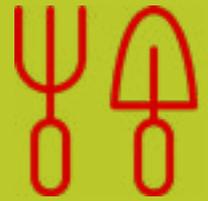




BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNITY GARDENING DURING COVID-19



Community gardens offer benefits such as: social bonding, reduction of stress, gardening knowledge, physical exercise, and increased production and consumption of nutritious, fresh, locally grown produce.

This guide is developed to offer:

- Best practices for community garden/landscape management during COVID-19
- Guidelines for cleaning/sanitation procedures in community gardens/landscapes
- Recommendation on safely visiting community gardens

THE BASICS

1. How long can the COVID-19 virus live on surfaces?

Current research suggests the COVID-19 virus can live on surfaces for hours to days, depending on the actual surface material (plastics 72 hrs, stainless steel 72 hrs, cardboard 24 hrs ([WebM. B. Nazario, MD June 2020](#))).

2. Should I be concerned with food safety when it comes to produce from my garden?

- Practice proper hand washing techniques when handling food. Soap and water is effective. There is no evidence COVID-19 is transmitted through food or food packaging. [More CDC food safety information](#).
- Do not eat or drink in the garden. When produce is shared with others, use extra caution.
 - Resource: [Food Safety & COVID 19 for Producers and Farmers Markets in Nebraska](#)

3. What are proper practices for keeping my hands and surfaces sanitized?

- Soap, alcohol and bleach are agents used to kill the virus on surfaces. Soap with water is effective for hand-washing.
- Set up a hand washing station at the entrance/exit to the garden.
 - [Simple hand-washing station instructions](#)
- When washing hands with soap and water, scrub for 20 seconds ("Happy Birthday" song twice). If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol). However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash with soap and water.
- Clean and disinfect items you touch that someone else might also touch using common EPA-registered household disinfectants. If the surface is visibly dirty, wash first with soap and water.
 - Make your own disinfectant solution by mixing: 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water. Leave the solution on the surface for at least 1 minute. Use paper towels and dispose of after each use.
- It is good practice to wear gloves, however gloves do not replace proper disinfection procedures. The outside of your glove can still transmit diseases to yourself and others. If you wear gloves, wash after each use.
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue that fully and tightly covers your mouth. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

4. What's a safe distance for interaction with others?

- Maintain at least 6 feet between yourself and other gardeners (as far away as a long-handled garden tool!).
- Bring a mask to wear when others are in the garden, especially when physical distancing is not possible.
 - [The CDC provides guidelines on use and directions for masks](#).
- When in doubt, STAY HOME. Do not come to the garden if you are experiencing symptoms, someone you've been in contact with is sick, or are part of a higher risk population.

5. How can I share these guidelines?

- Communicate guidelines and recommendations regularly through a variety of methods (i.e. email, text, phone, social media).
- Post laminated guidelines at the entrance of the garden and throughout.

These guidelines are based on current information we have on the COVID-19 virus, as well as community garden policies from across the country. <https://extension.purdue.edu/article/36666>, <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/community.htm>, <https://vcgn.org/covid-19-guidelines/>

For updates on the COVID-19 virus and precautions, visit:

Center for Disease Control at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

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TOOLS & EQUIPMENT

- Inventory all areas in the garden where people commonly come into contact (i.e. spigots, hose, handles, gates, tools, garden cart, etc.).
- If possible, leave garden gates open during your garden's open hours, to avoid excess contact.
- Remove all 'community' shared tools and equipment to limit virus transmission.
 - Limit access to tools with wooden handles as much as possible.
 - Consider that items that cannot easily be cleaned (for example, garden hoses) could be a site for the transfer of the virus.
 - Thoroughly wipe down the hose nozzle/spigot with a disinfectant solution BEFORE AND AFTER USE and encourage hand washing before and after handling the hose.
 - Tool-sharing alternatives: **1)** Assign tools and associated tasks to specific gardeners for the season. **2)** Use proper disinfectant solution to thoroughly wipe down the handle BEFORE AND AFTER USE. **3)** Ask gardeners to bring and use their own tools.
- Ask gardeners to bring and use their own tools. If people aren't able to bring or afford their own tools, consider asking your community for tool donations for individual use. Use proper sanitizing when accepting donations.
- No tools or other personal items should be left in the garden. Gardeners need to take their tools, trash and other items home when they are done for the day.
 - If any shared tools and equipment remain at the garden, be sure to use a disinfectant solution to thoroughly wipe down the handle BEFORE AND AFTER USE.
- Consider removing lids for the time being so that gardeners can directly add garden waste. If lids are needed, have a small group of volunteers maintain the compost bins while using proper disinfection techniques.
- Remove or cordon off public benches, picnic tables, or any other shared spaces that may promote close contact.

SCHEDULING WORK

- If possible, wait to open the garden to gardeners as late as is reasonable as we work to "flatten the curve" of the virus.
 - Stay tuned to the CDC website and your local Health District for up-to-date information.
- If possible, close the garden to outside visitors (non-gardeners).
- Consider creating designated work hours only for vulnerable populations and those at higher risk.
- If the garden space is small and it will be hard for gardeners to operate with proper spacing, schedule community gardeners for specific garden hours to limit numbers present in the garden at any given time.
 - In some situations it may make sense to schedule gardeners based on the location of their plot in the garden--spreading out gardeners across the garden space.
- Schedule a half-hour break between groups of gardeners to wipe down shared surfaces with the above-mentioned bleach solution.
- Avoid group work while the concern for the virus is highest. Once group work can resume, continue to use the above precautions, including: stay apart by 6 feet, bring and wear your own gloves, wash hands thoroughly, and wipe down shared surfaces.
- Assign specific tasks to gardeners at a variety of times throughout the week. A simple way of managing schedules for shared tasks is GOOGLE SPREADSHEETS or SIGN-UP GENIUS.
- Young children must remain in the family plot while visiting the garden or stay home.
- STAY HOME if showing any symptoms or if you've been in contact with someone who is sick. Encourage gardeners to STAY HOME if they are considered more vulnerable to exposure to the virus (older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions). Support these gardeners by offering to plant or cultivate for them while risks remain high.

HOW TO SUPPORT FELLOW GARDENERS IN THESE CHALLENGING TIMES?

- Maintain regular and timely communication with gardeners. Keep gardeners up-to-date on guidelines. Be available to respond to questions and concerns.
- Share inspiration to keep gardeners hopeful and engaged--such as garden images or quotes. Encourage gardener communication through an email list, Google Group or Facebook Group.
- Share remote resources for continued preparations and garden learning--such as how-to videos, free on-line gardening classes, and the Extension Master Gardener Hot-line.
- CDC advises the use of simple cloth face coverings as an additional, voluntary public health measure.

SUPPLIES

- Hand and tool washing soap and facilities at each garden.
 - Hand sanitizer if a washing station is not possible
- Cleaning materials to sanitize commonly touched surfaces such as spray bottles with a bleach mixture of 5 tablespoons bleach per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water.
- Secure place to lock up common tools so they can't be a source of transmission.
- Nonporous plastic tables that can easily be cleaned and disinfected.
- Automatic irrigation systems when possible