



Your guide to
**Community
Gardens**

What are Community Gardens?

Community gardens are places where people come together to grow vegetables, herbs, fruits and flowers in designated plots. The gardens are coordinated and maintained by volunteers, and the produce is not for commercial use.

Benefits of Community Gardens

Community gardens can provide you with:

- fresh herbs, fruits and vegetables.
- an opportunity to learn from others and share knowledge on gardening and cooking.
- a chance to meet your neighbours.
- a way to be active and enjoy the outdoors.

Community gardens are great for the neighbourhood too! They:

- provide an inclusive gathering place for people of all ages and cultural backgrounds.
- build welcoming, safer communities.
- improve the look of neighbourhoods.
- support pollinator habitats and a healthy environment.

Who do I contact to get started?

We're here to help.

Neighbourhood Development Office, City of Kitchener
lovelyhood@kitchener.ca
519-741-2200 ext. HOOD (4663)

About this guide

This guide will make it easier for you to start a new community garden. It walks you through each step and explains how city staff can help.

Generally, this guide is focused on community gardens on city-owned land. Of course, most of the steps will apply to other properties as well. Just keep in mind you'll need different permissions from the land owners.

Meet the Community Garden Council!

The Community Garden Council of Waterloo Region is a volunteer-driven organization dedicated to supporting community gardens. We are extremely grateful for their leadership role in our community.

Throughout this guide, we point to even more helpful resources and templates they've put together, especially related to the everyday management of community gardens and the nitty gritty details of actually getting things to grow! You can find these resources at community-gardens.ca.

If you want to find a plot and garden on your own, please contact the Community Garden Council. They'll be happy to help!

This information is available in accessible formats upon request.

Please call 519-741-2200 ext. 7083 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.

How much will this cost?

Community gardens can cost several thousands of dollars depending on the size, layout, features and proximity to services. Typical start-up costs include:

- Water connection
- Locates
- Soil testing
- Site preparation
- Shed and other storage
- Fencing or other delineation like shrubs
- Signage
- Tools, hoses, hand tools, wheelbarrows
- Plot construction and/or raised beds
- Common amenities like seating, shade or art

We offer a Community Gardens Grant to help with start-up costs. For gardens on city-owned land, you can receive up to \$1,000 in cash plus in-kind services related to water connection, locates, soil testing and preparation of the garden. Gardens not on city land can receive up to \$1,000 in cash.

How long will this take?

Overall, the entire project to start a community garden can take about one year from start to finish (with no unexpected complications).

We recommend you start planning in April, so your garden can open in the spring of the following year. If you're looking for financial and in-kind assistance from the city, please note that grant applications are due on **June 1** every year, for installation in the spring of the following year.

Also, the Community Gardens Grant currently supports only one to two new gardens a year. If you're not approved, don't let this stop you! We'll check in with you in the following year to see if you are still interested in receiving a grant and starting a community garden. You won't have to complete the entire application form again.



10 steps to start a community garden

Shaping a vision

Depending on your comfort level, you might want to do the first two steps in a different order. Up to you!

1. Form a group of keen gardeners

Start by getting four to six people involved and ready to work together. As a group, come up with a list of goals you hope to achieve or a vision for what your garden might look like.

2. Contact city staff & the Community Garden Council

Express your interest to city staff (contact information is on page 2). We'll walk you through this guide and grant opportunities, as well as provide some advice on engaging the whole neighbourhood in your community garden project.

The Community Garden Council can point you to more helpful resources and connect you with experienced gardeners to learn from. Visit community-gardens.ca.

Finding the right location

3. Identify two to three potential locations

Factors to consider include:

- Accessibility
- Visibility and sightlines
- Soil condition and quality
- Underground services
- Water access
- Adequate sunlight

- Storage space
- Existing and/or potential use of the site

Sharing your vision

4. Do a “pulse check” in your ‘hood

Do others share your vision? Will a community garden be supported by the neighbourhood? Start these conversations early to build broad support.

Share your vision and possible locations with your [ward councillor](#) and [neighbourhood association](#), as well as schools, faith communities, businesses or non-profits.

Confirming city and neighbourhood support

5. Prepare a grant application

By June 1, prepare a grant application for the city's Community Gardens Grant. The application form will ask you to identify preferred locations, in order of priority, and describe how the garden can have a positive neighbourhood impact. Check the grant guidelines for more details. Approval by the city will include confirmation of the best location.

6. Engage the neighbourhood

At minimum, we ask that you inform residents within 120 metres of the proposed location and host a public information meeting.

Sometimes, there may be differences of opinion between residents. We can help you respond to any potential challenges or concerns that may arise.

Planning garden coordination

garden planning group and the gardeners themselves.

7. Develop a layout, create a budget and look for funding

Once your garden has been approved, you'll need to determine the layout of your garden plots and other amenities. The Community Garden Council has great templates from other gardens and it's probably a good idea to visit an existing community garden or two as well.

Talk with city staff to discuss how to design your garden to be accessible, such as raised beds and barrier-free pathways.

This is also the time to make key decisions that will dictate the cost of your garden, like:

- Pathways and access to the garden
- Fencing or delineation
- Type of storage, if any
- Gathering spaces, seating or art

While the city's grant support is substantial, it will not cover the full start-up costs of a new community garden. Additional funds could be raised through member fees, donations, fundraising, sponsorships or other community grants. Remember to build a "rainy day" fund for unexpected costs in the future.

8. Complete a Community Garden Agreement

This agreement, between your community garden group and the city, will lay out clear roles and responsibilities for both the start-up phase and long-term care and ongoing maintenance of the garden.

This agreement also includes insurance requirements that are necessary to protect your

9. Plan how to run your garden

Key decisions include:

- On-going volunteer roles
- Annual maintenance and operating budget and garden plot fees
- How people sign up for plots
- Gardener guidelines
- Annual work days, potlucks or celebrations
- Ways to give back to the community

Again, city staff and the Community Garden Council can provide templates for these details. Once you have plans in place, you can start receiving gardeners, assigning plots and clearly defining roles and responsibilities of all gardeners.

Building the garden

10. Prepare the site and build the garden

We'll work with you to create a schedule of who is doing what for garden construction.

Build community and a sense of ownership in the garden by hosting a work day for all gardeners. Assign tasks, such as building the plots, installing fences, organizing tools, etc. Try to find something that meets everyone's skill levels and abilities. Don't forget lunch breaks or fun stuff like live music.

Start gardening!

You did it! Your community garden is ready to go. Host an official opening and take lots of pictures to remember this special day. And don't forget to thank all the amazing volunteers who made it happen!

Community Gardens in Kitchener



The community garden at Trinity Village features raised beds so people with different physical abilities can participate.

How can your garden be accessible to all?



The Gzowski Park Community Garden brings together many different cultures, helping to form residents' sense of belonging.

How can your garden reflect diversity?



Rosemount Millennium Community Garden has a communal plot for gardeners to tend to, with the produce being donated to the local foodbank.

How can your garden give back to the local community?



Guelph Street Community Garden hosts regular potlucks for the whole neighbourhood, not just gardeners themselves.

How can your garden be a gathering place for the neighbourhood?