

# Community Garden Network

## Community Garden Operations Document

### Background

The Athens Land Trust (ALT) recognizes the potential of urban agriculture as a solution to food insecurity in our region and, as such, established the Community Garden Network (CGN), with funding from the USDA, to promote the development of community gardens throughout the city. Our expectation is that these gardens will provide access to affordable, nutritional foods for communities which otherwise would not have access and, in doing so, will make a significant contribution to the prevention of obesity and associated diseases. CGN gardens are also expected to build and strengthen community, increase social equity and promote environmental stewardship. Under the ALT's program, community gardens will be created and maintained by Garden Groups and citizens, who will organize themselves and establish clear chains of accountability for the management of all CGN gardens.

The goals of CGN Community Gardens are as follows:

- To increase access to healthy, nutritious food for low-income families by providing opportunities for them to grow it themselves;
- To create an understanding of the value of community gardens and the need for community gardens in Athens-Clarke County;
- To encourage and facilitate the establishment of local urban agricultural systems; and
- To turn vacant and underutilized urban parcels into productive gardens.

### Overview

The following document is intended to serve as a guide for both new and established community gardens and gardeners who seek membership in the Community Garden Network. Our objective in providing this document is to encourage self-sufficiency and self-reliance among Garden Network members. Included in this toolkit you will find:

- CGN Rules and Requirements
- Community Garden Network Garden Contract
- CGN Release, Waiver of Liability, and Indemnification Agreement
- Plant care and harvesting recommendations and general garden maintenance information
- Garden record keeping logs, including
  - Harvest logs
  - Volunteer tracking logs
  - Crop rotation logs
  - Pesticide and fertilizer application logs

## Definitions

*Community Garden* means privately- or publicly-owned property used to grow fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs, or native or ornamental plants for non-commercial purposes, in which there is no exchange of goods for monetary value.

*Community Garden Organizer* means an Athens Land Trust employee funded under the USDA Community Food Projects Grant and charged with the management and administration of the CGN Community Gardens Program.

*Garden Group* means a group of individuals either affiliated or non-affiliated with a non-profit organization, whose aim in establishing a community garden is to increase access to fresh foods for garden members and low income neighbors.

*Garden Manager* means an individual elected from among the Garden Group membership and charged with the responsibility of overseeing all garden management and maintenance and serving as the primary contact between the community garden and the CGN.

## CGN Community Gardens Program

Under the leadership of the Community Garden Organizer, the Athens Land Trust seeks to encourage community gardening by facilitating the establishment of community gardens on underutilized green space in Athens-Clarke County. Groups are encouraged to engage with individual gardeners by creating their own policies to rent individual plots or by establishing cooperative policies through which communal parcels can be best utilized. All Garden Groups and the individual gardeners within them must follow the CGN Community Gardens Rules and Guidelines. Furthermore, Garden Groups are encouraged to think of themselves as members of a network in the truest sense, and to view their fellow CGN Garden Groups as resources upon which they can draw for volunteer help and resources.

Subject to available resources, the Athens Land Trust will support CGN Community Gardens in the following manner:

- Provide a CGN Community Gardens Coordinator to act as a resource and to check all parcels on a periodic basis to ensure compliance with the Rules and Guidelines;
- Maintain a webpage to provide information about CGN Community Gardens and to serve as a resource portal for community gardeners;
- Provide seeds, compost, and mulch according to availability and on an as-needed basis;
- Serve as an intermediary between Community Garden groups, Master Gardeners and the County Extension Service; and
- Help raise awareness of and participation in the Community Garden Network through the webpage and by supporting each Garden Group's outreach activities.

## CGN Community Gardens Requirements

*CGN Gardens and Gardeners agree to adhere to the following requirements:*

1. Garden Groups commit to electing from among themselves one individual to serve as the Garden Manager for their specific garden.
2. The Garden Group agrees to comply with the CGN Gardens Rules and Guidelines for the duration of the use of the garden.
3. Individual gardeners all agree to the terms of the CGN Release, Waiver of Liability, and Indemnification Agreement; furthermore, Garden Groups commit to providing the CGN with the names and contact information of all current gardeners and to updating the CGN within 7 calendar days whenever new gardeners are added or current gardeners leave the group.
4. Community gardeners must be residents of Clarke County. If gardeners move from the county their plots must be returned to the Garden Manager at the end of the growing season. Volunteers who participate in CGN Gardens may be non-residents.
5. Garden Groups commit to maintaining accurate and timely records of all produce and flower harvests, volunteer activities and garden labor dedicated by garden members, as well as fertilizer and pesticide applications.

*Furthermore, the Garden Group certifies that the following pre-conditions have been met:*

1. All individuals participating in the community garden have completed a Release, Waiver of Liability, and Indemnification Agreement. The Garden Group further commits that individual waivers for new gardeners will be submitted within seven calendar days of an individual agreeing to participate in the Community Garden. Failure to send Individual Waivers will result in the Garden Group being solely responsible for the defense of and compensation for any and all personal injuries and/or property damage sustained as a result of an individual's participation in the Community Garden.
2. The Garden Group has demonstrated that they adequately informed the neighborhood of their plans to create a Community Garden by notifying all residents within a 150 ft. radius of the proposed community garden site. Proof of said support has been provided in the following way:
  - a. a letter of support from the active community or neighborhood association located nearest to the proposed garden site; or
  - b. a petition of support with signatures from a majority of neighborhood residents who reside in close proximity to the proposed garden site.
3. A soil sample has been collected and a test performed by the UGA Agricultural Extension Service, and the results of this test indicate the soil is safe and suitable for the establishment of an edible garden.
4. The Garden Group has designated a Garden Manager to be responsible for the overall maintenance of the Community Garden and to serve as the Garden Group's primary contact with the CGN's Community Gardens Coordinator.

## Garden Group Formation

Garden Groups are encouraged to recognize that there is a maximum number of individuals any space of ground can be reasonably expected to support. As such, groups are encouraged to limit the number of persons who can be considered "members" of any particular garden. This upper limit should be established in consultation with the CGN Community Garden Organizer, and when this limit is reached, Garden Groups should work with the CGN to secure land and establish additional gardens nearby.

The following steps are recommended to help Garden Groups support the establishment of spin-off gardens in the event that more persons wish to garden than their space can support :

1. Form a garden committee comprised of these individuals and have them democratically select a garden manager from among themselves
  - 1.1 Have potential garden managers “campaign” by presenting to the group regarding their growing experience and/or availability to increase their knowledge in the techniques of garden management
    - 1.1.1 Have selected garden manager sign Stewardship contract, placing 2 year limit on his/her term of service and committing himself or herself to pursuing continuing education (through CGN workshops) and to sharing knowledge gained through training opportunities at his/her site
2. Have garden committee members help identify and secure access to land appropriate for establishment of the garden
3. Determine maximum number of persons the proposed site can be expected to support
  - 3.1 If the number of interested persons exceeds that which the site is capable of supporting, repeat steps 1 and 2 as many times as needed\*\*

\*\*Garden groups are encouraged to support the home gardening efforts of individuals waiting to gain access to community garden plots.

## Garden Organization/Management

Garden Groups have the option of deciding among themselves whether they’d like to garden their parcels communally, meaning garden efforts and produce would be shared across the entire membership, or separate their parcels into individual plots. If a Garden Group chooses to divide a parcel into individual plots, then it must create an application process to offer individual plots to any member of the Group or resident of the neighborhood on an annual basis, subject to renewal and under the following conditions:

- a. Garden plot requests must be processed on a first come, first served basis. A waiting list must be maintained for applicants for whom no plot is available.
- b. Garden Groups may charge a fee for each plot to help offset the normal operating costs of the garden. The fee shall not exceed the amount necessary to cover the normal operating costs of the garden including watering, maintenance, and improvement costs of the parcel. Records of fees and expenses shall be kept and forwarded to the CGN Community Gardens Coordinator to ensure proper use of fees.
- c. A resident who cannot afford a plot may volunteer a pre-determined number of hours (\$19/hr. is the standard value for an hour of volunteer service) to help with general maintenance of the parcel in exchange for a plot
- d. The Garden Group may create a fund to provide parcels for residents at certain income levels.
- e. If applicants do not return their applications and fees by January 15 of each year their parcels may be assigned to applicants on the waiting list.
- f. Applicants from the previous season will have first preference and may choose either the same plot or a vacant plot if one exists
- g. Once an applicant is approved, they must sign an agreement with the Garden Group. The Agreement must contain at a minimum, the CGN Community Gardens Rules and Guidelines.

## **CGN Gardens Rules**

The following rules are established to govern the CGN Community Gardens Program, and to ensure that all community garden plots are maintained and that Athens-Clarke County policies and laws are followed.

These rules are subject to change. The rules and all changes to the rules will be posted on the Athens Land Trust webpage on [www.athenslandtrust.org/communitygardens](http://www.athenslandtrust.org/communitygardens)

### **General Rules:**

1. No produce or any other items grown in a community garden may be exchanged for goods for monetary value, i.e. sold.
2. No one under the age of eighteen (18) years shall be on Community Garden property without adult supervision.
3. Plants regulated or prohibited by federal and state laws are prohibited in gardens. If any such plants are found, the occupants of the parcel on which they are found will be immediately evicted.
4. The Garden Group must remove all structures, fencing and materials from its parcel when it vacates the parcel.
5. All garden activities must take place between dawn to dusk, i.e. daylight hours only.
6. Any building materials delivered to a garden site must be used or removed within 14 days.
7. No pets, animals or livestock are allowed in the Community Garden.
8. No alcohol, drugs or illegal substances are allowed at the Community Garden site and any use will result in immediate eviction from the premises.
9. All gardeners are prohibited from baiting, trapping or transporting animals in the garden.
10. Stealing of any kind is not allowed and will result in immediate loss of gardening privileges.

### **Maintenance Rules:**

1. The Garden Manager must call the CGN Community Gardens Coordinator to schedule to have the entire parcel marked for utilities before anyone can begin any digging, erection of fence posts or any excavation for the first time on any parcel. Once the parcel has been marked for utilities then the CGN Community Gardens Coordinator will confer with the Garden Manager to determine appropriate areas for gardening.
2. Garden Groups are responsible for maintaining the entire parcel in good condition. Maintenance is defined as: regular mowing of parcel; attention to encroaching Bermuda grass and other weeds and grasses within plots and 2' of bordering pathways; regular harvesting and removal of dead/dying plants and rotting vegetables. If any gardener decides to let a plant go to seed in order to collect the seeds, the gardener must indicate this by placing a bag over the fruit or plant. This will keep those seeds from spreading and will notify the Garden Manager that seeds are being collected.
3. It is illegal to cut down or remove any trees without prior written approval.
4. Gardeners must maintain their plot throughout the growing season with active planting, harvesting and weeding. Weed control must follow the CGN Community Gardens Rules and Guidelines.
5. All gardening activities on all parcels must be contained within the plot boundaries established by the CGN Community Gardens Coordinator.
6. Diseased and pest-ridden plants must be removed from the site or placed in the trash bin to prevent spreading.
7. Gardeners must keep all organic gardening debris, non-organic debris, trash and litter cleaned from their plot, as well as from adjacent pathways and fences. Plants or trash CANNOT BE DUMPED

anywhere outside the garden site. Unapproved dumping will result in the immediate revocation of garden access.

8. Gardeners must remove all tools, implements, hoses, plant pots, non-organic debris, refuse and garbage when they leave the garden. Hoses must be neatly rolled up and stored, along with all tools, in the tool shed after each use.
9. Gardeners shall use only organic fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides, and use them in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines.
10. Gardeners may use non-permanent structures such as sheds with non-permanent foundations, fences, raised beds, trellises, and deck box containers. Gardeners must maintain any structures in good repair. No chipped paint on structures is allowed.
11. The building and maintenance of fences and other structures must adhere to building code requirements where applicable and the CGN Community Gardens Rules and Guidelines. The CGN Community Gardens Coordinator will confirm proof of compliance with applicable building code requirements.
12. Mulches such as gravel, stone, pavement, carpet and artificial turf are prohibited.
13. Plant heights must adhere to the CGN Community Rules and Guidelines. Gardeners shall not plant crops or build structures that shade or interfere with another plot.
14. Gardeners should not block garden paths, aisle ways or public access areas with equipment, structures, debris or vehicles.

## **Children in the Garden:**

Out of the need for safety and respect for all, the following rules shall apply to all garden related activities:

1. No one under the age of eighteen (18) years shall be on Community Garden property without adult supervision.
2. Parents are responsible for the constant supervision of their child/children at all times.
3. Children's feet will remain on the ground while in the garden and surrounding areas. There will be no climbing on fences, water tanks, seating, or other structures.
4. Children are not allowed in tool sheds unless supervised by an adult.
5. Rocks will remain on the ground, as throwing rocks is a very serious safety hazard for everyone in the garden and for those mowing grass. Rocks that are found while working in the garden will be placed (gently) in appropriate areas by an adult.

## **Fencing for Community Gardens:**

Fences up to 8 feet tall are permitted, but not required. The Garden Group or gardeners will supply the materials and labor.

1. Any fencing must meet yard (setback) requirements of the zoning district. The Garden Group or gardener must obtain city approval and relevant permitting for placement and/or construction of any fencing.
2. Fence posts shall be composed of pressure treated lumber and may be up to 8 feet tall and up to 4 inches wide. Gate posts may be up to 8 inches wide. Posts must be placed deep enough into the soil to securely anchor the post. Concrete may only be used at gateposts, corners, terminus points and otherwise as needed.
3. For safety reasons, all posts 48" or shorter must have an appropriate cap or be covered. Alternate fencing materials will be reviewed by the CGN Community Garden Coordinator on a case by case basis.

## **Improvements and structures for Community Gardens:**

1. Any building must meet yard (setback) requirements of the zoning district. The Garden Group or gardener must obtain any necessary city approval and permitting for placement and/or construction of any improvement(s).
2. The Garden Group will supply the materials and labor for all structures.
3. Structures must sit on durable low maintenance temporary foundation materials. Structures must be sturdy and lockable and include exterior grade building materials such as: hardiplank, cedar, exterior grade painted plywood, etc.

## **On-site Composting**

Composting plant materials within the garden is encouraged as an excellent way to reduce trash and conserve nutrients. However, food scraps (such as meat, oils, or fat) cannot, under any circumstances, be composted, as this attracts animals and generates unacceptable odor.

1. If installed, compost bins must be located to the rear of the garden parcel.
2. Compost bins may not be located near pedestrian pathways or adjacent property lines.

## **Raised Beds and Containers**

Gardeners may use raised beds and containers in gardens at any time. Non-treated wood is required for the edging on raised beds. Any other material will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the CGN Community Garden Organizer. No treated wood or other harmful materials may be used for containers.

If the soil condition requires the use of raised beds or containers then the following steps must be followed:

- a. Place weed barrier, geo-technical fabric, thick gauge plastic, or 3" of mulch over entire parcel to surround raised beds and cover ground under raised beds to ensure that existing soil does not come in contact with plants or clean soil being used for gardens.
- b. Use untreated lumber at least 6" high for raised beds (we recommend a 4" x 8" ft frame, made of untreated 2 x 6" lumber, with a 4" square piece in the corners)
- c. Use 4-6" of imported clean soil in raised beds or clean soil in containers

## **Making Good Plant Choices**

Gardeners may grow a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers. The guidelines below will help gardeners make good choices.

1. Perennials such as asparagus, rhubarb, and many desirable flowers are permitted. Gardeners must commit, however, to dividing such plants as needed to manage their size and must also promise to remove all perennials when leaving the Community Garden.
2. Herbaceous vines are permitted when grown on a non-permanent structure, such as a trellis, contained within individual garden plots.
3. Plants on the Georgia Invasive Plant List are prohibited: <http://www.gaeppc.org/list.cfm>.
4. Desirable plants that can be weedy, such as raspberries, blackberries, mint, morning glories, and fennel must be kept one foot or more away from plot boundaries.

## **Mulching and/or Cover cropping**

The Garden Group is prohibited from leaving soil bare for longer than two weeks at a time and is required, in between plantings and as a means of erosion control, to either mulch their plots or sow a cover crop.

1. Organic mulches, such as compost, leaves, straw, and shredded bark are highly recommended to conserve water and add nutrients to the soil.
2. Cover cropping is encouraged, though gardeners must consult with the CGN Community Garden Coordinator before sowing any particular cover.
3. Non-biodegradable mulches, such as stone, carpet and artificial turf, are prohibited.
4. Fresh manure is prohibited as it may contain weed seeds, smells bad, and may have sanitary issues that could affect neighboring plots. Composted manure is permitted.

## **Watering**

The Garden Group commits to using water conservation methods such as mulching and selecting plants that use less water, as well as to incorporating, where applicable, Earth-friendly and low-water gardening methods.

1. All hoses must be stored in areas that do not present a safety problem to other gardeners or if applicable, to personnel that maintain the common areas.
2. Leaky hoses and leaky connections must be promptly repaired so water is not wasted or cause a problem with soggy spots in common areas. Water faucet problems must be reported to the CGN Community Gardens Coordinator.
3. Recognizing that standing water or excessively wet spots are breeding grounds for mosquitoes, which are a health hazard, the Garden Group commits to the emptying of all containers and to storing them upside down.

## **Managing Pests**

Non-organic pesticides are prohibited within the Community Garden. The following tips will be utilized to manage pests without the use of pesticides:

1. Plant varieties will be chosen that are appropriate for our area and are resistant to pests.
2. Plants will be kept healthy by using compost for fertilizer and mulches to retain water.
3. Insects that can be removed by hand, such as caterpillars and beetles, will be.
4. Dead and diseased plants will be cleared immediately.
5. Barrier methods, such as fencing below the soil line and netting, will be utilized to protect crops from small mammal and deer pressure.



## CGN Community Garden Watering Guide

In deciding which option to choose for the watering of gardens two things should be considered:

- The amount of water needed each month
- The number of plots needing water

**OPTION ONE: RAIN BARREL or CISTERN** - Rain barrel (assembly needed - \$60 and up; assembled - \$200 and up) or Cistern - \$1,500 and up

Cisterns and rain barrels are storage tanks that capture runoff water from a catchment area such as a rooftop. Cisterns are essentially large-scale rain barrels.

- Design Considerations
  - Roof available on site
  - Water demand
  - Rainfall pat
  - How much rain could be captured - for example during a 1-inch rain event a 1,200 square foot roof would collect more than 700 gallons.
  - Storage capacity - typically a 55-gallon food quality plastic drum. Multiple rain barrels can be used at each downspout
  - Overflow device
  - First flush bypass

NOTE: Benefits of rainwater catchment include the reduced use of potable water for irrigation and a reduction in the quantity of stormwater runoff.

### **OPTION TWO: EXISTING WATER SERVICE AT PROPERTY (Water Meter in service)**

- Applicant shall receive written permission from the property owner/person listed on monthly billings to use water supply on site and describe any billing arrangements in written approval.
- Installation of a sub-meter is optional for property owner if they want to bear the monthly cost of the water use.

IF THERE IS A WATER FAUCET

- Applicant shall hook up a hose connection from faucet to plot

IF THERE IS NO FAUCET AVAILABLE

- Applicant shall receive written permission to (1) tap existing water service on property and (2) extend pipe and install a faucet
- The applicant shall be required to obtain a Plumbing Permit from the Athens-Clarke County Inspection Department, 120 W. Dougherty St., (706-613-3520), for all plumbing work on-site including installation of the RPZ backflow preventer.

Note: Private FIRE HYDRANTS are not approved for domestic water usage.

**OPTION THREE: EXISTING WATER SERVICE AT PROPERTY (No water meter installed)** - \$35 water meter reset and \$2,000 plumbing work

- Garden Group shall determine location and size of pipe on property
- Garden Group shall obtain written approval from the property owner to request a water meter reset in an existing water meter box where the lateral is in good working condition
- Garden Group shall request a 5/8" water meter reset in the applicant's name from the ACC PUD Water Business Office, 124 E. Hancock Ave. Athens, GA 30601 (706-613-3500).

- Garden Group shall obtain a Plumbing Permit from the Athens-Clarke County Inspection Department, 120 W. Dougherty St., (706-613-3520), to tap the main on property, install a RPZ backflow preventer, pipe and faucet(s).
- The Cross Connection Specialist will inspect the backflow device and approve the meter reset.

**OPTION FOUR: NEW WATER SERVICE** - Water Service Permit (currently \$2,000 - 5/8" water service), plus Plumber Cost.

- Garden Group will apply for a Water Service Permit - new water service installation from an existing water main parallel to the property. If there is not an existing water main running parallel to the property, the applicant is responsible for paying for water main extension to the property.
  - Apply and pay for a Water Service Permit through ACC PUD Water Business Office, 124 E. Hancock Ave. Athens, GA 30601 (706-613-3500).
  - PUD would install the water service from the water main in the street to the property line.
  - Applicant will hire a plumber
    - to draw a plan for the plumbing work needed on site (extend a pipe from the water meter to a spigot and install a backflow preventer within 25-feet of the water meter on property),
    - apply for a Plumbing Permit, and
    - install the plumbing work on property.
- DPU would inspect the backflow preventer that protects the public drinking water system and approve setting the water meter for water service.