

CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

COMMUNITY GARDENS IN THE PARKS LETTER OF COMMITMENT

After agreeing to abide by the following Community Garden terms, your group will be accepted and ready to begin. Please read this document carefully, making sure that all members of your group understand and agree to the terms listed below. Signing this Letter of Commitment formalizes your agreement with the Chicago Park District. Garden Groups are expected to renew their commitment every three years.

COMMUNITY GARDENS IN THE PARKS GUIDELINES

MANAGEMENT

Gardening in the parks is intended to be a community endeavor. Your group must include at least two people from separate households as active participants in the group and the garden. The group is entirely responsible for the organization and management of group members. You are free to manage in a style that works best for your group, provided the following guidelines are met:

Inclusiveness: The Group must follow a transparent membership process open to all. As a public agency, Park District policy requires inclusiveness; anyone interested in joining the Group is to be fairly considered.

Membership: Your Garden Group must have a stated plan for welcoming interested new members. The Group should communicate to the community and the public about ways to be involved in the garden. This can be through signage (such as those provided by the park district), online communication, open meetings, events, and public workdays. We strongly encourage active recruitment of new gardeners in communally managed spaces.

Communication: The Group's leadership is expected to maintain communication with the Park District. Your garden is important to us and we want to help! Please contact the Community Gardens in the Parks staff promptly with any concerns or questions about the maintenance or management of your garden. The Park Supervisor should be informed and involved in the resolution of any problems involving patrons of the garden or park.

We also like to hear good news, so please share any information about upcoming events or programs in the garden. Similarly, please let your group members know of Park District opportunities, events, or workshops that may be of interest.

Fiscal responsibilities: Your garden group may collect a nominal annual fee to help in the ongoing maintenance of your garden space, provided you can demonstrate that 100% of the funds collected are invested back into the garden and that you have obtained proper fiscal agency or individual non-profit status. Fees should be reflective of the actual cost of maintaining the garden. Funds may not be used to pay any group member for their work in or pertaining to the garden. For more information on fiscal agency please see the Appendix or contact the Community Gardens in the Parks staff for more information.

Liability: The Park District is not responsible for the garden itself, or to anything in or pertaining to the garden. **Each member of the group must sign a [Waiver of Liability \[form 4b\]](#)**, which should be updated annually. Garden group leaders must keep all forms on file and be able to present upon request.

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Transfer of leadership: Any transfer of leadership responsibilities or liaison contact information should be clearly communicated to the Community Gardens in the Parks staff. In the event the garden leader needs to step down, he or she is responsible for recruiting and facilitating new garden leadership.

Garden termination: If the Group can no longer maintain their space, they must immediately notify the Park District. The Group will be responsible for proposing a plan to restore the garden to parkland to the satisfaction of the Park District's Department of Cultural and Natural Resources (DCNR).

While unlikely, the Chicago Park District reserves the right to remove the garden at any time and will make every effort to provide notification prior to removal.

Garden borders and type: The garden boundaries and garden type must remain as submitted on the original design plans. Any proposed modification or expansion requests must be approved by DCNR BEFORE any changes are made. Please contact the Community Gardens in the Parks staff for further guidance and instructions.

Quality assurance: A Chicago Park District representative may attend a neighborhood association and/or Park Advisory Council meeting to review the successes or challenges experienced by the Community Gardeners. The Park District will take appropriate action based on that assessment. Failure by the Community Gardeners to provide the required operational and financial support will result in the removal of the garden by the Park District.

MAINTENANCE

The Group is entirely responsible for the maintenance of the Community Garden. Keep in mind that the space allocated is on public land and must always be actively maintained.

Garden maintenance and appearance: The Park District will not do any maintenance within the Community Garden itself. Pathways and areas between garden beds must also be mulched and maintained by the Group. Through the Park District's independent observation, if the space is deemed unsightly, weedy or otherwise neglected, the group leadership will get two separate warning notices. If the problem continues thereafter, the agreement will be revoked and the Group will be responsible for proposing a plan to restore the garden to parkland to the satisfaction of the DCNR.

Winterizing: Gardens are expected to be cleaned up/put to bed by December 1st of each year. Any temporary structures or plant supports must be removed and stored off-site by this date.

Water: Please conserve water! The water supply is **ONLY** to be used by gardeners caring for their assigned areas. Washing of cars or other personal non-garden related activities is prohibited. Irrigation systems are discouraged. Drip hoses or other water conserving devices are encouraged.

Organic practices: In keeping with the Chicago Park District's commitment to sustainability, and for the health and safety of all park patrons, it is required that ALL gardening practices, including disease and pest control, be organic.

Composting: Composting of on-site garden waste is encouraged. Per the City of Chicago's Municipal Code, please do not bring material from outside sources, unless your system is registered with the city. The compost must be contained in a manner suitable under the [City of Chicago's Municipal Code](#). Avoid rodent-attracting foods such as meat, starches, and cheese. Also avoid large or thorny branches and diseased plant material.

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An alternative to a compost bin is bagged plant material waste. Ask your Park Supervisor to contact his or her landscape crew for pickups as needed.

Soil: It is the responsibility of the Group to ensure that the soil used in the garden is clean. Groups working in vegetable gardens should take care to test your soil regularly to ensure it is safe enough to grow edible crops.

Bird feeders: Bird feeders are not allowed. Use of native plants will provide natural food sources such as berries and seeds without attracting rodents or pigeons. Please refer to and utilize our Native Plant List.

Rodents: Garden groups growing edible plants are expected to harvest regularly and properly support plants so as to keep excessive produce from rotting on the ground and attracting rodents.

Vandalism: Like drought, hail and freezing temperatures, theft and vandalism are among the assumed risks of gardening in the park. All gardens in the parks are and will continue to be public property. While the Community Gardens in the Parks program continues to support efforts to reduce unnecessary vandalism or theft, we cannot guarantee that any garden is free from the risk.

PERMANENT STRUCTURES AND SIZEABLE LANDSCAPE MATERIAL

Any permanent structures such as benches, planters, fences, or tool chests and any sizeable plant material such as trees must be specifically approved by DCNR and in some cases the Park Enhancement Committee (PEC) BEFORE placement in the garden. Sheds are not permitted. Only Park District staff may prune or remove established trees, including those within a garden site. If a tree in or near your garden needs attention, please contact Community Gardens in the Parks staff.

NON-PERMANENT STRUCTURES

Small (4'x6' or less) trellises and plant supports are permitted. All non-permanent structures must be removed and stored offsite or in a tool chest by the Group by December 1st each year.

SIGNAGE

Each Community Garden will be provided with a sign by the Park District upon request. Other signage, particularly sponsorship signage, must be approved by DCNR. Please contact Community Gardens in the Parks staff for further guidance and instructions.

VEHICLES

Park patrons are permitted to use motorized vehicles within a park **ONLY** on designated roadways, driveways and parking facilities. The parking or driving of motorized vehicles by any park patron on walkways, restricted-access drives, lawn areas, under trees, or within landscaped areas is strictly forbidden.

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES IN THE GARDEN

- **Littering, dumping, grilling, alcohol consumption** and any otherwise unlawful activities.
- **Amplified sound.**
- **Pets** are not allowed in the garden per the Code of the Chicago Park District.
- **Ball playing** or other forms of active recreation.

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RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

The Community Gardens in the Parks staff and your Park Supervisor are your main contacts for all departments within the Park District.

Park District landscaping crews will be shown your garden space to assure that the boundaries are respected and to see where their maintenance responsibilities adjoin yours. Maintenance of plumbing features, when necessary, will remain the responsibility of the Park District.

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**COMMUNITY GARDENS IN THE PARKS
LETTER OF COMMITMENT**

Garden Group Name: _____

Liaison/Group Leader's Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email: _____

Alternate Contact's Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email: _____

** The Primary & Alternate contacts may not be in the same immediate family and may not reside at the same address.*

We _____ and _____ are the official liaisons of the Garden Group. Each current member of our Garden Group has read the attached guidelines and agrees to abide by them and now enters into a commitment to maintain our Community Garden in _____ Park.

Liaison's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Liaison's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

ATTACHMENTS

Attach a brief paragraph describing your garden, garden group, and your goals. This information will be added to the Chicago Park District website. Suggested information to include: what kind of plants do you grow? What's the general theme or goal of your garden? Is it a butterfly garden to attract wildlife, ornamental plants for beautifying the park, a vegetable garden to grow healthy organic food, or to teach children about gardening? What are some volunteer opportunities for other community members? Please include any publicly available contact information, such as a group email, social media or website address.

If you have 2-3 pictures of your garden for possible use on the Chicago Park District website, please attach them separately in a .jpeg format. Pictures of your group members working in the garden are especially appreciated.

Please submit this form and attachments (see above) to communitygardens@chicagoparkdistrict.com, or by mail to:

Kristin Brock (edible or combo) or Sarah Dugan (ornamental)
Community Gardens in the Parks | Chicago Park District
7059 S. South Shore Drive | Chicago, IL 60649