



Approved by	Jeanette Koncikowski, Executive Director & Ellen Barnum, Board Chair
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## COMMUNITY GARDENING DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

### Summary

Community gardens are important resources for food-insecure individuals and families, especially those who live in food deserts without access to grocery stores or readily available transportation. The public health crisis created by the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable members of our community. Our most vulnerable community members do not have the resources to mitigate the effects of the massive social and economic disruption that's happening. One negative impact is worsened food access. Community members without adequate financial resources or access to transportation cannot stockpile large quantities of food. Supply chain disruptions resulting from food hoarding will exacerbate this problem as the Covid-19 crisis continues. The need for community gardens, which provide fresh, nutritious food free of charge to income-limited and other vulnerable community members, especially seniors, is urgent. Yet, community gardening is a social activity which poses virus transmission risks.

**Our office is closed until further notice.** All staff are working remotely during this time. Our goal is to provide you with as much support as possible this season to continue the success of our community gardening program when it is most needed.

In compliance with Governor Cuomo's recent executive order, **effective immediately and until further notice community gardens may remain open or closed to garden members only at the discretion of each garden group, and only for absolutely necessary maintenance and seasonal preparation.** Due to the relatively small spaces in most gardens and the difficulty in achieving safe physical distancing of 6 feet or more, gardens should remain closed to the general public until further notice. We realize that this will be disappointing to some, but it is necessary to help protect public health. Below are details and requirements for all GGWNY member-gardens and gardeners which remain in effect until further notice (informed by the Governor's Executive Order on Non-Essential Services, Cornell Cooperative Extension, New York State, and the UB Food Systems Planning & Healthy Communities Lab, and noticed to Erie County and the Cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls).

### Requirements

#### 1. *Access & Planning*

- a. Access should be limited to garden members only, and only for garden maintenance and season preparation that is absolutely necessary. Gardens should remain closed to the public until further notice. GGWNY will provide signage at each garden indicating this closure to the public. If neighbors or other community members are concerned about food access, please connect them to our office to have them register as a community gardener with us if your member-garden can host them.
- b. All public events in community gardens are prohibited. In addition, all in-person meetings, activities, and gathering of garden groups are prohibited. Large projects such as volunteer workdays that require many hands must be postponed.



- c. In order to safely garden with your fellow gardeners, please make communication a priority. Coordinate via email or phone who should access the garden, timing of access, assign prior tasks done by groups to be completed by 1 or 2 people, and determine how to distribute materials. We highly recommend that if you are a communal garden (no individually assigned plots) to restructure for the season, clearly delineating physical locations indicating who gardens where to reduce the risk of cross-contamination.
  - d. Create a schedule to assign one or two gardeners to visit the garden each day or week to plant, harvest, or conduct needed maintenance on their delineated spaces. If the workload is heavy, assign multiple gardeners to visit at different times if possible to specific areas of the garden.
2. *Planting*
- a. Grassroots will continue to arrange for delivery of soil, lumber and plants through our staff or vendors if you have requested them for the season. Contact the office via phone or email (see contact information in footer) for any supply needs you have. We will reach out to you directly to arrange delivery.
  - b. As of today, our nursery partners are indicating they expect to be able to meet our orders. We will notify all lead gardeners as to the process for picking up or arranging delivery of plant material later this spring, when we have more information on the status of the plants and the overall disease progression in our community.
  - c. We can direct ship vegetable seeds and/or indoor seed starting materials to any Grassroots Gardener's home if you would like to add additional edibles through direct sowing. Contact our office at 716-783-9653 for more information.
  - d. If you have the space, grow as many vegetables and fruits as possible this season. We know that the economic fallout from this crisis will last even longer than the disease so we encourage all community gardens to grow food as much as they can maintain during this time.
3. *Working in the Garden while Maintaining Physical Distancing*
- a. **Gardeners should stay home if sick.** The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough, and shortness of breath.
  - b. Gardeners in high-risk groups (those over age 60, people with underlying health conditions that lower immunity) should **assess the benefits and risks of leaving their homes to participate in the community garden.** Staying home may reduce virus transmission but may also increase social isolation and depression. Members of high-risk groups should not feel obligated to participate in community gardening during this crisis if they do not feel comfortable doing so. **Please be gentle with each other right now regarding shared chores.** We are all doing the best we can.
  - c. To follow physical distancing guidelines put forth by the Governor, we recommend no more than 2-3 people in the garden at a time, preferably from the same household. Keep in mind everyone needs to stay 6-8 ft. apart at all times and you should only be in the garden to plant and do maintenance.
  - d. Gardeners should practice basic precautions including but not limited to covering their coughs and sneezes and washing their hands before and after visiting the garden.
  - e. Gardeners should **use their own garden tools** if they are available to them due to the virus being transmitted on materials such as wood, metal and plastic. **If gardeners are lacking basic tools please contact the Grassroots Gardens office and we can assist with season-long loans of tools, we have in stock once sanitized.**
  - f. If tools must be shared, they must be cleaned after each use. For maximum precaution, based on the length of virus viability on stainless steel, individual shared tools should not



be used again for 72 hours after each use. These tools should be kept away from other tools, with indications of when they can be used again. Disinfection guidelines can be found on the CDC website. If hand sanitizer is available, gardeners should use it before and after touching shared tools.

- g. High use areas of the garden like benches or handles on sheds should be wiped down after each use with a disinfectant.

#### 4. *Harvesting*

- a. **Share the harvest.** Please do not let the harvest spoil. GGWNY can put you in touch with your nearest food pantry through our connection to the FeedMore garden. So many children, families and elders will be in need of food this year. If you are going to share the harvest with neighbors, gardeners should wear proper personal protective equipment such as face masks and disposable gloves. Place produce into a clean bag and leave near mail box or entry door if physical distancing remains a public health requirement. Only people in optimal health should harvest and distribute produce.

### **Resources**

Please visit the [gardening.cals.cornell.edu](http://gardening.cals.cornell.edu) and <http://www.grassrootsgardens.org/> websites to stay informed of any changes as things continue to evolve. GGWNY shares your disappointment in reducing access to community gardens, especially during a crisis, but it is imperative that we all work together to help protect public health and keep our fellow New Yorkers safe. Thank you in advance for your close attention to these requirements. We encourage you to continue to take all necessary steps to help keep yourself safe during this challenging time. You can learn more, including how to help stop the spread of the coronavirus, on the CDC webpage.

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