-one meeting. This can be very helpful if all parties are not yet on board with seeking mediation.

### GreenThumb Policy:

If your garden group has garden bylaws, sought mediation, and still cannot resolve a conflict, please reach out to your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator, who may be able to suggest additional resources.

## Building a Healthy Garden Group: 10 Tips for Resolving and Avoiding Conflicts in your Community Garden

By Hannah Riseley-White (Formerly at Green Guerillas) and Ena K. McPherson (GreenThumb community gardener at Tranquility Farm, Brooklyn)

Want to have a healthy garden group and avoid conflicts between garden members? Want to keep everyone involved and participating to garden work? Here are 10 suggestions based on years of community gardening:

**Address conflicts:** Create an open forum that encourages dialogue—this will set the groundwork for resolving conflicts. Try to avoid side discussions with a few individuals—wait for the full meeting. Don't let the discussion focus on earlier occurrences, stay focused on a positive solution that moves the garden group past the conflict. Look for a solution that is fair to all garden members and that sets a precedent of consensus-building and group understanding

If you sense there is an issue between garden members, create a safe space for discussion before it turns into a larger issue. Many conflicts are easier to resolve than you may think. Review your bylaws for possible solutions. If it does not directly address the current issue, could the bylaws be adapted to include language that would help your group avoid this problem in the future?

**Share leadership:** All garden members should have a sense of ownership in the garden. Allow all members to take the lead in an area of interest. Do not tell them what or how to do it, let them take on responsibility and let that area of work be their own. Everyone has something to offer; tap into members' strengths. Have the grace to step aside and let go of control. As a garden leader your first priority is to plan for and work towards leadership transition to others. The garden's strength and sustainability depend on a diverse and prepared group of leaders—not just one or two individuals.

**Acknowledge all contributions:** Always say "Thank you." Give credit where it's due, acknowledge all efforts, big and small, of all garden members.

**Assess your leadership performance:** Are you performing in your leadership role? Leadership requires work. If you are not ready to implement initiatives or lead projects in the garden, step aside and let others take the lead. Listen to your group—they will give you hints on what they expect from you as a leader and also on what they are prepared to do as members. Set goals that are clear and realistic; you can't expect members to follow through if you don't yourself.

**Be open and flexible:** Listen and be open to the ideas each member brings. Be flexible in your expectations of members' abilities; some of the greatest ideas come from children gardeners. Be responsive, act on all suggestions; let members try out their ideas.

**Be respectful:** The heart of a community garden is its community. Each NYC neighborhood is diverse and unique, which is reflected in its community garden. Be tolerant and respectful of the differences that make up your communities and the members in the garden by listening and remaining open to new ideas. Encourage the garden to be a safe place for your neighborhood where everyone can learn and grow.

**Take the "I" out of community gardening – emphasize the "we:"** A community garden is a collaborative effort. The garden does not belong to any one person. Working towards consensus should be a core principle in how things get done. Hold garden meetings where all opinions are respected and listened to. It is important to understand what motivates an individual garden member's participation.

**Host community-building events:** Celebrate and enjoy the garden as a group. The more time people spend together the better they get to know and understand each other. Organizing parties, potlucks, workdays or other events builds understanding and community morale. Be sure to invite other local community groups and organizations too.

**Avoid the seeds of conflict:** It is easy to offend others without realizing it. Language is a powerful tool—it can empower as well as diminish; use it wisely. Do not make assumptions about others, and be

sensitive to ethnic, racial, and cultural differences. Food brings people together or can tear them apart. Be respectful of various cultural cuisines. Encourage gardeners to grow their cultural foods. This can provide a learning opportunity for the whole group. Be open to ideas that will broaden your knowledge of horticulture. Cultural observances are key in establishing a harmonious relationship with your fellow gardeners. Highlighting and observing gardeners' ethnic and cultural holidays goes a long way towards making members feel like part of a group.

**Create an open garden:** Create a colorful "Open Garden" sign that invites residents and passersby to come into the garden. Keep the garden gate open when working in the garden at all times; and most importantly allow visitors a sense of freedom to explore the garden on their own. People sometimes just want to enjoy the space on their own and are not interested in a formal tour. Your community garden belongs to your community. Make sure people know they are welcome to get involved in whatever way is appropriate for them, so that your garden group can continue to grow.

## Working With Youth in the Garden

Community gardens present wonderful opportunities to engage people of all ages and backgrounds. Community gardens are open to everyone, but sometimes it takes extra planning and coordination to engage young people in the garden. Community gardens can be spaces to connect with nearby daycares, pre-k classrooms, and K-12 schools as well as engaging youth in skill and job development projects.

### Guidelines:

- To foster greater youth presence in the garden, the garden group should first discuss its intentions and strategies. Put “increasing youth presence” on the agenda of your next garden meeting and brainstorm ideas on how and why you want to do this.
- Prioritize undertakings that allow young people to lead discussions and activities. Called “student-centered learning,” this practice allows young people to step into leadership and take ownership over their learning process.
- Young people are still learning about themselves and their communities. Urban agriculture may be new to them. Prioritize self-exploration in garden activities. What can students learn about themselves in the process? Can they earn credit for school?
- Reach out to another community garden that is already working with youth and observe their programs in action for ideas and guidance.

### Tips for Working with Schools (K-12):

- Invite teachers, parents, and administration to the garden. Organize a tour and meeting to discuss a collaborative use of the garden with the decision makers at the school. Some community gardens have specific beds designated for classes while others set aside specific tasks for students to accomplish. Having discussions with teachers to create common goals in advance is very important.
- Invite teachers to bring their class for a tour or to hold their class in the garden.
- Work with school staff to create a schedule of days and times that the school group will visit the garden and where they will be working.
- Meet with participating teachers to find out what students are learning in the classroom to better align garden work to those subjects or lessons. There is a huge amount of curricula out there, and a lot of it is free online or through local greening organizations. [New York Agriculture in the Classroom](http://NewYorkAgricultureintheClassroom.org) (agclassroom.org) and the [Edible Schoolyard Project](http://EdibleSchoolyardProject.org) (edibleschoolyard.org) both have curricula matrices with tons of garden-aligned lesson plans. It is best to match up the curricula with the New York City Department of Education standards.

### GreenThumb Youth Leadership Council:

GreenThumb Youth Leadership Council (YLC) is an intergenerational, service learning program that offers community gardens the opportunity to host youth between the ages of 14 and 21 to volunteer during the growing season. If your garden is interested in hosting a group of youth volunteers, look out for an announcement each summer from your Outreach Coordinator. If you know any young people who might be interested in volunteering, you can share the application with them, which is reviewed on a rolling basis.

## **Additional Resources:**

- Grow to Learn is a program partnership of GrowNYC, the NYC Department of Education and NYC Parks GreenThumb. Find out about how to start a school garden, find a local school garden you can partner with, download toolkits, and explore curriculum by visiting [growtolearn.org](http://growtolearn.org).
- Your local community board has a youth committee, and you can get on the agenda of their next meeting to let them know the garden is a resource for youth in the community. To find your local community board, visit [nyc.gov/html/cau/html/cb/cb.shtml](http://nyc.gov/html/cau/html/cb/cb.shtml)
- Sign up to serve as a Summer Youth Employment program host site. The Summer Youth Employment Program provides youth between the ages of 14 and 24 with paid summer employment for up to six weeks. Visit [nyc.gov/dycd](http://nyc.gov/dycd) for more information or call (800) 246-4646 or (646) 343-6800

For a more complete list of resources available to schools or community gardeners working with schools, please visit [growtolearn.org](http://growtolearn.org) or email Grow to Learn at [growtolearn@grownyc.org](mailto:growtolearn@grownyc.org).

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