



## Resources for Working Together Remotely

During this difficult time, in the midst of a global pandemic, community gardeners are growing food and caring for the safety and well-being of their communities. GreenThumb sees and appreciates this hard work and we want to provide you with some resources that will ease us into working together while practicing social distancing!

Below are several easy and free ways that you can communicate with your garden group remotely. Some use video, so that you can see each other. Most offer a phone option, so that you join the group by voice, using your phone, even if others are on video. Many of these resources require that at least a member or two have access to the internet through a smartphone, tablet, or traditional computer. The internet is our best friend in these times and this is a great opportunity to teach our fellow community gardeners how to better use their internet access.

Below we will outline several different ways to use video conferencing and phone conferencing to communicate safely with community garden members. We are not endorsing any particular company or functionality, but this is intended simply to provide a limited overview of various options that are available.

### Instant Messaging Platforms

These platforms offer your garden group a way to organize and communicate with each other in an instant message/text message style. Many offer ways to organize yourselves into different groups within a larger group. This is a great option for garden groups where you have a large membership and lots of committees. It gives you the ability to communicate short bits of information to both a full membership and to smaller groups focused on specific tasks.

Certain platforms are geared to more distinct tasks. Slack is largely focused on instant messages/chat functions. Microsoft Teams works best if you have a number of people already utilizing Microsoft Office. Google Hangouts/Groups works best if you have a number of people already using Gmail/Google drive. WhatsApp is mostly focused around mobile use and has less desktop/laptop functionality.

#### How to use Slack

It's like an instant messenger! Some people might remember AIM or the days of chatrooms - Slack is quite similar. Slack can integrate Zoom, Google Drive, and so forth into its functionality - you can be on Slack chatting with a garden member (or a committee of people) and instantly set up a video call, easily share files, and share screens!



- Slack has an Apple App Store and Google Play Store app (if you want it on your phones or tablets) and a desktop app (though you can use slack from your web browser too!). They are all free. More information about downloading the apps or using the web version is [available here](#).
- A “workspace” is where a full organization lives.
- Channels are like chat rooms. Channels can be topic specific, committee specific, whatever makes sense for your group. Channels can be made private in case you need to share certain things discreetly (for example, if your garden has a conflict resolution or arbitration committee, it probably makes sense for them to be chatting privately).

Here is a simple [Slack tutorial video](#) that covers the basic functions. Once you begin using Slack you can also message the ‘Slackbot’ listed under Direct Messages with questions.

### **How to use Microsoft Teams**

We’re not going to cover this platform in depth, but it is very similar to Slack in functionality with more integration with Microsoft’s existing products. If your garden group/organization uses Microsoft Office (especially the cloud-based 365 product) for most of your work, this is a great option. This is usually a paid product but is currently free. [More information is available here](#).

### **How to use Google Hangouts**

This platform is also similar to Slack and is integrated with Google products. If your garden group/organization already uses Google products for almost everything, this might be a simple addition. Google Hangouts has the most “Slack” like features on its paid version ([more information here](#)). The free version of Google Hangouts has very limited functionality.

### **How to use WhatsApp**

WhatsApp is another great instant messenger that allows you to create group chats, make phone calls and video calls with up to four people, send encrypted messages, easily send pictures and videos, and send other users a voice note. WhatsApp is great for connecting with people who live internationally and have different phone carriers as this is an application that can be used with WiFi. [Here](#) is a series of tutorial videos to get started!

## **Video Conferencing Applications**

Video conference applications are a great way to hold meetings and stay in touch with garden members. They are good for holding meetings if you want to be able to see each other, and many applications also have call-in options for those without webcams or computers.

### **How to use Zoom**

Zoom is well known for its video chat and meeting functions. It also has instant message chat functions and integrates well into Slack.



- Zoom has mobile apps and desktop/laptop apps. All are free and it is free to create an account.
- You can have up to 100 participants in a video meeting and the ability for people to call in if they do not have internet access.
- For the free version of Zoom, if you are meeting with more than one person, your meeting is limited to 40 minutes.
- You can share computer screens for displaying photos, presentations, videos, and more.
- Zoom has great resources on its website to guide you through using it. [You can find all those resources here.](#) And here's a great [infographic](#) made by an artist named Naomi RW on how to use Zoom.

### **How to use Cisco Webex**

Cisco Webex is not as well known, as it is usually used by large businesses but it does have some great free features and is very similar to Zoom.

- Mobile and desktop/laptop apps. All are free to download and create accounts. [More info on that here.](#)
- The free version is expanded right now and has no time limit on video conference, up to 100 participants on a videoconference.
- It has a call in function for those without internet access to call into your meeting and still participate.

### **How to use Skype's Meet Now function**

Skype is a web calling platform that has been around since 2003. If you and many other gardeners already have skype accounts (for free) and have used it before, it has a feature to allow video conferencing.

- Mobile and desktop/laptop apps are available to download for free. You do need to create an account. [More info on that here.](#)
- The "meet now" function is accessed by clicking the "meet now" button on the left side of the app. The maximum attendees varies based on your device.
- It allows recording meetings, sharing presentations, and blurring your background.
- It has a call in function for those without internet access to call into your meeting and still participate.

### **How to Set up a Conference Call**

For members without internet access, computer access, or video capabilities, conference calls are another great way to be able to communicate and host remote meetings. Once your garden group sets up a conference call line, you can share the call-in number and access code with your members to use for standing calls.



## Free Conference Call

Your easiest option for setting up a conference call is [www.freeconferencecall.com](http://www.freeconferencecall.com). You will need to create an account that requires an email address and create a password.. Once you've done that it automatically gives you:

- a call-in number (this is the phone number people call into)
- an access code (this is what you and the other participants put in to enter the call)
- and a leader code (this is the code that only you as the call leader put in to start the call and connect everyone).

To make a conference call for the first time, the leader of the meeting goes to [freeconferencecall.com](http://freeconferencecall.com) and sets up an account. The leader is given the call-in number, access code, and leader code. These codes can be used for all future meetings that the leader hosts.

Once the date and time of a meeting are set, the leader of the meeting shares the call-in number and access code with all the members of the group. At the time of the meeting, the host calls the call-in number and will be prompted to provide the access code and the leader code. At the same time or anytime thereafter during the conference call, each member calls into the call-in number. The member will be asked to put in the access code. Once the code is accepted, the member can hear everyone else on the call and can be heard by everyone as well. To exit the call, members simply hang up the phone.

- Be aware that on phone conference calls, it can be difficult to identify which voice is speaking when, so be sure to identify yourself from time to time when you speak.

## Email Listserv Platforms

Email listservs are a great way for garden groups to send out messages to members (who have email addresses) about key updates and announcements. Platforms such as Google Groups have different settings where members can choose how many emails they want to receive (ex. A daily summary or every message), and admins can choose settings for whether any member can reply to the whole group or whether admins need to approve messages before they are posted.

### Google Groups

Google Groups is a free email platform that is available at <https://groups.google.com/>.

- To create or manage a Google Group, a gmail account is needed (these are free!). Members with other types of email addresses (Yahoo, AOL, Hotmail, etc.) can still receive email notifications in their inboxes.



- To create a group, click “Create Group” and then enter the required information for your garden group (Group name, Group email address, Group description, Group’s primary language, Group type, and Basic permissions).
- The “Group type” describes how your Google Group will operate, either as an email list, web forum, Q&A forum, or collaborative index.
- “Basic permissions” refers to determining who can view the group, whether it’s searchable to the public, who can see topics, who can post to the group, and who can join the group.
- The group email address will be the address that you would email to contact the full group, rather than including individual email addresses for each member, for example [mycommunitygarden@googlegroups.com](mailto:mycommunitygarden@googlegroups.com) with your garden’s name.
- Admins of the Google Group can manage members, review join requests, and set them as “Member,” “Manager,” or “Owner” of the group.

## Tips for Remote Meetings

New to facilitating remote meetings? Many of us are grappling with learning new tools and finding ways to maintain connections while socially distancing. Organizations with experience in online facilitation such as Training for Change have compiled some great resources on tips to keep your remote meetings engaging, productive, and inclusive. Read on for more.

- [Training for Change - Facilitating hybrid groups online](#)
- [“Leading Groups Online - a down-and-dirty guide to leading online courses, meetings, trainings, and events during the pandemic crisis”](#)

### A couple notes:

- Many of the platforms outlined above, including conference call services and general access to the internet, are being used at unprecedented levels during these times so you may encounter delays or errors! Be patient. If you are using conference call services, try not to schedule meetings on the hour (ex: 1pm, 2pm) but instead at times like 1:15 or 2:45 so that the services don’t become overwhelmed at specific times.
- It is very important to keep gardeners who do not use the internet in the loop! Think of the various ways you can keep them involved:
  - Use meeting services that allow people to call in (most of the video conference platforms we outline do!)
  - Have a phone tree! [More info on creating a good phone tree here!](#)
  - Post signs with updates on garden gates or in public spaces inside the garden