



# Community Gardens

Community Gardens are unique forms of public open space which are managed by community volunteers primarily for the production of food and to contribute to the development of a sustainable urban environment. They are places for sharing and learning about sustainable living practices, and for actively building community through shared activities.

North Sydney Council recognises community gardening as a valuable recreational activity that contributes to the health and well-being of the whole community and provides a wide range of environmental, social and educational benefits.

These Guidelines support the implementation of Council's Volunteer Gardening Policy and establish a framework for Council's commitment to the appropriate management of both new and existing Community Gardens. This framework provides a rationale for decision making that ensures consistency in the management of all Community Gardens within North Sydney as well as guidelines for the establishment of new gardens and details stakeholder communication and administrative responsibilities.

## 1. Introduction

Community Gardens require substantial community involvement in planning, decision-making, garden management and day-to-day activities. Collaborative projects such as Community Gardens offer a range of benefits that align with the [2020 Vision, Community Strategic Plan](#) including demonstrating best practise sustainable design, building effective partnerships between community groups and government agencies and helping residents to reduce their environmental impacts.

## 2. Objectives

The objectives of these Guidelines are to:

- promote the development of community gardens as demonstration sites;
- document and standardise processes and procedures to ensure consistency in the management of all Community Gardens within the North Sydney local government area (LGA);
- help increase the number of community gardens, in accordance with North Sydney's capacity, community need and availability of appropriate sites;
- clarify the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in community garden projects;
- support community gardens to be self managed to increase community ownership; and
- promote access to fresh, organic and locally produced fruit and vegetables.

### 3. Types of Community Gardens

There are a number of different models of community gardens, the two most common being:

- community gardens with a mixture of allotments for each member and some shared areas and;
- communal gardens where the entire garden is shared between participants.

The following Community Gardens (as at February 2012) within North Sydney are communal gardens:

- Coal Loader Community Garden, Waverton
- Kurraba Community Garden, Kurraba Point
- Milson Community Garden, Kirribilli

### 4. Definitions

**Allotment Gardens** - are community gardens where gardeners have exclusive access to a plot or small area of the garden. This term is common in the United Kingdom, where allotment gardens are normally managed by the local government. In Australia, gardens with allotments are predominantly managed by the community members and supported by government organisations.

**Community Gardens** - are not-for-profit, community based enterprises producing food primarily for the consumption of the gardeners. They are a community managed, multi-functional garden space, that when carefully designed and managed can provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits.

**Community Gardener** - is a member of a Garden Group.

**Community Garden Group** - the community volunteers responsible for a Community Garden site. Community Gardeners are members of the committee.

**Interpretive Signage** - describes signage designed to explain a feature of the landscape to enhance interaction with the site and add educational value.

**Organic Growing** - describes a food production system that does not use toxic chemicals including synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. It aims to improve the long-term fertility of the soil.

**Site Supervisor** - a resident who has agreed to be responsible for a Community Garden site for a minimum of one (1) year.

### 5. North Sydney Council's Role

Council intends to develop strong partnerships where volunteer gardening groups manage the gardens themselves. Council will provide the following services/support to community garden groups:

### **5.1 Financial Support**

Funding is critical for the long-term success of any community garden project. Community Gardens should be planned with the goal of long term financial sustainability, so that they are not dependent on unreliable sources of funding such as grants or sponsorship from partnering organisations. Being financially independent may also increase the feeling of empowerment and security as participants manage more aspects of the community gardens themselves.

Council will support the development of Community Gardens through its Streets Alive Program. Funding will depend upon budget constraints and demand for resources and should not be relied upon by Community Garden Groups.

### **5.2 Advice and Materials**

Council will:

- provide advice and ongoing communication with garden coordinators and committees;
- help to establish new community gardens, develop garden management plans and provide assistance in obtaining grants and resources;
- provide support to establish recycling, worm farms and composting facilities; and
- deliver workshops and training on an as-needs basis.

### **5.3 Promotion and Other Support**

Council will:

- connect local gardens and gardeners to each other to help build relationships and encourage the sharing of information and experiences;
- promote community gardens through the Council's website, publications and events; and
- facilitate garden meetings and community engagement when needed.

## **6. Community Management of Gardens**

Community gardens should be managed and implemented by the community in such a way that the needs of all stakeholders are taken into account.

### **6.1 Responsibilities of Community Gardeners (Volunteers)**

Community gardeners are responsible for maintaining the garden so that the health and safety of the surrounding community is not adversely impacted. In particular, gardeners are responsible for ensuring that:

- they cooperate and manage effective relationships with the surrounding neighbourhood;
- they do not discriminate against one another due to differences in race, culture or sexuality;
- they regularly communicate with the Council and/or other stakeholders;
- decision making is democratic, transparent and inclusive;

- any water leaving the garden is not contaminated by sediment, fertiliser, manure or excessive organic matter that might pollute waterways;
- noise levels within the garden are maintained at a level that is not disturbing to neighbours;
- compost, worm farming systems and fertilisers are maintained so as not to attract vermin or produce unpleasant odours;
- rainwater harvesting systems are maintained to ensure water is of a high quality;
- the garden beds are kept tidy; any materials delivered to or stored at the garden are maintained so as not to create an unpleasant environment for other residents in the community; and
- visitors are welcomed to the garden, and members of the public can access the community garden during daylight hours.

## **6.2 Security**

Community Gardens are open to the community; however from time to time Community Gardens are under pressure due to large gatherings in nearby parks, e.g. during Christmas and New Year weekends. There may be a higher incidence of vandalism and theft of produce during those times. A Garden Group may, with permission of Council, lock the garden for short periods during those times.

## **6.3 Rights of Community Gardeners**

Garden Groups have the right to:

- develop their own internal policies, organisational procedures and plan of management providing they liaise with and get support from Council;
- be consulted by Council with regard to any decision that may affect the project; and
- be advised by Council in a timely manner of any policy changes that impact them.

## **6.4 Conflict Resolution and Complaints Handling**

Garden Groups should aim to promote an environment that is communal, tolerant and caring. However conflicts may sometimes arise, either within the garden group or with external stakeholders, such as local residents or Council. Immediate steps should be taken to resolve any conflict.

Council recommends that community gardeners develop terms of agreement that include a 'gardener's agreement' that all members agree to follow. An agreement should provide information on the expectations of behaviour on site, the management of shared garden areas and plots and a conflict resolution process.

Where a site supervisor and the appointed Council Officer cannot reach agreement on a particular issue, the matter may be taken to Council's Director of Open Space and Environmental Services.

Complaints made by members of the public about Community Gardens should be made in accordance with Council's [Complaints Policy](#).

## **6.5 Insurance and Risk Management**

It is essential that Garden Groups are aware of the risks associated with undertaking a publicly accessible community garden project. Each Garden Group has a duty of care to the community when people access the garden areas. Council's Insurance Policy covers gardens on Council land where a risk assessment has been undertaken. As with all volunteer activities associated with North Sydney Council, participants must be registered with Council to be covered.

## **6.6 Incorporation of the Garden Group**

Council encourages Garden Group to have a clear and identified structure. Garden Groups can apply to the NSW Office of Fair Trading to become 'Incorporated Associations'. This arrangement affords the group some flexibility in the management of funds and enables them to open a bank account, and apply for government grants.

Incorporation as an association requires groups to establish a management committee with annually elected office bearers and to commit to regular meetings. This can be beneficial for the project as it maintains a structure that can address management issues; having a committee also helps share the tasks of garden management and avoids excessive responsibility being placed on a few people or the garden management becoming dominated by one person.

## **6.7 Council Use of the Garden as a Demonstration Site**

Where community gardens are established on land owned or controlled by North Sydney Council, Council retains the right to use the garden as a demonstration site for community education activities, such as tours and workshops. Council will work with the Garden Group to ensure that organised activities do not conflict inappropriately with other garden uses, such as regular working bees.

## **7. Establishment of Community Gardens on Council Land**

Gardeners/Garden Groups must work in partnership with Council in the establishment of new community gardens. Establishing a community garden can be a complex process requiring consultation with a broad range of stakeholders and there are a number of issues that need to be considered before initiating a community garden.

For Council to consider supporting the development of new Community Garden on Council owned or controlled land, applicants will need to address the following selection criteria. If the application is supported, then the Council will organise community consultation with local residents and work with the Garden Group to address any concerns.

### **7.1 Site Selection Criteria for New Community Gardens on Council Owned Land**

**7.1.1 Location** - sites owned by Council and zoned Open Space will be given priority.

**7.1.2 Safety** - the site should have no major safety or health concerns and have good passive surveillance (for example, can be easily seen from nearby houses or shopping areas).

7.1.3 **Accessibility** - the site should be accessible for a range of user groups. Sites should be located close to public transport, allow disabled access, have vehicle access (e.g. for delivery of mulch and soil) and accommodate groups wanting to visit the garden.

7.1.4. **Solar access** - the site needs to be suitable for growing vegetables and receive full sunlight ideally for at least 5-6 hours per day.

7.1.5. **Size** - the site must be large enough to accommodate garden beds, composting systems, rainwater tanks, seating areas, shelter for gardeners and for community workshops and demonstrations.

7.1.6 **Water** - there must be easy access to water or to buildings nearby from which rainwater can be collected.

7.1.7 **Soil Contamination** - sites may need to be checked for soil contamination. If high levels are present then advice will need to be sought from experts on whether it is suitable for growing food.

7.1.8 **Multiple Use** - ideally sites for a community garden can be integrated without conflicting adversely with other land uses and where the community garden can still be used by non-gardeners for passive recreation and educational workshops.

Note: It may not always be possible to find a site that meets all of the above criteria. Council will prioritise the sites that can meet as many of the requirements as possible.

## **7.2 Procedure for Starting a New Community Garden**

7.2.1 Applicant(s) establishes a community Garden Group.

7.2.2 Applicant to discuss their proposal with Council to identify any potential issues.

7.2.3 Applicant to submit a completed Streets Alive/Community Garden Application form to Council.

7.2.4 Council will undertake community consultation. Council will consider any feedback received during the consultation period and work with the Garden Group to ensure any concerns are addressed. If there is considerable opposition to the project Council reserves the right to consider alternative sites for the project.

7.2.5 Application with community feedback is presented to Council meeting for adoption. The Council Officer will advise the applicant of the outcome. If the application is approved, a Council Officer will meet with the applicants to develop any relevant written agreements for the garden such as a licence.

## **7.3 Security of Tenure**

New gardens established on Council land will be given an initial licence for a trial period of one (1) year. If the Garden Group fulfils all its responsibilities with regard to the management of the garden, a longer arrangement may be negotiated with the Group.

A licence or other agreement with the Group could be revoked or not renewed if:

- the Group disbands or ceases to function due to internal conflict. In this situation Council may try to assist the Group to resolve the conflict first by mediation or;
- the garden is not maintained or becomes unsafe for public access.

## **8. Land Use Planning**

To facilitate community gardening within the North Sydney LGA, Council's Local Environment Plan includes community gardens as 'exempt development' provided that applicants go through the application process for new gardens as outlined in Council's Community Gardens Policy.

Common elements of a community garden, such as rainwater tanks, fences and solar photovoltaic systems, are currently already listed as exempt development according to certain specifications. Council will prioritise support for new gardens in areas that do not currently have a community garden within a short walk from a major residential area.

### **8.1 Open Space Management**

North Sydney Council considers community gardens to be a valid and important land use within its open space network. Where appropriate, community gardens may be incorporated into plans of management for public open space.

Upgrades to parks, open spaces or community facilities may also provide an opportunity for Council to gauge interest and capacity to develop Community Gardens as part of a proposed upgrade or in a new development. Existing community facilities can be ideal sites for Community Gardens because they normally already have infrastructure such as toilets, shelter and storage areas.

## **9. Related Documentation**

These Guidelines should be read in conjunction with:

- [Community Engagement Policy](#)
- Volunteer Gardening Policy
- Streets Alive/Community Gardens Application Form
- Local Environment Plan 2001
- Draft Local Environment Plan 2009
- [Management of Council Land and Facilities Policy](#)
- Work Health and Safety Act 2011
- Pesticides and Allied Chemicals Act (1978)
- Pesticides Regulation 1995
- [Code of Conduct: Standards for Volunteers and Community Representatives](#)

**Council's Street Alive Coordinator is the key contact for Community Gardens**

**Phone: 9936 8248**

**Email: [council@northsydney.nsw.gov.au](mailto:council@northsydney.nsw.gov.au)**

**Website: [www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/communitygardens](http://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/communitygardens)**