

# Growing Community Gardens in the City of St. John's

A Guide for Community Gardens on City-Owned Land



ST. JOHN'S



## About this Guide

The City of St. John's recognizes that community gardens help build local and sustainable food systems and help to ensure that nutritious and affordable food is available in neighbourhoods across the City.

There are numerous community gardens in St. John's. Many of the gardens work in partnership with non-profits, schools, faith-based organizations, and City initiatives. This guide aims to outline the necessary steps and considerations to starting a community garden on City-owned land.

## What is a Community Garden?

A community garden is a shared space where residents get together to grow vegetables, fruits and flowers for themselves or others.

There are several types of community gardens:

**Collective gardens:** All vegetables and fruits grown are cared for, harvested, and shared between all gardeners.

**Allotment gardens:** Community Garden beds that are cared for, and harvested by, one person, family, or group.

**Combination:** Some garden beds are cared for by one gardener or family, while others are grown for everyone.



## How it Supports a Healthy Community

Community gardens are a place where social connections are made. Social connections are important for people's sense of belonging and for physical and mental health. Community gardens contribute to the well-being of residents. They are important for the health of neighbourhoods and create a place of gathering for people of all ages and backgrounds.

### Benefits of taking part in a community garden

- ✓ Affordable opportunities to eat healthy
- ✓ Physical activity
- ✓ Supports mental well-being
- ✓ Builds social connections
- ✓ Allows sharing of food skills with others

## City of St. John's Support for a Community Garden

Subject to resources and capacity, the City of St. John's will:

- ✓ Promote community gardening.
- ✓ Help build connections to other community gardens in St. John's and organizations that support community gardening.
- ✓ Provide a staff contact liaison for community garden projects.
- ✓ Help find City-owned land that is suitable for starting a community garden.
- ✓ Provide helpful information and resources on starting a community garden.

## Community Garden Projects on City-Owned Land

The City of St. John's supports new community gardens in residential areas, neighbourhood parks and open spaces. All new community garden projects on City-owned land will be subject to the following requirements as part of the approval process:

### A. Garden Committee

A required first step is to start a 'garden committee'. At least some members of the committee should reside near the proposed garden site. The 'garden committee' will create a project plan to make sure the garden operates as an effective and sustainable garden. A project plan makes sure that the workload is shared, and everyone has clear roles and responsibilities.

Garden committees should work with existing community gardens and organizations that support community gardening. This will help the garden committee gain valuable information and insight. The City of St. John's recommends that all new garden committees visit the Cavell Park Community Garden. The Cavell Park Community Garden is found at the base of Signal Hill at the end of Cavell Avenue. This community garden is an example of a successful community garden on City-owned land. Visitors are welcome. Please follow their garden rules, including not picking any plants.

### B. Finding a Good Garden Location

Recommended locations for community gardens are green spaces and open parks. There should be easy access to resources, such as paths and water. Locations that would not be ideal include sites near traffic intersections, traffic islands, or close to city streets.

#### Consider the following:

1) Approximately 6 hours of full sun exposure daily, such as visible flat green spaces away from streets and shade.

2) Easy access to water, such as:



Securing rain barrels near the garden



Using a nearby resident's water supply.

Proposed garden sites will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. This means that not all green spaces and open parks are suitable for a community garden. The City will not prepare land, provide gardening materials or signage, or maintain the community garden. All work is to be done by the garden committee.



## C. Community Engagement

Starting a small manageable garden that can grow over time will be more practical for volunteers and garden committees. Before starting, find out:

- How many residents are interested in participating in a garden?
- How much space is needed?
- What resources and funds are required?

Connect with other community gardens for valuable information on starting a community garden. There are community gardens across the city that can share experiences.

Contact **Food First NL** for a current list of community gardens in your area.

## D. Community Garden Application

New garden projects must submit the **Application to establish a Community Garden on City-Owned Land** to the City of St. John's. Committees should connect with [HealthyCommunities@StJohns.ca](mailto:HealthyCommunities@StJohns.ca) for advice and support in filling in the application. Submitting the application will start the review process. Applications will be reviewed to determine if the garden committee has met the requirements. The application should be submitted to:

**[HealthyCommunities@StJohns.ca](mailto:HealthyCommunities@StJohns.ca)**

### Healthy Neighbourhoods & Inclusion Fieldworker – Community Gardens

Department of Community Services  
City of St John's  
PO Box 908  
St John's NL A1C 5M2  
(709) 726-0180

## Guide to Filling in the Application to Establish a Community Garden on City-Owned Land

Detailed below is a description of the information that you will need to include in the **Application to Establish a Community Garden on City-Owned Land**

### Section 1

In this section, we ask that you provide us with the name of the garden group/committee, the name and contact details of all members of the committee, along with the main contact person. We also ask that you identify the location of the proposed garden (i.e. civic/street address). If possible, we ask that you also provide **Mapcentre** coordinates.

### Section 2

**Community Garden Location:** Briefly describe why you have chosen this site for the community garden. Please identify on the aerial photo provided by Healthy Communities the proposed location. Please specify the total size of the garden in square footage.





**Structures for the community garden:** Describe all the structures that you plan to build and/or place in the Community Garden site (e.g., number and dimension of the raised beds [including type of timber used], shed, rain barrels, signage, etc.). Please include a site plan that highlights where all the structures will be located in the garden. Please refer to the [Food First NL Community Garden Best Practice Toolkit](#) for sample site plans. For safety reasons, the City only allows the use of raised beds for community gardens. Raised beds are more visible, ergonomic, and promote the use of safe, good quality soil. Appendix 1 of this guide provides further information on building raised beds, while the Accessibility Guidelines in Appendix 2 provide advice on how to make all structures as accessible as possible.

**NOTE:** if the committee would like to build additional structures (e.g., more raised beds, a shed) after the initial approval to establish the community garden has been given, they must contact City staff beforehand at [HealthyCommunities@StJohns.ca](mailto:HealthyCommunities@StJohns.ca).

**Access to Water:** Clearly outline the most appropriate and accessible water source for the community garden. If using rain barrels, you will need to describe how you plan to fill these and ensure safety (see Appendix 1 below for more guidelines on this). The water supply method will depend on the gardening site layout and available sources.

**Compost, waste management and pest control:** Community gardens provides the opportunity for gardeners to compost their garden waste. The composter must be a closed bin design to keep animals and pests out, provide the ability to turn the compost, and be of sufficient size or number to match the gardens capacity. We suggest that compost bins are located on an accessible path, wide enough for wheelbarrows. It's important that gardeners do not throw waste or weeds on the pathways, in the fields close by, or just beyond their plots.

All members of the committee must provide proof of completion of the MUN Botanical Gardens [Composting Made Easy](#) course before starting operations in the garden.

**Accessibility and inclusion:** All community gardens should be as accessible and inclusive as possible. An accessible garden allows all members of the community the opportunity to participate. Please refer to the Accessibility Guidelines in Appendix 2 of this guide for tips on how to make the garden as accessible as possible.

**Safety:** It's important that the committee take all necessary measures to minimize any risk to those using and visiting the garden (e.g., protective covers on rain barrels, safe tool storage/usage, keeping garden tidy, labeling potentially toxic plants).



**Community Engagement:** Before you start your community garden, it's important that you gauge the level of support among residents in your neighbourhood. Every possible effort should be made to inform residents that border the immediate location of the garden and the surrounding neighbourhood. Options to raise awareness of the garden include in-person or virtual meetings, notifications on neighbourhood social media pages, and distribution of flyers. Engaging with local residents in this way provides an opportunity to highlight your motivations for starting a garden, gain their support, and to answer any questions that they may have about it.

**Funding for the garden:** There are several ways garden committees can finance the cost of starting a community garden. Some examples are fundraising for money or supplies, finding sponsors, and applying for grants.

Examples of grants that can be used for community gardens include:

- **City of St. John's Community Grants**
- **The Wellness Coalition** - Avalon East (only available to members of the Wellness Coalition)
- **Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Community Garden Support Program**

For information on other possible grant funding opportunities, refer to the **Food First NL Community Garden Best Practice Toolkit**. Some community gardens charge an annual membership fee to use a garden plot. This is a seasonal fee to help cover costs of general upkeep and supplies.

## License

Dependent on permitted use, for Community gardens on City-owned land, a license or 'land-use agreement' may be required between the City of St. John's and the garden committee. Licenses/

agreements will be subject to Council approval and terms may vary based on location and size of gardens.

## Volunteers

Having trusted volunteers care for the garden helps to create a welcoming community space. It is important to share tasks through the seasons and build up new volunteers to sustain the garden.

## Conclusion

We look forward to working with garden committees across the city. This guide provides some of the steps toward establishing a community garden on City-owned land. However, each gardening site is different and may require additional considerations. Community garden proposals will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. We look forward to working with garden committees across the city!

For a more detailed review on how to start a community garden, please see **Food First NL's Community Garden Best Practices Toolkit: A Guide for Community Organizations in Newfoundland and Labrador**.





## Appendix 1:

### Recommendations for building and maintaining raised garden beds

#### Introduction

This section provides some additional recommendations and considerations for building and maintaining your community garden.

**Placement of the raised beds:** The type of surface you choose to put the raised beds on will impact how accessible your community garden is. Ideally, they should be solid, level surfaces free from obstacles. To avoid impeding movement, you should allow at least 63 inches between the beds. Refer to our Guidelines for Accessible Community Gardens in Appendix 2 for more information.

**Raised bed dimensions:** Where possible, it's best to install garden beds of varying heights, lengths, and widths to increase the accessibility for a wide variety of gardeners.

**Standing beds:** Standing beds are suitable for gardeners that have difficulty bending or kneeling. While difficult to define an "ideal" height, it's recommended that they be between 30 - 44 inches.

Standing beds generally require a flat, hard surface, such as concrete or pavement, however they can also be built to be supported by cement "Deck Blocks". The "floor" of the standing beds should have a base using a series of lats, using a series of 1 inch by 4 inch lats, with 2 to 3 inch spaces between to allow for drainage. The base of the bed should be lined with landscaping fabric. Our Guidelines for Accessible Community Gardens in Appendix 2 provides more information on suitable dimensions for your raised beds.

**Height of your raised beds:** The height of your raised beds will determine the type of vegetables you can grow, as well as how accessible your garden is for different folks in the community. Ideally you will build beds of a range of heights suitable for people with different accessibility needs (e.g., young children, users of mobility devices such as wheelchairs). In choosing the heights to build your beds, think about who will be using them and what they will be looking to grow ([FFNL Best practice toolkit](#)).

While taller beds (18-30") are more accessible and allow for a greater variety of vegetables to be grown, 6-12" beds can also be successful. However, taller beds will be more costly to build and fill.

#### Material for building your raised bed

For safety reasons, we recommend that you use untreated lumber when building your beds. While cedar has the advantage of being naturally water resistant and longer lasting than other varieties of lumber, it is usually much more expensive. Most gardens in the city use untreated spruce, fir, or pine.



## Appendix 2:

### Guidelines for Accessible Community Gardens

#### Preamble

This resource has been prepared by the City of St. John's Inclusion & Accessibility Services Team as a guide for planning inclusive and accessible community gardens in the City of St. John's. The following information is based on best practices from other jurisdictions, input from CNIB St. John's, and design standards outlined in the [CSA Group B651-18 National Standard of Canada Accessible Design for the Built Environment](#).

#### Accessibility Matters

Accessibility benefits not only people with disabilities but also caregivers with strollers, people with carts or trolleys, aging adults, and those with communication challenges.

According to Statistics Canada, approximately 31% of the St. John's area population, ages 15 years and over, identify as having a disability, which is over 54,000 people. As the population ages, people are more at risk of becoming disabled in physical ability, visually, auditorily and/or cognitively.



#### Garden Parking & Accessible Routes

- ✓ Accessible parking and drop off location should be nearby and connected to the garden entrance via an accessible route.
- ✓ Community Gardens should be located near accessible public transit and have space for GoBus stops.
- ✓ Pathways to and within the garden should be accessible. Ideally, they should be solid (e.g., level surfaces free from obstacles).
- ✓ Width: 63 to 72 inches wide (the latter to include passing space)
- ✓ Specifications from the [Canadian Standards Association B651-18 Accessibility for the Built Environment](#).

#### Accessible Garden Bed Dimensions

Where possible, install garden beds at varying heights, lengths, and widths to increase access for a wide variety of gardeners.

#### Recommended Garden Bed Heights

- ✓ 24 inches high option (suitable for child gardeners)
- ✓ 28 - 36 inches high options (suitable for gardeners using a wheelchair)
- ✓ 36 - 44 inches high options (suitable for standing gardeners)

#### Recommended Garden Bed Lengths and Widths for Wheelchair Users

- ✓ 36 inches long garden bed suitable for 1 wheelchair user
- ✓ 72 inches long garden bed suitable for up to 2 wheelchair users
- ✓ 108 inches long garden bed suitable for up to 3 wheelchair users
- ✓ If bed can be accessed by gardeners from all sides, beds should be no more than 48 inches wide
- ✓ If beds can only be accessed from one side, 30 inches wide is recommended.



## Wheelchair Accessible Options

### Raised Bed with Angled Access

Angled exterior walls allow a wheelchair or seated gardener to sit closer and work in a more natural position. It reduces the need to lean and reach.

### Accessible Garden Beds

Where possible, install garden beds at varying heights, lengths, and widths to increase access for a wide variety of gardeners.






### U-Shaped Garden Beds

The u-shape allows a wheelchair or seated gardener to sit closer and work in a more natural position, with the benefit of added space accessible from both the left and right sides.



## Accessible Garden Tools

-  Ergonomic tools improve gardening capability for gardeners with limited flexibility and dexterity.
-  Consider adding spaces near the garden bed to hang or lay tools.
-  Consider preparing accessible garden tool kits that can be loaned and returned onsite.

### Accessible Watering Cans

To meet the needs of more gardeners, watering cans with vertical and horizontal handles are recommended.

Lightweight watering cans with long spouts benefit gardeners who have difficulty with lifting and reaching.



Watering cans that have wide grips are beneficial for gardeners with grasping difficulty.

### Accessible Garden Hand Tools

Tools with curved or vertical handles are beneficial for gardeners who have difficulty with traditional horizontal handles.



The curved or vertical handle allows the gardener to use the tool with a more natural resting hand position.





### Accessible Stools & Kneelers

Stools and kneelers provide comfort when gardening at low beds. Multiuse options are available that can act as both a stool and kneeler when flipped over. Stools and kneelers should:

- Be lightweight.
- Have adjustable height.
- Have handles for ease of lowering and lifting oneself.
- Be padded.
- Have a locking wheel for pushing/pulling.
- Have space for tools if possible.



### Accessible Garden Carts/Wagons

Carts and wagons allow gardeners to transport multiple tools and supplies from storage to the garden with ease and maximizes the gardeners time and energy.



#### Push Style Cart

A pushcart style benefits gardeners who have difficulty with bending or balance. Push carts may also provide balance support.

### Pull Style Cart

Waist height carts benefit gardeners who have difficulty with bending and balance.



### Water Access

- A water source should be a short distance from beds and be installed between 24 and 48 inches above the ground.
- Water sources with levered handles are more accessible than round turn style knobs.
- If the water source has a round turn style knob, consider having a grasping tool or long screwdriver that can be inserted in through the knob to assist with gripping and turning.
- If a hose cannot reach the area, watering cans and carts should be available for use.





## Accessibility Considerations for Vision Loss

- Print materials including handbooks, advertising, instructions, signage at the garden should follow [Clear Print Guidelines](#).
- Walkways should be clearly defined with edging indication and color contrast in areas of transition.
- Use brightly colored garden bed materials and tools that contrast with their background.
- Gardens should be well lit at night.

## Other Accessibility Considerations

- Inform gardeners that print materials may be available in alternate formats upon request.
- Prepare instructions, guides or handbooks with pictures, photos or pictograms which provide visual explanation of information, instructions, and procedures.
- Use plain language writing. The average literacy rate for public engagement is at a grade 8 level. Avoid long-winded sentences and jargon.
- Point form information is more efficient than large paragraphs.
- Consider placing benches or other outdoor seating, with adjacent space for a wheelchair to park/transfer, throughout your garden as rest areas.

## Resources

(CSA Group, 2018) Accessible Design for the Built Environment

(Stats Canada, 2022) Persons with and without disabilities aged 15 years and over, census metropolitan areas.

(Canadian National Institute for the Blind, n.d.) Clear Print Guidelines

(Plant a Seed & See What Grows Foundation, n.d.) How to Make Your Community Garden More Accessible





## Connect with us!

Do you have questions about this guide or about starting a community garden in the City of St. John's?

Connect with us at Healthy City St. John's by email at [HealthyCommunities@StJohns.ca](mailto:HealthyCommunities@StJohns.ca) or by phone at **709-726-0180**

