

Thank you to all who watched our recent [How to Join a GreenThumb Community Garden](#) webinar. We received a number of questions both before and during the webinar and this document is our attempt to synthesize and respond to those questions. You can learn more about NYC Parks GreenThumb by exploring the [GreenThumb website](#), subscribing to our [YouTube channel](#), following us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [Twitter](#), or reaching out to your respective [GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator](#).

How to Join a Community Garden

1. What gardens have open enrollment? How do I find out more information about a community garden in my area if there's no information online?

The GreenThumb gardening season is from April 1 to October 31, but many garden groups accept membership requests year-round. Gardeners are often looking for new members just before or at the start of the gardening season. Drop by the garden, contact them via phone, email, or social media, or contact your respective [Outreach Coordinator](#) for more information. To aid in your search, GreenThumb provides an online [map of registered gardens](#). If you see one near you, pass by the garden to see if there is information displayed on the fence or gardeners at work. You can also contact GreenThumb at greenthumbinfo@parks.nyc.gov or 212-602-5300. Please indicate your address, neighborhood, or areas where you are interested in gardening so we can get back to you with relevant information.

2. To become a regular volunteer, what kind of work is involved? What volunteer roles are needed?

The process for joining a community garden varies group to group and often involve attending workdays, participating in group meetings, completing a membership form, or simply just showing up regularly!

It is important to note that no one will be turned away from membership because there are no available raised beds or they are unable to pay membership dues (some gardens require them). The needs of gardens also vary, but most gardens need help keeping communal areas clean, weeded, and welcoming. Ask a garden member what the process for joining is, how you can help, and the ways the group can waive the memberships fees (if applicable). If you can't get in touch with a garden directly, contact the [GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator](#).

When you talk to a gardener, tell them what skills you have that could support the garden. Remember you don't have to have gardening skills to be a member. Gardens need writers, planners, accountants, artists, teachers, organizers, or a pair of helping hands, just like any small organization.

3. What skills do you need to belong to a garden? How can you be trained to obtain the necessary skills?

Community gardening requires a host of skills. Since none of us know everything, gardening needs the contributions of many. Some of the obvious skills include gardening, watering, ground maintenance, pruning, and weeding. But there are many other skills that are valued at community gardens: sign-making, holding open hours, treasurer, snow-shoveling, bookkeeping, event coordination, photography, social media management, tool sharpening, membership outreach, note taking, local official liaison, etc.

Garden skills are passed from garden member to garden member. GreenThumb workshops

and trainings provide additional opportunities to learn new skills relevant to community gardening.

4. **What is the typical time commitment associated with becoming a community gardener and what skills does it require?**

Each garden group sets its own time commitment for an individual member or family and some gardens have a range of membership levels. It's best to ask at your initial meeting with a garden representative.

5. **What are the levels of involvement? My only gardening experience is with keeping houseplants, but I love to be outside and am craving some community contact. Can I volunteer to help out?**

Gardens are quite fond of volunteers. Many gardeners learn their skills by watching, asking, and doing. And many gardens have different membership levels with different time commitments.

6. **Can you be a member of several gardens? Is there a membership fee?** Yes, you can be a member of multiple gardens, as long as you can meet each garden's membership requirements and time commitments. Some gardens have membership fees and some do not. However, no one can be refused membership at a GreenThumb garden because of inability to afford dues and groups will offer discounts and alternative to paying money.

7. **How do food and social justice issues shape community garden missions/ethos.**

New York City's community gardening movement was initiated as a grass-roots response to the city's financial crisis of the 1970s, which resulted in the abandonment of public and private land. The majority of present-day GreenThumb gardens were derelict vacant lots renovated by volunteers, and we continue to acknowledge this bottom-up ethos of community stewardship today.

GreenThumb community gardens adopt diverse missions that best represent the interests of the garden members. Some groups prioritize food and social justice, either explicitly in their mission, or through their day-to-day actions. You can ask this question when applying for membership or volunteering at a garden. Decisions about garden functions are made according to the bylaws of the garden group. To learn more about the history of community garden movement, visit the [NYC Parks website](#).

8. **How can newcomers best honor the wishes, needs, and traditions of longer-term community garden members?**

The best way to respect the histories of gardens is by listening to gardeners and getting to know each other! Find out who started the garden, how long your fellow gardeners have been involved, what events they like to host, what plants they like to grow, favorite fruits/veggies/herbs, etc.! In other words, come to the garden with an open mind and don't be afraid to ask questions.

9. **Do gardens hold consistent open hours?**

Anyone can visit and join a GreenThumb community garden! All GreenThumb gardens are required to be open to the public for a minimum of 20 hours per week during the garden season from April 1 and October 31. Open Hours are posted on garden fences and our [online map](#) includes this information as well. Please note that due to the ongoing COVID-19

pandemic, GreenThumb community gardens are not required to be open and will be following NYC Parks GreenThumb's current COVID-19 policies which can be [found here](#).

COVID-19

What are the changes to volunteering given COVID-19?

You can find the most up-to-date GreenThumb COVID-19 policies on the [NYC Parks GreenThumb website](#). As of March 2021, gardens are welcome, but not required, to hold Open Hours. Gardens may decide whether to be fully open, open to members only, or closed until further notice. There are no restrictions on gardens recruiting new members, as the space still needs to be cared for and activities can take place. All individuals in gardens must wear face coverings and practice social distancing by remaining 6 feet apart. There may be no more than 25 individuals in the garden at any one time. The rules are not that much different than what we have come to expect in New York City. We all want to be safe.

Non-Profits and Partnerships

May a non-profit's staff join as a group?

There are several non-profits, churches, block associations, civic groups, and related groups active in community gardening throughout New York City. Non-profit staff can join a garden as individual members or the group can become a partner of the garden.

Community based organizations are encouraged to partner with community garden groups. Best practice would include a written agreement explaining what the partnership includes. It is important to understand that GreenThumb gardens on NYC Parks property must be open to the entire community and membership in a particular organization cannot be a requirement for joining the community garden. Gardens are only licensed to individual community members and not to non-profits. Contact the [Outreach Coordinator](#) for the garden in question for more information.

Gardening Tips/Miscellaneous

1. Do I need to participate in workshops?

Registered GreenThumb community gardens are required to have one garden representative attend at least one GreenThumb event a year, which can include workshops, our annual GreenThumb GrowTogether conference, or any other official GreenThumb event. Our workshops and events are fun and a great way to connect with GreenThumb staff and other gardeners! And some garden groups strongly encourage members to participate in workshops and even count that as part of member hours.

2. How do I learn to maintain a garden and grow food?

Working side by side with experienced gardeners is one of the best and most rewarding ways to learn to maintain a garden and grow food! GreenThumb also offers many workshops and trainings to help you learn basic gardening and farming skills. Our educational programs are free and open to the general public. Upcoming programs are listed on the Events page of the GreenThumb website and recorded webinars can be watched on our YouTube channel.

3. Where do I go if I am looking for gardening tips — like is the soil safe for vegetable growing? What kinds of things grow best? Is there a restriction regarding plants I can grow in a GreenThumb garden?

GreenThumb workshops and webinars are free and open to the public. On [our website](#) and [YouTube channel](#) you will find upcoming events and [past recordings](#).

Please note, all GreenThumb gardens are required to grow food in raised beds that have a barrier from the surrounding soil. GreenThumb's Safe Soil Gardening Requirements can be found on page 21 of the GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook. To learn more about soil safety try watching this past program [Ag in the City: Growing Healthy Soils](#): Facilitated by Hannah Shayler and Perl Egendorf (Cornell University). To learn more about crops try out [Crop Planning 101](#): Facilitated by Mara Gittleman and Ciara Sidell (Randall's Island Urban Farm). Don't forget to like and subscribe to [our channel](#)!

Our online resources are great, but nothing replaces learning while in the garden! Ask your fellow gardeners about their growing practices and past experiences with different plants. Sun, soil, and water are the greatest restrictions to what can be grown. You also don't want to grow plants so tall that they shade your neighbor's plants. Before a garden on NYC Parks property can plant any trees, fruit or decorative, it must obtain approval from GreenThumb.

4. **I'm guessing that the most common vegetable to plant is tomatoes. Do you have recommendations on specific varieties of tomato plants? And where to find those varieties?**

There are over 750 varieties of tomatoes at this time, and more varieties are being developed! Common varieties include: plum, beefsteak, yellow, and cherry tomatoes. Each spring, GreenThumb provides an assortment of vegetable plants and some tomato varieties are included in the mix. However, many gardeners have favorite websites or local nurseries. Our recent webinar, [Tomato Heaven!](#), may be of interest to those hoping to grow tomatoes.

5. **What other agricultural growing methods are used outside of soil-based farming at your garden sites?**

There are a few community gardens practicing aquaponics, hydroponics, and [mushroom growing](#). GreenThumb has workshops on all of these methods. Upcoming workshops are listed on the [Events page](#) of the GreenThumb website and recorded webinars can be watched on our [YouTube channel](#).

6. **Are there any grants for materials since gardeners are volunteers?**

Yes, there are a number of grants available to support garden groups. For example, Partnerships for Parks and Citizens' Committee both offer grants for garden groups and you can learn more about their funding by watching the [Make it Rain: Grants for Your Green Space](#) webinar.

Depending on the particular grant, a garden may be able to apply on its own or by partnering with a non-profit. Your GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator can make suggestions and we always try to include information on current grants in the [monthly digital newsletter](#).