Welcome to NYC Parks GreenThumb

Dear Volunteer:

On behalf of the GreenThumb staff and Youth Leadership Council Coordinators, I want to welcome you to the GreenThumb Youth Leadership Council (YLC). I am excited for you to learn, grow, and give back to the community gardens as you take part in this program. Thanks to you and our 20,000 other volunteers, we continue to make an impact in communities across New York City.

This volunteer handbook will act as a guide to make your volunteer experience a success. Please use this handbook as a reference, as it provides background on the history of GreenThumb, and the mission, vision, and goals of the YLC. It also outlines policies and procedures, program guidelines, and volunteer position descriptions.

Gardening—especially community gardening—is not just about growing vegetation and plants, it is about connecting with the living things surrounding us. You will have the opportunity to meet new people, make new friends, receive hands-on educational gardening experience, and make your community a better place to live.

Thank you again for joining the YLC! As you embark on this new experience I wish you great success. You are not only a YLC member, you are now a green steward leader of New York City.

Sincerely,

William LoSasso
Director, GreenThumb
Description and History

Established in 1978, NYC Parks GreenThumb is proud to be the nation’s largest urban gardening program, assisting nearly 600 community gardens, over 650 school gardens, and thousands of garden members throughout New York City. GreenThumb’s mission is to educate and support community gardens and urban farming in NYC. By providing free materials and technical assistance, GreenThumb supports neighborhood volunteers who manage community gardens as active resources that strengthen communities. GreenThumb gardens are hubs of neighborhood pride and provide a myriad of environmental, economic, and social benefits that have had a ripple effect citywide.

Education in the Garden

Since 1988, GreenThumb has provided material and technical support to educators throughout the five boroughs. School gardens present engaging interdisciplinary lessons in core subjects such as science, math, language arts, nutrition, and art to NYC school youth. Students and teachers receive learning materials, curricula, and tools to enhance their use of the gardens. GreenThumb currently serves schools through partnerships with GrowNYC and the NYC Department of Education’s Office of School Food which together make up Grow to Learn NYC: the Citywide School Garden Initiative. GreenThumb also partners with several other garden educators including the City Parks Foundation Learning Gardens Program, Edible Schoolyard, and several urban agricultural sites with robust youth leadership and development programs through their farms.

Since 2010, Grow to Learn NYC has provided material, technical, and financial support to school garden projects throughout the five boroughs. There are currently over 650 school-led Grow to Learn gardens providing hands-on educational experiences for students and instructors alike.
About GreenThumb Youth Leadership Council (YLC)

The YLC is a free program designed for high school youth and college students to volunteer in GreenThumb community gardens located throughout the five boroughs. YLC takes place each year during the spring and summer. High school youth and college students team up with a specific garden site throughout the five boroughs to form a local Youth Leadership Council at each of these gardens. Participants volunteer at the garden at least twice a month, accumulating a minimum of 20 service hours throughout the program. In return, community gardeners teach students about the garden’s history, as well as the local community how to maintain and grow a healthy garden, and how the garden helps to grow community.

Since 2015, YLC has engaged over 30 garden sites in historically underserved communities, with 300 high school students, 40 college students, and 30 community gardeners completing over 6,000 volunteer hours.

The YLC’s goal is to continue cultivating the next generation of community gardeners.
Best Practices for a Successful Youth Leadership Council

1. Represent yourself in a respectful way.
2. Arrive on time. This will ensure that you do not miss any key instructions given in the beginning of the volunteer day.
3. Treat your time at the garden as a learning opportunity and a chance for personal and team building growth.
4. Be open to new experiences and challenges.
5. Make sure you dress appropriately for rain, hot days, and general gardening work.
6. Ask for help if you need clarification.
7. Know your limits. Feel free to decline completing a task if you feel that it is beyond your ability or presents a safety concern.
8. Find the joy and meaning in giving back to your community and learning from the experienced generation of gardeners.
YLC volunteers getting their hands in the soil. Courtesy: GreenThumb YLC
Volunteer Position Descriptions

High School Youth Volunteer

**Description/Purpose:** Youth volunteers (ages 14–21) will have the opportunity to learn firsthand from community gardeners how to maintain and grow a healthy garden, covering topics such as botany, agriculture, horticulture, composting, and community development.

**Responsibilities:** High School Volunteers will:

- Work in a team setting on garden projects
- Follow safety procedures, guidelines, and directions implemented by the gardener(s) and college mentor(s)
- Interact with other volunteers in a pleasant and respectful manner
- Participate in the Kickoff and Graduation events
- Arrive to service days on time
- Communicate with the gardener(s) and college mentor(s) about anticipated absences and lateness

**Required Skills/Tasks:** Willingness to learn, follow directions, and work with other volunteers.

**Age Requirements:** 14–21 years old.

**Time Commitment and Schedule Details:**

- Kickoff Celebration (Spring)
- Pre-scheduled service project days at least twice a month, 3–4 hours per service day—Monday–Sunday, flexible (Spring/Summer)
- Graduation Ceremony (Summer)

**Benefits/ Support Provided:** Youth volunteers receive hands-on and educational experience in the garden. All participants receive Metrocards for travel and YLC gear.

**Additional Information:** Be flexible and open minded. This is a great opportunity for any student interested in a wide range of natural science and hands-on skills as well as working in the open space and community development or property management sectors in city government.
College Mentor Volunteer

**Description/Purpose:** College Mentors will support and assist gardeners with managing, teaching, and guiding the group of high school youth volunteers in the garden throughout the program.

**Responsibilities:** Alongside the community gardener(s), college mentors will:
- Coordinate and schedule service days and garden projects
- Maintain record keeping (i.e., attendance and Metrocard log)
- Assist the gardener(s) with overall program facilitation
- Ensure the safety and appropriate behavior of program participants
- Interact with students in a pleasant, and non-threatening, way
- Resolve conflicts in a professional manner
- Supervise and monitor garden site decorum

**Required Skills/Tasks:** Willingness to manage, guide, and mentor high school youth volunteers.

**Time Commitment and Schedule Details:**
- College Mentor/Gardener Training (Winter/Spring)
- Kickoff Celebration (Spring)
- Pre-scheduled service project days at least twice a month, 3–4 hours per service day—Monday–Sunday, flexible (Spring/Summer)
- Graduation Ceremony (Summer)

**Benefits/Support Provided:** College mentors will gain volunteer management, leadership, community/youth development skills, hands-on and educational experience in the garden. Mentors will receive youth volunteer management training. All participants receive Metrocards for travel and YLC gear.

**Additional Information:** Be flexible and open minded. This is a great opportunity for any student interested in a wide range of natural science and hands-on skills as well as working in the open space and community development or property management sectors in city government.
Community Gardener

**Description/Purpose:** Community Gardeners will support the YLC's mission by teaching and engaging 10–12 youth volunteers in a community garden. The volunteers are expected to meet twice a month throughout the spring and summer, accumulating a total of 20 service hours. Gardeners will facilitate the completion of garden improvement and beautification projects. With help from college students, gardeners will mentor, promote learning, and foster the next generation of New York City's community gardeners.

**Responsibilities: Community Gardener(s) will:**
- Ensure the safety and appropriate behavior of program participants
- Promote garden engagement and education
- Interact with volunteers in a pleasant and non-threatening way
- Maintain record keeping (i.e., attendance and Metrocard log)
- Assist YLC Coordinator with special program activities (i.e., field trips)
- Resolve conflicts in a professional manner
- Teach in a fun and positive environment about planting, weeding, harvesting, and watering, along with other gardening techniques
- Inspire youth to become the next generation of community gardeners

**Time Commitment and Schedule Details:**
- College Mentor/Gardener Training (Winter/Spring)
- Kickoff Celebration (Spring)
- Pre-scheduled service project days at least twice a month, 3–4 hours per service day—Monday–Sunday, flexible (Spring/Summer)
- Graduation Ceremony (Summer)

**Benefits/Support Provided:**
YLC Program Coordinators recruit the volunteers for the program. Gardeners receive youth volunteer management training and material support from GreenThumb for garden project(s).

**Additional Information:** Be flexible, patient and open minded.
Special thanks and acknowledgements to:

NYC Service

Previous Partners:
The Compost Project
The Department of Education
GenerationOn
Grow to Learn NYC
Just Food
The United Nations

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Join the conversation online by following GreenThumb on:

Facebook: facebook.com/GreenThumbNYC
Twitter: twitter.com/greenthumbgrows
Instagram: instagram.com/greenthumbgrows
Flickr: flickr.com/groups

#YLC #younggardener #communityservice
#greenthumbgrows @greenthumbgrows
YLC volunteers sharing a laugh at Smiling HogsHead Ranch. Courtesy: GreenThumb YLC
GreenThumb by the Numbers

An estimated **87,000** pounds of edible food is produced in GreenThumb gardens each year.

More than **150** workshops are given by GreenThumb each year.

Over **1,000** tons of soil and compost are delivered to gardens each year.

There are more than **5 million** square feet of garden space in the five boroughs.

More than **100** rain water systems are installed in GreenThumb gardens, collecting more than 1.1 million gallons of water each year.

More than **20,000** people are members of a GreenThumb garden.

More than **75** Greening Partners are affiliated with GreenThumb.

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