

MEMBER HANDBOOK

Project Grow Community Gardens

Gardening with Project Grow	2
About Project Grow	2
Community Gardens	2
Education	2
Special Events	3
Governance and Operation	3
Finances	3
Volunteers	4
Communication	4
Operation of the Garden Sites	4
Garden Site Coordinator	5
Garden Plots: Annual vs Perennial	5
Plot and Bed Size	5
Opening of the Annual Gardens	6
Watering	7
Tools and Equipment	7
Site Volunteering and Work Parties	8
Closing Your Garden Plot	8
General Guidelines for Gardening With Project Grow	9
Gardening Organically	9
Fencing	10
Weed Control	10
Insect Control	10
Disease Control	10
Fertilizers and Soil Amendments	11
Garden Refuse	11
Non-Acceptable Plants	11
Newly Adopted Policy Regarding Raspberry Plants	12
Plot Maintenance	12
Moving?	12

Gardening with Project Grow

The following sections describe how Project Grow runs and what to expect at your garden. Before exploring that, we'd first like to say something about community gardens, what it means to garden in a community garden, and being a member of that community.

Project Grow's mission is to, **"Provide the space, education and inspiration to make organic gardening accessible to all"**. This was not formally adopted as our mission statement until 2000, but we have been fulfilling that mission from the beginning.

Project Grow's founder, Susan Drake, saw Project Grow as a grand social experiment bringing together people from very different backgrounds and circumstances in a common activity. Project Grow gardens still do this, bringing together people of different races, religions, cultures and economic circumstances. Many gardeners say they meet people at the garden they would never otherwise have met. Some gardeners want to grow organic food, others want to grow flowers, and some love just being outside, even if it means getting a bit dirty and sweaty. What they all share is a love for gardening.

To get the most out of your gardening experience, we strongly encourage you to be part of the *community* at your community garden. Talk to your garden neighbors, ask for and share gardening ideas, seeds, plants, and volunteer to work on shared tasks. Helping your garden become an interactive community, volunteering, and taking or leading classes are the best ways to become involved with, and support, these gardens. Most of all, have fun and enjoy!

About Project Grow

Community Gardens

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 their use, and maintain them as part of our network of community gardens. At this time, we manage 21 garden sites located throughout the city, which range in size from only 5 plots at Wines Elementary School to over 80 plots at our largest site, County Farm Park. Our Discovery Gardens, at Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living, County Farm Park, and Leslie Science and Nature Center provide gardening opportunities for children, seniors and the physically challenged.

Education

Project Grow also offers classes and workshops to anyone who would like to learn more about gardening, organic gardening, seeds, harvesting produce, preserving the harvest, and other gardening related topics. In addition, we sponsor an ongoing certificate in composting through

the Master Composter Certificate Program, offered in partnership with the Washtenaw County Department of Public Works. Check our [website](#) or newsletter for upcoming classes.

Special Events

Throughout the year, we hold annual events celebrating gardening that reach out to the public and develop connections with Ann Arbor residents. Watch the newsletter for announcements about these events. Among our standing annual events are a Seed Share, an Heirloom Plant Sale in May, and a Tomato Tasting. All of these emphasize the value of organic gardening, heirloom plants (especially heirloom tomatoes and peppers), and seed saving.

We also partner with other local organizations at their events such as the DIY Fest at the Ann Arbor Public Library and the Monarch Festival at Leslie Science and Nature Center.

If you would like to recommend and help present an event, let us know if we can help you do that.

Governance and Operation

Project Grow is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and day-to-day business and program management are carried out by the Managing Director. Information on the current board members and director can be found on our website, www.projectgrowgardens.org. Board meetings are on the second Thursday of each month at 7pm. The meetings are held either via Zoom, or in person at the Ann Arbor Senior Center, 1320 Baldwin Ave, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

All board meetings are open to the public. If you are interested in attending a meeting, please contact the Managing Director at info@projectgrowgardens.org to find out how to attend the next meeting.

Finances

The largest source of income for Project Grow are the plot fees we charge our gardeners. But, these fees only partially cover the costs of running Project Grow. Our expenses include

- Water
- Tilling
- Gardening tools and equipment
- Insurance and accounting services
- Information technology (a website, email, Zoom, telephone)
- Office supplies
- Salaries for Master Composter instructors and the Managing Director

Income from our annual plant sale, fees from the Master Composter Certificate 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 financially healthy.

Volunteers

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 with Project Grow, please email volunteer@projectgrowgardens.org to find out how you can help. 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. Volunteering at your community garden and at Project Grow events is to everyone's benefit. Project Grow belongs to you, its community - please get involved!

Communication

Project Grow announces important events via email. We send Project Grow gardeners a monthly newsletter as well as special announcements such as reminders to register, and notices of events like our plant sale, Tomato Tasting, garden closing and annual meeting. Please ensure your email is functioning well so that you receive these important Project Grow announcements.

The newsletter and many other announcements for the entire organization are sent using Constant Contact. If you unsubscribe to Constant Contact, be aware you will stop receiving all announcements.

Operation of the Garden Sites

Project Grow's 21 garden sites are run fairly independently. Each has some characteristics and practices that are unique, but all follow the general guidelines presented below, and all are ultimately overseen by the Managing Director.

Each site has one or more Site Coordinators. Site Coordinators are on-site managers and intermediaries between the landowner, the Managing Director, and the gardeners. The most important part of garden management, is in fact, you the gardener.

When you become a Project Grow gardener, you get to use a plot of land but more than that, you become part of a community garden. Project Grow ultimately relies on the gardeners to help care for the site as a whole. Helping to maintain the site by volunteering for work days (fondly called "work parties") is certainly part of this. More important, though, is becoming part of the site's community of gardeners by getting to know your neighbors, and being a good neighbor - keeping weeds down in and around the perimeter of your plot, and helping others when you see the opportunity.

Garden Site Coordinator

Each garden site has one or more gardeners who are Site Coordinators. Site Coordinators are usually long time members of Project Grow and seasoned organic gardeners who volunteer to help manage the site. They oversee the opening, operating, and closing of the garden site each season, schedule and notify gardeners of site meetings and work parties, hay deliveries, current problems at the site, and closing day and its requirements.

Your garden Site Coordinators can answer questions about the garden site, gardening in general, and the responsibilities of individual gardeners. Be sure to let them know of any problems in the garden. They know what is happening at the site and can usually answer your questions. When necessary, they will pass issues on to the Managing Director.

Please let your Site Coordinators know the best way to reach you, especially if your contact information changes. Some gardeners wonder why they have not heard from their Site Coordinator when the gardens open. Make sure to check for misdirected email in your SPAM folder. Many times this has been the case.

Garden Plots: Annual vs Perennial

Project Grow garden plots are annual or perennial. Annual plots open to gardening around May 1st in the spring and close in mid-October. Perennial plots are open year round. Some sites have only annual plots, some only perennial plots and a few have both. We have more sites with only annual plots because many landowners prefer that their property be cleared each fall.

County Farm, Catholic Social Services and Ellsworth have both annual and perennial plots. Matthaei has perennial quarter plots available to people who also have an annual plot. If you would like a perennial plot at one of these sites, and have completed one year as an annual gardener at the site, please email the Managing Director. You will be placed on a waiting list and notified when one becomes available on a first come, first served basis.

Airport, Buhr Park, Clague, Hillside, Lakewood, and Wines are entirely perennial so you can also get a perennial plot by applying for a plot at one of these sites.

Plot and Bed Size

Full plots are approximately 750 square feet in size. Half-sized plots are approximately 375 square feet. Many Project Grow gardens are decades old, so sizes are approximate and may vary. Not all sizes are available at all sites.

A Discovery Garden raised bed is 18-32 square feet, depending on the site and the bed. While Discovery Garden beds can be gardened by anyone, some of them are taller and are especially suited for the physically challenged. If you would like a tall raised bed, you can request that in the Notes section of the application.

Opening of the Annual Gardens

There are a number of steps to prepare annual gardens in the spring. The Managing Director works with landowners, outside contractors, and Site Coordinators to do the following:

1. Tilling - Project Grow uses an outside contractor to do the tilling at 11 sites.
2. Staking - Your Site Coordinator and volunteer gardeners place a labeled stake on the corners of each plot so that you can identify your plot. Your confirmation contains your plot number, and a sitemap you should use to find your plot.
3. Prep - Many sites have other chores that need to be completed before the garden is fully up and running. These include laying out hoses and maintenance of tools. These tasks are usually carried out by the gardeners under the direction of the Site Coordinator.
4. Opening Day!

Tilling of the Gardens

Spring tilling occurs between late April and mid May. Wet ground cannot be tilled because it creates big lumps of soil that dry out into hard clods. This damages the soil structure and makes gardening very difficult. In a wet spring, we ask for your patience. Soil moisture is checked regularly and we till as soon as conditions are right. Tilling must be completed before the site can be staked and plots marked. Watch for email updates from your Site Coordinator!

Garden Stake Out

Once tilled, gardens are staked to mark individual plots by your Site Coordinator and other gardeners. Like tilling, stake out depends on the weather and also available volunteer time. If you would like to help with stake out, watch for an email request for volunteers from your Site Coordinator or email them and say you're available to help. This is one of the hardest times to be patient - we're almost ready! Do not start gardening until you receive word from your Site Coordinator that the gardens are open.

Final Prep Work

Almost all sites have hoses that need to be laid out in the garden, and storage sheds for shared tools that may need to be organized. Watch for information from your Site Coordinator on ways you can help with these last preparations to get the gardens open and running so that everyone has a good experience.

Opening Day

Your Site Coordinator will inform you when the site is prepared and you can start gardening. It is important that you do not start until you get this announcement. Some sites schedule an "official" opening day so gardeners can meet, and Site Coordinators can answer questions and

inform you of policies specific to the site. Please try to attend if one is arranged at your site. It is a great community building opportunity for your garden.

When visiting the garden the first time, bring the map and plot number sent with your confirmation so you are sure to begin planting the right plot. If you are at all unsure, check with your Site Coordinator.

Watering

Water is furnished at every Project Grow garden site and the cost is included in your plot fee. For those sites that use City or County supplied water, the water is turned on by the city or county only when they are confident hard frosts and freezes are unlikely to occur. This often happens after the gardens have already opened. If this happens, please be patient about water. We will already be working to try to get water to you.

The following practices and guidelines help avoid wasting water:

- Unattended watering is prohibited.
- Sprinklers are allowed but you must be present the entire time they are in use on your plot.
- It is the gardeners' responsibility to turn the water off at the spigot after watering.
- Some hoses have a nozzle that will stop the water from flowing from the hose without turning off at the spigot. Remember to turn off both spigot and nozzle before you leave.
- Please handle hose nozzles and spigots with care and notify your Site Coordinator if they need repair.
- Help conserve this important resource by watering judiciously and mulching well.
- Please also check with your Site Coordinator to learn any quirks of your site's watering setup.

Tools and Equipment

Hoses

Every site will have hoses for watering your plot. While hoses start off each season in good repair, pulling, twisting and the hot sun eventually cause wear and tear. If you encounter a leak, damaged connection, or notice a hose is kinked beyond reasonable use, let your Site Coordinator know. Please do not discard hoses unless the Site Coordinator decides they cannot be repaired.

Tools

All gardens are supplied with large tools like shovels, rakes, hoes and wheelbarrows. Project Grow tools are usually marked with a red painted tip on the handle and labeled "Project Grow". After use, they should be returned to the storage site, cleaned and ready for the next gardener to use. Let your Site Coordinator know about broken tools so that they can be repaired or replaced. If you use Project Grow tools, remember to return them to the storage site when you

leave the garden. The tools are for everyone to use and should never be left or stored in your plot.

Site Volunteering and Work Parties

Every site has areas shared by gardeners and guests - aisles, perimeters, water spigots, shared tools and so on. Maintaining these requires mowing, weed-whacking, and hose or tool repairs. At some sites special work parties are also organized for putting up and taking down fencing for the site, or repairing shared fencing. Project Grow has over 400 gardeners and inevitably one or more plots end up abandoned by the gardener. Cleaning up abandoned plots is also a shared responsibility.

Some larger sites schedule monthly work parties, while smaller sites may encourage individual gardeners to keep the common areas mowed, weeded and trash free. Many sites also have a final work party to close the garden at the end of the season.

Your help is an essential part of being a Project Grow gardener. Please get involved in whatever way you can!

Closing Your Garden Plot

The third Saturday of October marks the end of the annual garden season. The exact date is published on our website, published several times in the newsletter and communicated to gardeners by their Site Coordinators. As agreed to when you applied for a garden plot, the gardening agreement includes cleaning your plot at the end of the season. This is a big job and it is strongly recommended that you start the process several weeks ahead of the date so you can take your time.

Annual Plots

Annual plots must be plow-ready by dusk on closing day. Here is a checklist to use to meet that deadline:

- ☐ Remove and take home all fencing, cages, stakes, strings, pots, markers and all other non-organic material from your garden.
- ☐ Leave the numbered stakes put in by Project Grow to ID the plot number.
- ☐ Remove all rocks and place them in designated rock piles.
- ☐ Remove all diseased and solanaceous plant and fruit material (tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and 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.

- ☐ Dig up stumps from sunflowers, corn, and anything else with a large stem. These cannot be easily pulled up by the tiller.
- ☐ A final walk through of your plot to collect any remaining plastic debris: plant tags, zip ties, straw/marsh hay roping, etc.
- ☐ Give needed volunteer hours for whole garden cleanup, or 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.

Perennial plots can be gardened throughout the year, but also require end of season cleanup. Perennial gardeners must:

- ☐ Compost or take home all dead annual plants and weeds.
- ☐ Compost at least 12 inches deep all diseased plants or remove and dispose of at home.
- ☐ Take home any tools, pots, buckets or items that will not be used during the fall/winter including bottled liquids, soil supplements, etc.
- ☐ Take home or neatly stack/store all tomato cages and plant/structure supports in one area of your garden.
- ☐ Give needed volunteer hours for whole garden cleanup, or attend any final work party scheduled for your site.
- ☐ At the end of closing day, all perennial plots should be free of any non-organic material not in use and have a neat appearance.

General Guidelines for Gardening With Project Grow

Gardening Organically

Project Grow is committed to gardening in socially and environmentally responsible ways. All of our gardens are organic. The only fertilizers, herbicides, and disease or pest controls allowed are those 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, if you need further assistance, email the Managing Director at info@projectgrowgardens.org. Many of your neighbors at the garden site are experienced gardeners and may be able to offer advice and solutions to your problems. Do not overlook them when trying to get answers to your questions.

Fencing

Project Grow's long term goal is to eliminate the use of plastics in the garden. To achieve that goal, we ask that you do not use plastic fencing. Except at sites with a perimeter deer fence, Project Grow does not supply garden fencing. Fencing is not required around the perimeter of your plot, but it is encouraged, especially if you are gardening at a site that does not have common deer fencing around the entire site. We share these sites with many creatures, large and small, two and four-legged. Fencing can improve your harvest by providing a barrier to the creatures that want to eat what you are growing. No fence or barrier will keep everything out, but fencing can help.

Several sites including Food Gatherers, Hunt, and Wines have common deer fencing around the entire site. Project Grow paid for these fences when they were installed and plot fees at these sites are slightly higher until the cost of the fence is repaid.

Weed Control

Gardeners are expected to control weed growth in and around the perimeter of their plot. Synthetic herbicides of any kind are prohibited. Recommended practices for controlling weeds are hoeing, mulching, and hand weeding. A quick start in the gardens after they open also helps, as desirable plants help to keep the weeds at bay.

The absolute best method of weed control is mulching. It comes with the added bonus of increasing moisture retention in the soil. It's a win-win that will make the difference in how much you work in the garden and how much you enjoy it. We provide the opportunity for the purchase and delivery of marsh 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. You can also use other mulching material: leaves collected in the fall, chemical-free grass clippings, and even the weeds themselves will work. A layer of cardboard or multiple layers of newspaper laid under other mulches can also be used.

Insect Control

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

Disease Control

Most problems with diseases, especially soil borne ones, can be controlled by maintaining a clean garden and healthy soil. Here are some ways you can help:

- Keep track of what you plant and where from year to year and do not plant the same crop in the same location year after year (rotating crops).
- Water judiciously (infrequent deep watering, instead frequent light watering).
- Select disease-resistant and healthy plant varieties.
- Remove diseased plants from the garden as soon as possible.
- Solanaceous plants and fruit, such as tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and eggplants, should be buried at least 12 inches deep or removed at the end of the season, to minimize the presence of disease spores that can devastate these crops the following year.

Fertilizers and Soil Amendments

In general, 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, and fish or plant meals. Natural mineral amendments, such as greensand, granite dust, ground limestone, or rock phosphate are also good. Should other fertilizers be required, liquidized seaweed, fish emulsions, and commercially prepared organic fertilizer blends are acceptable.

Garden Refuse

Gardens inevitably create weeds and refuse that need disposal. Do not dump organic waste in brush or woods near the garden, or in trash receptacles. Composting can be done within your plot by using weeds as a mulch or designating a specific corner/area of your plot as the compost pile. If you cannot or do not wish to compost garden waste in your plot, please dispose of the refuse at home.

Dumping of weeds into unused areas of your site is **strictly** prohibited. A few of the smaller sites have a designated compost area - ask your Site Coordinator if your site is one of them. If you wish to learn more about composting, classes with our Master Composter Certification Program are available each fall, while direct hands-on experience in composting is available at Project Grow's Compost 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 currently offered.

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;
- Illegal or dangerous plants;

- Bushes or other woody perennials such as blueberries and raspberries are permitted in perennial plots but not annual plots.
- Raspberries and other cane fruit can be grown in perennial plots but please adhere to the policy below.

Newly Adopted Policy Regarding Raspberry Plants

Given the invasive nature of raspberries and the frequent problems they generate for gardeners in plots adjacent to them, Project Grow is asking that growers of raspberries maintain a raspberry-free distance of 3 feet between them and their neighbors, unless the adjacent gardener is also interested in growing raspberries. These growers need to also keep their plants from extending into the common pathways.

Plot Maintenance

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. These 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 each gardener to inform Project Grow of any obstacles that prevent them from gardening in a timely or acceptable fashion.

Moving?

If you relocate some distance away from your garden, please inform your Site Coordinator and Project Grow immediately. It is important to let Project Grow know of your move because it may adversely impact your garden. Abandoned gardens are an avoidable burden to Project Grow. Don't be "that person" who leaves your garden unattended. Email the Managing Director at info@projectgrowgardens.org before you move. It's much easier to help before the weeds grow.