

# MEMBER HANDBOOK

## PROJECT GROW COMMUNITY GARDENS

### I. INFORMATION ON PROJECT GROW

Project Grow has been serving the Ann Arbor community as a private, non-profit, community gardening organization since 1972. We identify potential garden sites, arrange for its use, and maintain it as part of our growing network of community gardens. At this time, we manage 18 garden sites located throughout the city, which range in size from only 3 plots at our Brooks St. location to our largest site at County Farm, with over 80 plots. Our Discovery Gardens, connected to two sites, Leslie Science Center and County Farm, provide gardening opportunities for children, seniors and the physically challenged. Project Grow also offers classes and workshops, most of them at no cost, to anyone who would like to learn more about organics, gardening in general, seeds, harvesting produce, and preserving them for future use. In addition, we sponsor an ongoing Organic Gardening Certification Program, in partnership with Washtenaw Community College.

Throughout the year, we hold annual events as a means of reaching out to the public and developing connections with the residents of Ann Arbor. Among our standing annual events are a Seed Swap in February and two Tomato Tastings, in August and September, all of which are used to emphasize the value of seed saving, heirloom tomatoes, and organic gardening in general. For the last two years, we have also held a Potato Pledge, whereby we offer free seed potatoes to gardeners who are willing to grow them out and offer a percentage of their produce back to Project Grow for ultimate delivery to Food Gatherers, Ann Arbor's resource for food for the needy.

Project Grow is governed by a volunteer board of directors, while day-to-day business and program management are carried out by the managing director. Information on the current members and director can be found on our website, [www.projectgrowgardens.org](http://www.projectgrowgardens.org). Board meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month at 7pm at the Leslie House, Leslie Science and Nature Center, 1831 Traver Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48105. All board meetings are open to the public; minutes of past meetings are available on our website.

The largest source of income for Project Grow is the plot fees which we charge each of our members. These fees, however, only partially cover the costs of managing the gardens. Expenses incurred by Project Grow include water, plowing, tools and equipment for each site, insurance, accounting services, information technology, office supplies, OGCP instructors' and the managing director's salaries. Income from our annual plant sale, fees from the Organic Gardening Certification Program, and donations of time and money from our members and supporters help to cover the rest of the costs and to keep Project Grow alive.

Volunteers play an essential role in fulfilling our mission, from garden support and management

to special events planning and program facilitation. If you are interested in volunteering or finding out what role you might take as a volunteer with Project Grow, you can register online at our website, [www.projectgrowgardens.org](http://www.projectgrowgardens.org), or request that an application be sent to you by calling our office at 734-996-3169. We welcome both individuals and groups seeking a one-time community service experience, as well as those who want to be involved in an ongoing way. Project Grow belongs to you, its community! Help us make it better. Get involved!

## **II. OPERATION OF THE GARDEN SITES**

Each of the 18 garden sites managed by Project Grow is run fairly independently of one another. However, while each may have some characteristics and practices that are unique to the site, all follow the general guidelines presented below. Additionally, all are ultimately overseen by the managing director. Important to the efficient and effective functioning of this structure is the site coordinator/s of each garden. These individuals act as the on-site manager and intermediary between the gardeners and garden site and the managing director. The most important cog in this structure, however, is you, the gardener. As a member of Project Grow Community Gardens, you are expected to act as part of your site's community, by getting to know your neighboring gardeners, being considerate of those neighbors by keeping weeds down in your plot, helping others with their garden if they need it, and asking for help when your need it. It also includes attending work parties to do your part in keeping the common areas clear.

### **Garden Site Coordinator**

Each garden site has one or more site coordinators who also gardens there. They are essentially volunteer "managers" who are usually seasoned organic gardeners and long-time Project Grow participants. They are responsible for opening, operating, and closing down their garden site each season. They also function as the "eyes and ears" of the managing director, informing him of problems, issues, and requests posed by the gardeners. They are also the on-site point of contact for gardeners who have questions about the functioning of the garden, about gardening in general, and responsibilities of individual gardeners. They schedule and notify gardeners of site meetings and work parties, hay deliveries, problems current with the site, closing day and its requirements. Please let them know the best way to reach you, especially if your contact information changes.

### **Garden Plots**

Our community gardening plots are either annuals, which open to gardening in the spring and close in mid-October, or perennials, which are open year round. Ideally, each site will have a combination of both types, to accommodate the preferences of all of our gardeners. However, that is not always possible. We have more sites which only contain annuals, mostly because their landowners prefer that the property be cleared each fall. Should you want a perennial plot, note that they are generally in high demand and may require a waiting period of years to secure. Note, too, that a move might be required, as the only sites with perennials are Buhr Park, Clague, County Farm, Greenview, Hillside Terrace, Lakewood and Wines. Please email the managing director of your interest in a perennial along with the site of your choice. You will be placed on a waiting list and notified when one becomes available on a first come first served basis.

Full plots are approximately 750 sq. feet in size. Half-sized plots are approximately 375 sq. ft. However, variation in sizing occurs at some of the sites. Check out the site of your choice on our website to see what dimensions apply there. Not all sizes are available at all gardens. Discovery Garden raised beds are 18-24 sq. ft, depending on its configuration. While most of the Discovery Garden beds can be gardened by both seniors and children, some of them are raised higher up and are intended for the physically challenged. Please indicate if a highly-raised bed is required.

### **Tilling of the Gardens**

Sites with annual plots are tilled twice a year: the first time, during the spring as soon as the soil is dry enough to be worked; the second, in the fall after the gardens are closed for the season. The spring tilling ideally occurs in late April, after which the sites are opened for gardening. However, it is often fraught with anxiety, especially for gardeners in those sites that are subject to flooding in a very wet spring or are made up of clay soil that is very slow to dry after the spring rains. Wet ground cannot be tilled, as doing so will result in hard clumps of soil that make it difficult to garden once the soil has dried out. Should wet conditions occur at your site, we ask for your patience. Soils at affected sites will be monitored frequently and tilled as soon as conditions are right. Once done, gardeners will be informed and be able to start their season.

### **Garden Stake Out**

Once tilled, gardens are staked out into individual plots by your site coordinator and other gardeners. This event usually happens around the first weekend in May. If you wish to join in this activity, look for the email notice from your site coordinator and show up when the event is scheduled. Please do not garden until this job is done, as it is nearly impossible to determine exactly where an individual plot is located, despite maps. You may just be sowing a lovely bed of greens for your neighbor! Once a garden is staked out, the season can begin. You will be informed of this signature date.

### **Tools and Equipment**

Every site will have hoses for watering your plot. While hoses start off each season in good repair, they eventually, from being pulled to and from many plots and lying in the hot sun, show wear and tear. Most of the problems can be easily fixed. Please feel free to do so, if you can; otherwise, please inform your site coordinator of any leaks or damaged connections that you discover. Please do not discard hoses unless the site coordinator has deemed them unworthy of repair. Most sites will also have a supply of tools with which to garden; a few do not, due to a prohibition on storage sheds by the landowner. Project Grow's tools are marked by a red painted tip and the name "Project Grow" on them. Where they are available, gardeners are free to use them when needed. However, we do ask that they be returned to the storage site when you are done with them. Should a tool be broken, please inform your site coordinator—such accidents happen and we would like to know of them so that broken tools can be repaired or replaced.

### **Water**

The cost of water is included in your plot fee and is furnished for every garden site managed by Project Grow. Water is turned on by the city or county only when it is deemed that no further hard frost is likely to occur. Sometimes this happens after the gardens have opened. In that event, we ask your patience, while we try to get the water turned on. Watering of plots should never be unattended; hose timers are prohibited. Only hand-held attachments are permitted.

Please conserve this important resource by watering judiciously and mulching well.

### **Work Parties**

Every site has areas that are commonly used by everyone: aisles, perimeters, watering sites and tool sheds. Because they are part of the "commons," they need to be cared for by the community. It is during work parties that this important communal effort is done by gardeners of the site. At some, they are scheduled monthly, during which mowing, weed-whacking, hose or tool repairs, and other such tasks are done. At other sites, work parties may be more sporadic, perhaps occurring only twice in the season or entailing only a garden closing/final work party. Whatever their frequency, work parties are essential for the smooth functioning of the site. It is your responsibility as a member of Project Grow to attend as many of them as you can when your site coordinator schedules them.

### **Closing Your Garden Plot**

Sometime in mid-October (date is published on our website and notices will be sent to you as the time approaches), the gardens will close down for the season. Every gardener is expected to clean up his/her plot at this time. This is a big job and it is strongly recommended that you start the process several weeks ahead of the date. For annual plots which close down when the gardens close, it means that they must be plow-ready. To achieve this state, annual gardeners must:

- Remove and take home all fencing, cages, stakes, strings, plastics and all other non-organic material from your garden, leaving only the numbered stakes put in by Project Grow during the stake out;
- Remove all rocks and place them in designated rock piles;
- Remove all diseased and solanaceous plant and fruit material (tomatoes, peppers, eggplants) and discard at home;
- Pull out all plants with tough stalks or long vines, such as sunflowers, corn, or pumpkins, chop them into 1-foot lengths and spread them around your plot;
- Chop down all other tall plants into 1-foot lengths and spread the pieces around the area (do not leave them in piles, which cannot be easily plowed);
- Unbind and spread out all unused hay bales, to facilitate plowing;
- Attend any final work party scheduled for your site.
- At the end of closing day, all annual plots should be ready for the fall tilling.

For perennial plots, though these gardeners are able to garden throughout the year, closing day also needs to be observed. Perennial gardeners must:

- Remove all dead annual plants and weeds and either compost on site or discard at home;
- Remove all diseased or solanaceous plants and discard at home;
- Remove all gardening equipment not in use, as well as bottled liquids, soil supplements, etc., and take home with you;
- Remove all tools and store them appropriately, either at home with you or placed in Project Grow sheds;
- Attend any final work party scheduled for your site.
- At the end of closing day, all perennial plots should be free of all non-organic material not in use and have a neat appearance.

### III. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR GARDENING WITH PROJECT GROW

Project Grow is committed to gardening in socially and environmentally responsible ways. All of our gardens are organic. Fertilizers and pest control measures which may be used in our organic sites are those which are accepted by major organic certification agencies, such as the Organic Crop Improvement Association. Soil fertility is maintained or enhanced by creating optimal conditions for biological activity, through crop rotation and the addition of organic material and the judicious use of organic and natural mineral amendments. The use of prohibited chemicals will result in immediate expulsion from the garden and forfeiture of the right to garden with Project Grow in the future.

Guidelines for permissible gardening practices are given below. If you have specific questions, please contact your site coordinator, consult the gardening section of our website or other organic gardening resources, or, if you need further assistance, email the Project Grow office at [info@projectgrowgardens.org](mailto:info@projectgrowgardens.org). Many of your neighbors at the garden site are very experienced gardeners and may be able to offer you great advice and solutions to your problems. Do not overlook them when trying to get answers to your questions.

#### **Weed Control**

Gardeners are expected to control weed growth in and around the perimeter of their plot. Herbicides of any kind are prohibited as they are hazardous to human health, may kill or damage desirable crops, drift into neighboring gardens, or persist in the soil. Recommended practices for controlling weeds are hoeing, mulching, and hand weeding. A quick start in the gardens once they are open also helps, as desirable plants help to keep the weeds at bay. We provide the opportunity for the purchase and delivery of hay to your site at the beginning of each garden season. Your site coordinator will contact you when it is time to place an order. If, however, you would like to use other mulching material, leaves collected in the fall, grass clippings (especially from non-chemically-fertilized/weed-killer sprayed lawns), and even the weeds themselves will work.

#### **Insect Control**

Synthetic insecticides are prohibited. Preferred control methods include crop rotation, hand picking of insect pests, introduction of predator species and biological controls, such as ladybugs, lacewings or *Bacillus thuringiensis*, companion planting, soil solarization, and row covers. The latter works best with vegetables that don't require fertilization, such as lettuces, arugula, spinach, beets, or chard, by preventing insects from getting to the crops to lay eggs or feed.

#### **Disease Control**

Most problems with diseases, especially soil borne ones, can be controlled by maintaining a clean garden and healthy soil, rotating your crops annually, watering judiciously (watering deeply infrequently, instead of lightly often), selecting disease-resistant and healthy plant varieties, and removing diseased plants from the garden as soon as possible. Solanaceous plants and fruit, in particular, such as tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants, should be removed at the end of the season, to minimize the presence of disease spores that can devastate them the following year.

## **Fertilizers and Soil Amendments**

In general, a well-maintained soil should not need fertilizers. Rather, efforts should be directed to improving the quality of your soil, by the addition of organic material of plant or animal origin, such as compost, leaf mold, aged livestock manure, blood and bone meal, fish or plant meals. Natural mineral amendments, such as greensand, granite dust, ground limestone, or rock phosphate, are also acceptable. Should "fertilizers" be required, liquidized seaweed, fish emulsions, and commercially prepared organic fertilizer blends are acceptable. Project Grow gardeners often collaborate to get a truckload of city compost delivered to their site. If you are interested in forming such a group, ask your neighboring gardener or site coordinator, to discover other interested parties.

## **Garden Refuse**

Gardens inevitably create weeds and disposing of them can be a problem. Dumping of weeds into unused areas of your site is strictly prohibited. If you cannot or don't wish to compost such refuse, please take them home for the city to handle. The preferred method for dealing with garden refuse on site is to compost it. However, composting can only be done within your plot (try using weeds as a mulch!) or in designated areas at some of our garden sites. Inquire of your site coordinator to see if your site is one of them. If you wish to learn more about composting, classes and direct hands-on experiences in composting are available at Project Grow's Composting Education Center, located at the Leslie Science and Nature Center, 1831 Traver Rd., Ann Arbor, MI. Go online to our website to see what is being offered currently by the center.

## **Non-Acceptable Plants**

Project Grow cannot allow plants with the following characteristics to be grown in any of the gardens:

- Invasive species, such as comfrey, Jerusalem artichoke, or mints of all kinds, including oregano.
- Trees, bushes, or other woody perennials.
- Illegal or dangerous plants.

## **Abandoned Plots**

Plots that have not been seriously worked by June 1st of the current season or are overgrown with weeds taller than 18" at any point in the season may be considered abandoned and reassigned to another gardener or cleared of all growth during work parties. Such gardeners will also forfeit their right to garden with Project Grow in the future. Efforts will be made to contact the parties involved before any actions are taken, but it is the responsibility of such gardeners to inform Project Grow of any obstacles that prevent them from gardening in a timely or acceptable fashion. For those experiencing serious difficulties, Project Grow has a program called "Gardening Angels," which will engage volunteers to help them garden for a specified period of time. If you are such a person, contact [volunteer@projectgrowgardens.org](mailto:volunteer@projectgrowgardens.org) for help.