

## COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies for Community Gardens



### SAFETY GUIDELINES IN COMMUNITY GARDENS

Community gardens will need to be operated differently in response to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic. Community gardening is permitted but must be done carefully to mitigate the damage to our community.

#### Guidelines for Gardeners

If you have common symptoms of COVID-19, seek medical advice and physically isolate yourself until you can be tested or until you have had 3 days without symptoms. Even without symptoms, you and other gardeners can be infectious. Follow these guidelines in the garden:

1. Practice physical distancing: Stay 6 feet away from other gardeners at all times.
2. If possible, bring and use only your own tools.
3. If using common tools, wash them, handle and all with soap and water before and after using them.
4. Wash your hands with soap and water when you return home.
5. Rinse your vegetables in water. Do not use soap to wash your vegetables, eating soap is bad for you.
6. Remember that these guidelines keep you and others safe. Ignoring these guidelines could result in the death of your fellow gardeners.

#### Suggestions for Organizers

1. Cancel all events, opening days, and workdays. Make other arrangements for essential garden tasks.
2. Remove tools and items such as hoses that are frequently handled but cannot be easily cleaned.
3. Make it an essential task to maintain the supply of hand and tool washing materials (soap and/or dilute bleach solution).
4. Make it an essential task to frequently sanitize commonly touched surfaces with soap, alcohol, or a bleach solution: tool shed doors, water spigots, and gates.
5. Turn on water as soon as possible so gardeners can clean their tools. Delay the opening of the garden or lock up common tools until water can be turned on.
6. Allow gardeners who choose not to garden this year to return in 2021. Plan for what will likely be a higher number of vacant plots.
7. Various city services like the brush drop off sites are closed or have limited access. Check [danegardens.net/covid/](https://danegardens.net/covid/) for a summary of the status of these services.
8. Gardening in a community offers support and camaraderie and a way to mitigate food insecurity. Keeping a community garden open and safe in a time of crisis and uncertainty is one of the greatest services a garden can offer to its community members.

More information and resources can be found at <https://www.publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus> and <https://danegardens.net/covid/>.

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### COMMUNICATION PLAN

#### Signs:

We plan to mass-produce two laminated signs:

- **6 Foot Distancing**, designed by Public Health of Madison and Dane County
- **Wash Hands and Tools**, designed by Rooted with information from Public Health and other sources

These signs will be in English, Spanish, Hmong, Lao, and whatever other necessary languages – please email [gardens@rootedwi.org](mailto:gardens@rootedwi.org) with language requests.

We would like these to go in every garden – please let us know if you would like them and if your garden can handle posting these signs on your own.

#### Communication with Gardeners

We will be communicating on social and traditional media, with neighborhood centers, and through community organizations to let people know community gardens are still open and available and about the safety measures we are taking. We will rely on garden organizers to communicate with their gardeners about the importance of these measures. If you need support with reaching out to specific communities, mass texting or robo-calls, or translation, please contact [gardens@rootedwi.org](mailto:gardens@rootedwi.org). UW-Madison Extension Dane County has offered to translate communication related to the coronavirus in community gardens.

### SUPPLIES

These supplies should be secured before opening your gardens and regularly maintained throughout the growing season:

- Soap dispenser bottles – one for each water spigot.
- Chains for fastening bottles to spigots
- Bleach, alcohol, or sanitary wipes – locked in garden sheds, to be used by gardeners sanitizing frequently used surfaces.
- Signs – one of each for each garden
- Posts, as needed, for mounting signs

The Gardens Network will be making a bulk order of these supplies in April. Please let us know how many of them you would like and if your garden budget would be able to pay for them.

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## FAQS

### Why not close community gardens?

Although every trip outside carries a risk of infection, gardens are spaces with limited physical interaction that can be minimized with careful planning. They are likely at least as safe as a grocery store. They are also a necessary source of food for many gardeners.

### What about removing all common tools?

Some gardens are removing and locking up all common tools and having gardeners bring all their own to use. This is ideal if possible, but will prevent those without their own tools from gardening, a serious equity issue. However, tools should be locked down until proper cleaning and signs are in place.

### What about scheduling gardeners to avoid contact?

Some community gardens are setting up a gardening schedule so that gardeners will come at different times. While this will increase safety, it is not an option for many gardeners without regular internet access or proficiency. We recommend this system where feasible, but if not, proper physical distancing and hygienic use of garden equipment should make gardens a reasonably safer space.

### Why aren't you recommending gloves or other personal protective equipment?

Currently, personal protective equipment (PPE) is quite limited and may not be available to all gardeners. Also, many gardens do not have regular trash collection, and managing the disposal of other gardener's PPE is an additional, hazardous dangerous task to add to community garden organizers. Most importantly, gloves **do not** replace proper hand sanitation procedures. If using gardening gloves, remember they are as contaminated as whatever they touch. Treat and wash them accordingly.

## REFERENCES

Public Health of Madison and Dane County: <https://www.publichealthmdc.com/coronavirus>. Accessed April 5, 2020.

Hannah Traggis, Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group: Public Health Guidelines for Safe Community Gardening.

Edits by members of Rooted staff and Madison Community Garden organizers.