

Community Gardens Guidelines



INTRODUCTION

These guidelines outline the process and requirements for starting a new community garden on land that is owned and/or managed by the City of Marion. The aim is to assist community groups or organisations to plan, develop and manage a community garden. This document should be read in conjunction with the City of Marion Community Gardens Policy which is available on the City of Marion website.

Community gardening is becoming popular worldwide with the growing awareness of food security and climate change, and as a way to encourage healthier lifestyles and improve social connections. Community gardens offer health, environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits. Council recognises these diverse benefits to our community and strives to support existing and new community gardens.



What is a community garden?

A community garden is a garden on public open space that is managed by the community primarily for producing food and creating a sustainable urban environment. It is a place for learning about sustainable living practices whilst building community and contributing to improved health and wellbeing for those involved. Community gardens are regularly open to the public and anyone can become a member.

Community gardens are not typically located on the verge or nature strip. However, residents in the City of Marion can apply to Council to have a garden on the verge near their property. Verge gardens are different to community gardens in that they are typically managed by an adjacent household, rather than a community group. More information about verge gardens is available on the [verges page](#) of the Marion website.

Council's role in supporting community gardens

Council takes a community development approach to community gardens where gardening groups manage the gardens themselves with the support of Council and other partnering organisations. The City of Marion intends to develop strong partnerships with garden groups and play a supporting role. Council can provide the following support for gardening groups:

- Assessing proposed community garden sites
- Assessment and approval of community garden proposals
- Facilitate community engagement and consultation with the surrounding community
- Provide input into garden planning and design
- Provide guidance on developing Management Plans for community gardens

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- Assistance with promoting community gardens
 - Providing resources and building capacity of gardening groups
 - Contributing resources such as people, materials and 'in-kind' support where possible.

Once established, gardening groups are expected to be self-reliant and take responsibility for ongoing management, maintenance and obtaining funding.

As Council will be assessing your application for a community garden, we encourage you to liaise closely with our Community Gardens Coordinator throughout the process. It is a good idea to appoint a liaison person who will act as a conduit between your group and Council.

Contact Council early to let us know your intentions and find out how we can assist. We may be able to put you into contact with other residents who have expressed a similar interest in developing a community garden in your area.

What is involved in starting a community garden on Council land?

Building and managing a community garden is a large undertaking. It typically takes 1-2 years of groundwork before a community garden can begin operating. There is a considerable amount of planning, design and approval involved before you can get into the garden. It is important that you are aware of the process and timeframes from the outset. That way you can ensure that your group has the sustained interest, energy and momentum to set up the garden and see it thrive.

The key steps involved in starting a community garden are:

- Form a community gardening group
- Submit an expression of interest to Council
- Select a site
- Council assesses the site
- Engage with neighbours and the wider community
- Plan your garden design
- Develop a Management Plan
- Incorporate your community gardening group
- Prepare a budget and source funding
- Council arranges for the soil to be tested for contamination
- Council conducts a community consultation process with local residents
- Organise appropriate insurance
- Negotiate a lease or license agreement with Council

These steps are outlined in further detail below.

THE PREPARATION STAGE

Forming a community gardening group

You will need to have the enthusiasm and commitment of a group of people working towards a common dream to 'grow' your garden. A community garden can mean many things to different people. It is crucial to develop a group vision at the outset. Group members must agree on the purpose of the garden to avoid disagreement as the project evolves. Your vision should be well articulated, concise and kept in mind throughout the process.

It is important to form a working group that includes people with a variety of skills. The size of the group will depend on the size of the project and the size of the available open space. A smaller group may be easier to manage, while a larger group will provide more energy and input. Until you have liaised with Council and determined that a site is appropriate for your community garden, we recommend keeping your group small.

Once you have determined that your group is committed, you can hold a meeting to discuss how to proceed, identify strengths and skills of members and assign roles among the group.

You can use the Management Plan Template available on our community gardens webpage to develop your vision. This document should be a working document that is updated as your community garden project evolves.

Submit an expression of interest

As you form your group and select a site, we encourage you to keep in contact with Council's Community Gardens Coordinator to ensure you do not miss any important steps in the process. In the early stages, after you have formed a group and chosen a site, you will be asked to submit an expression of interest to Council outlining your intentions (see the Expression of Interest Form on the [Marion website](#)).

Start researching community gardens

A crucial factor for a successful community garden is adequate research. This will help you understand the concept of community gardens and provide insight into the level of commitment required. The [Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network](#) or the [South Australian Community Gardens Network](#) are great places to start. By speaking to existing community garden organisers, you can learn from their mistakes and find out what has worked well for them.

Determine the level of demand

You and your group might think the community needs a community garden, but what do the community think? Community gardens only thrive when supported by the local population. Without the need for formal consultation at this stage, gauge the level of support and commitment in your community. You could do this through letterboxing, doorknocking, holding a community meeting or drop in event, putting up posters and flyers, and tapping into existing local groups and networks. You may also want to find out if there are community gardens already in the area and what level of demand they have.



ASSESSING A SITE

Selecting a site

You may already have a site in mind when you form a community garden group. However, all new groups should thoroughly assess proposed sites to ensure they are suitable. You are encouraged to consider the site assessment criteria below while selecting your site. Do not be discouraged if you cannot meet all the criteria. Council will prioritise sites that meet as many of these criteria as possible, but all applications will be considered. If a site is deemed unsuitable Council's Community Gardens Coordinator will work with you to find an alternative site.

Site Selection Criteria

It is important to consider a range of factors to determine whether a location is suitable for a community garden. These site selection criteria must be considered and adequately addressed in your application.

- **Land status.** Contact Council to check the land tenure, zoning, community land status and any planned activities for the site.
- **Compatibility with surrounding land uses.** Is it an ecologically sensitive area where the garden could have an adverse impact e.g. a wetland or remnant vegetation area?
- **Land size.** Sites should be large enough to accommodate garden beds, composting systems, rainwater tanks, seating areas, shelter for gardeners and for community workshops and demonstrations. There is no limitation to the garden size if all the above issues have been considered and the proposed garden design is appropriate for the space. It is recommended that larger gardens are developed with a staged approach.

- **Water.** Gardens need access to water, or to nearby buildings from which rainwater can be harvested.
- **Sun.** Sites should not be overshadowed by tall buildings or dense tree canopy, to enable food plants receive more than 6 hours sunlight per day. To ensure the site has enough sun in winter, it is best to have a north, north-west or westerly orientation.
- **Topography.** Ideally your site will be relatively flat. It is cheaper and easier to move people and equipment into and around the site. In some cases, gentle slopes may be feasible but significant slopes which require ramps or terraces should be avoided.
- **Access.** Consider what services you will need to access on the site including electricity, phone, sewers, drains and water. People and vehicles will need to access your site. Large vehicle such as utes or trucks may need access during the construction stage and ongoing vehicle access is likely to be needed for deliveries. Sites should be highly accessible to a range of user groups including people with disabilities where possible. Fenced community gardens on Council land are required to be open to the public on a regular basis.
- **Toilets.** People using the garden must have access to toilets. The best option is to be in proximity to an existing public toilet or you could consider getting access to a nearby public building for this purpose.
- **Connection to residents or community facilities.** Priority will be given to sites close to a relatively high density residential area and/or a community centre or other community organisation which can support or partner the project.
- **Soil contamination.** All sites need to be checked for soil contamination by a qualified professional. If unacceptable levels of contaminants are present, advice will be sought from experts on whether the site is suitable for growing food. (Note that Council will arrange and cover the cost of soil testing.)
- **Impact on residents.** Ensuring support from nearby residents is crucial for the success of your garden. Consider what impact your garden would have on neighbouring households - in regard to traffic, noise and parking - and how this could be prevented, reduced or managed. Consider whether the site has enough parking and if there will be an impact on surrounding residents and businesses during events or busy times.
- **Safety and security.** The site should have good passive surveillance which means being in a high profile, preferably well-lit location that can be easily observed from nearby houses, shopping areas or businesses. Amenity, noise, pollutants and weed infestations from adjoining sites should also be considered.
- **Storage.** All community garden sites must have an appropriate location to store tools and equipment.

We recognise that it is not always possible to find a site that meets all these criteria. Council will prioritise sites that meet as many of these criteria as possible.

How Council assesses community garden sites

There are many factors Council considers when determining if a site is suitable for a community garden. In addition to site assessment criteria above, we will consider:

- Environmental impacts including impacts on biodiversity, water and trees.
- The zoning of the land in accordance with the current Local Environment Plan and Council's Development Plan.
- The category of the land in accordance with the Local Government Act.
- Consistency of the land use with the Community Land Management Plan for the site.
- Proximity to existing community gardens.

The Community Gardens Coordinator will coordinate Council's site assessment process, with input from various Council units including Open Space Recreation and Planning, Land and Property, Development Services, Community Health and Safety and Traffic Management. Advice will also be sought from Councils Biodiversity Coordinator, Arborist and Water Resources Coordinators.

Development approval

Many community gardens will need development approval from Council before the garden can go ahead. This is in addition to Council's approval as land owner. Development approval is usually required for structures such as storage sheds or shelters. Our Community Gardens Coordinator can assist you through this process. For more information about development applications visit the [Marion website](#).

Testing the soil for contamination

In the interests of public health, it is essential to investigate soil contamination before planting any edible plants. Many urban areas have high levels of heavy metals and pesticides. If the site was previously an industrial site or waste dump, then the soil is likely to be contaminated. Contamination is not necessarily obvious by simply looking at the site. It is safest to assume most sites will have some level of contamination which needs to be managed. Council can help identify the previous use of the site to determine the degree of soil contamination. Council will also arrange and cover the cost of soil testing at your proposed community garden site.



GARDEN MANAGEMENT

Developing a Management Plan

You are required to submit a Management Plan as part of your community garden application. This should outline your vision, objectives and policies, prioritise tasks, allocate responsibility, outline decision making and conflict resolution processes and include a code of conduct.

The Management Plan is a useful tool for many reasons including:

- Demonstrating to Council and other funding bodies that an appropriate level of research and forethought has gone into the project.
- Demonstrating that there is adequate commitment and capacity to plan, establish and maintain the garden.
- Planning for the long-term management of the garden.
- Clarifying direction and demonstrating ways of achieving the group's vision.

Spend time brainstorming what the group would like to see the garden become. You might not be able to see all results straight away but having it in the plan helps keep the momentum alive.

A management plan template is located on our [website](#) and can be adapted to suit your group.

Group Incorporation

Becoming incorporated gives community garden groups a clear legal structure that is separate from individual members. It gives the group the ability to manage funds, open a bank account, obtain public liability insurance cover, enter into a lease agreement with Council and apply for grants.

To become incorporated, your group must elect a public officer and establish a management committee who meet regularly. The committee generally includes a President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary and committee members. Having a structure helps share the tasks of garden management and avoids excessive responsibility falling to a few people.

To become an incorporated association, your group must apply to the South Australian Office of Consumer and Business Services. For more information visit the [Consumer and Business Services website](#).

Alternatively, groups can arrange for an already incorporated body, such as a non-government organisation, to auspice the garden group and ensure that it meets legal, financial and insurance requirements. Possible auspicing associations include existing community gardens, community service organisations, and sustainability organisations. If you are an unincorporated group with an auspicing agreement you will need to understand and follow your auspicing association's constitution.

Lease agreements

The allocation of public land for community gardens must be formalised through a lease or license agreement. New community gardens on land that the City of Marion owns and/or manages can obtain an initial two-year lease subject to assessment and approval. To provide security of tenure this will be followed by a five-year lease so long as the community garden is still feasible. You will need to submit a lease application form to Council's Land and Property Team, along with the required documentation including your certificate of incorporation, certificates of insurance, management plan, budget and garden design.

There is an annual license fee as outlined in Council's [Leasing and Licensing Policy](#). However, this fee will be waived for the first few years of operation while the community garden is being established.

Insurance and risk management

All groups should be aware of the risks associated with undertaking a community garden project with public access. Your group has a duty of care to the people who visit the garden so a minimum of \$10 million of public liability insurance is required.

Community Gardens are a unique land use that does not fit easily into established insurance categories. This can lead to significant variations in the cost of premiums so shop around.

Small community groups with limited funds for insurance could consider the following options:

- The group can become an incorporated association under the South Australian Associations Incorporations Act 1985 and manage your own insurance.
- The group could consider seeking affordable insurance from Local Community Insurance Services, Garden Clubs Australia or the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board Volunteer Support Unit.
- The group may be auspiced by another organisation or agency and arrange to be a project of that organisation and be covered by their insurance.
- A group of community gardens with similar objectives might obtain insurance together, as an umbrella policy is likely to be cheaper.

All groups must prepare a Safety Plan to ensure that everyone involved in the garden is aware of hazards and takes appropriate precautions. A template can be found on our [website](#).



FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY GARDENS

Developing a budget

You will need to develop a budget for your community garden and consider where you will obtain the necessary financial resources. A three-year garden budget must be submitted to Council as part of your application. A budget template is available on Council's website. Speak to our Community Gardens Coordinator to find out which costs can be covered by the City of Marion.

The requirements for each garden will vary but most new gardens have following expenses:

Start-up costs

- Incorporation fees
- Irrigation
- Rainwater tanks, including costs of fittings, pump and professional installation
- Shed/ tool storage
- Tools and equipment e.g. hand tools, wheelbarrows, watering cans and hoses
- Garden signage
- Construction materials e.g. garden beds, paving, seating, fencing
- Site construction works (e.g. levelling the ground).

Ongoing costs

- Lease fees
- Tools and equipment e.g. hoses, fire extinguisher
- Water and electricity bills
- Materials e.g. soil, manures, plants, fertilisers and mulch
- Public liability insurance
- Promotion and printing
- Administration costs e.g. PO Box, internet access, postage
- Toilet, kitchen and meeting facilities
- Waste management and disposal.

Raising funds

Plan your fundraising efforts carefully, ensuring that the money raised is worth the time and energy you spend. Community gardens can raise funds through a range of avenues:

- Annual membership fees, which can be a consistent income stream.
- Raffles, with prizes donated by local businesses.
- Traditional fundraising events like sausage sizzles and cake stalls.
- Sponsorship, by local businesses of a section of the garden.
- Sale of produce.
- Events and workshops.
- Grants, from Council or other bodies.
- Donations, from local business for materials, plants, soil or a tool shed.

Applying for grants

Council encourages groups to apply for grants or sponsorship to assist with start-up costs, construction or ongoing costs of new or existing gardens. Contact our Community Gardens Coordinator prior to applying for grants from the City of Marion. We can provide advice on the process and suggestions for garden materials and costing of items. We can also clarify which costs can be covered by Council without having to apply for a community grant.



ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

Involving the local community

Your group will need to speak to the local community to gauge interest, seek support and find members and volunteers. You can use the *Planning and Community Engagement Form* available on our [website](#) to step you through this process.

We strongly encourage you to contact the adjacent neighbours and any overlooking residents early in the process to seek their support. These residents are the most likely people to raise concerns about the garden and it is important to have them on board.

Council consultation requirements

Community consultation is essential to ensure the community can have a voice and helps mitigate potential conflict as the process continues. This will give the project the best opportunity of moving forward. In addition to the community engagement that your group will undertake, Council will consult with local residents about the proposed site and garden design. Keep in mind that some community members may raise concerns about the community garden, or the use of the site you are considering. Council will hear and consider all ideas and concerns raised and address them where possible.

The community gardens consultation process will be consistent with Council's [Community Engagement Policy](#) and can take a few months. Feedback will be sought from local residents through a mail out to households within 400 metres of the proposed site and online through Council's dedicated community consultation website Making Marion. A report on the consultation findings will be prepared for Council's elected members to consider. Council will communicate to the garden group and the wider community the consultation findings, responses to concerns and any decisions made.

USEFUL LINKS

City of Marion Community Gardens Webpage

List of community gardens in the City of Marion, community gardens forms and templates

www.marion.sa.gov.au/communitygardens

Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network

www.communitygardens.org.au

South Australian Community Gardens Network

Contact them through their [Public Facebook page](#)

Growing Community Handbook

An excellent resource developed by Community Centres SA

www.communitycentressa.asn.au/documents/item/26

See the Consumer and Business Services website

Information about becoming an Incorporated group

www.cbs.sa.gov.au/associations-cooperatives

Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board

Provides affordable insurance for community garden groups

www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/get-involved/volunteering/volunteer-support

Garden Clubs of Australia

Provides affordable insurance for community garden groups

<https://gardenclubs.org.au/forms-information-for-affiliated-clubs/>

CHECKLIST FOR COMMUNITY GARDEN APPLICATIONS

Here is a list of the documentation that is required for a community garden application. We recommend you complete your application in stages with assistance from our Community Gardens Coordinator.

Stage 1. Expression of Interest.

At this early stage you will need to submit a short Expression of Interest Form.

Stage 2. Concept Overview.

At this stage you will need to submit:

- Planning and Community Engagement Form.
- Garden design and map.
- Proposed three-year budget for the community garden.

Stage 3. Lease or License Requirements.

At this stage you must submit the following additional documents:

- Lease or Licence Application Form for Community Gardens.
- A copy of your Management Plan.
- Copy of your constitution.
- Copy of your incorporation certificate.
- Copy of public liability insurance (\$10 million).
- Minutes of last meeting.
- Safety Plan.

All forms and templates are available at marion.sa.gov.au/communitygardens

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