

COMMUNAL FOOD GARDEN (COMMUNITY GARDEN) ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES

CITY OF DAREBIN

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WHO TO CONTACT

The City of Darebin is happy to help with any communal food garden enquiries.

Contact Sustainable Food Officer
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Important Links

Communal Food Garden Site Assessment Checklist
Community Garden Licence Agreement Template



Introduction

Darebin Council supports communal food growing to help improve food security, promote healthy eating and facilitate community connections. Communal food growing sites can be a focal point for diverse members of the community to come together and share their food growing and preparation knowledge and skills. They can also encourage broader awareness of environmental sustainability by including water and food waste recycling initiatives, promoting food sharing and hosting events and workshops on sustainable living.

Community gardens are the most common type of communal food growing in Darebin. Community Gardens involve the collective gardening of a single piece of land by a community group on a not for profit basis, producing food primarily for the consumption of the gardeners. They can be located on private or publically owned land. They vary in size, access and governance / operating models.

Other types of communal food growing in Darebin include the All Nations Kitchen Garden, the orchard and bush foods garden at Bundoora Park, fruit trees in selected pocket parks and naturestrip or verge gardens. There are separate guidelines for the planting of naturestrips available on the Council website at: www.darebin.vic.gov.au/naturestrips.

Council provides a range of general services to all established community gardens as outlined in the Urban Food Production Strategy. These guidelines have been developed to explain the consultation and assessment process for new communal food garden proposals, and set out the community and Council roles and responsibilities.

Establishing and maintaining a community garden requires substantial community involvement and commitment. Community groups should not underestimate the importance of gaining broad support for the garden from the local community before commencing the project. Ensuring there are enough committed community members who can support the garden through both the establishment and ongoing maintenance phases is essential.

For the best chance of success, Council recommends community groups thoroughly research what is involved before initiating the Communal Food Garden Assessment process. Detailed guides on setting up community gardens are located at www.darebinfoodharvestnetwork.org.au under Resources – Community Gardens.

Purpose

The Communal Food Garden (Community Garden) Assessment Guidelines set out the key considerations for assessing the suitability of a particular site for growing food on a communal basis, as well as the steps involved in assessing and approving a new communal food garden proposal. The guidelines focus on the process for assessing sites on Council owned or managed land. They can also be used to help guide site choices and the process to establish food gardens on land owned by other public entities such as VicTrack or Melbourne Water, as well as on private land.

Communal Food Garden Site Selection Criteria

THE SITE SELECTION CRITERIA PROVIDED ARE DESIGNED TO IDENTIFY SITES WHICH HAVE THE MOST POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESS, BOTH IN TERMS OF BEING PRODUCTIVE FOOD GROWING SPACES AS WELL AS MAXIMISING ACCESS TO A BROAD RANGE OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

1. LOCATION

Sites which may be suitable include land which has been designated for communal use such as parks and open space. Examples are underutilised land adjacent to a sportsground or play space, or land associated with a community centre or council building.

Natural conservation areas, such as creek banks and native grasslands, sports ovals and play spaces would not be appropriate due to the conflicting use and access issues that would likely arise.

Land within kindergartens and child care centres may be appropriate for food gardens for the community using that centre, but are not considered appropriate for general community gardens.

Priority will be given to sites close to a relatively high density residential base and a community centre or other community organisation which could support or partner the project, particularly if the centre / organisation has the capacity to engage those from low socio-economic or disadvantaged backgrounds.

2. MULTI-USE

Priority will also be given to sites which can be developed without having an adverse impact on other existing land uses and where the site can still be used by non-gardeners for passive recreation, events and educational workshops.

Consideration should be given to whether the site supports a design which encourages community interaction as part of the gardens operation.

3. ACCESSIBILITY

Sites should be highly accessible to a range of user groups including people with disabilities. Ideally they will be located close to public transport and have vehicle access (to deliver infrastructure, soil etc).

4. SECURITY

The site should have good passive surveillance i.e. be 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.

5. SOIL CONTAMINATION

It is essential to investigate soil contamination issues prior to starting any planting in the interests of public health. For example if the site was previously an industrial site or waste dump then 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.

Council can help identify the previous use of the site to determine the likely degrees of soil contamination. Soil testing and remediation can be prohibitively expensive. To reduce contamination risk, food on Council land is generally grown in raised garden beds filled with clean soil from a trusted source. Council can help gardening groups seek advice on soil contamination on a site-by-site basis.

6. SOLAR ACCESS

Sites should not be overshadowed by tall buildings or dense tree canopy, to enable food plants receive more than 6 hours sunlight per day.

7. WATER ACCESS

Gardens need ready access to water or to buildings in close proximity from which rainwater can be harvested.

8. SIZE

Land of all sizes may be suitable for communal food growing. There is no limitation to the garden size as long as all the above issues have been considered and the proposed garden type / design is appropriate to the space.

Procedure for Assessing Communal Food Garden Sites

