



Portland Community Gardens Policies Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

As of Fall 2016, Portland Community Gardens has updated Policies. Below are answers to commonly asked questions about each policy and how they apply to specific situations.

Policy #1: You are welcome to garden all year round. During the main growing season (April – October) show you are using your plot by:

- Preparing the soil for planting
- Planting and growing crops
- Harvesting ripe produce
- Removing weeds, especially those in flower or setting seed
- Collecting seed you want to save before it drops on the soil

Common Questions:

Q **I only like growing tomatoes in my plot during the summer months. Can't I just use my plot during those months?**

A During the months of April - October, you are expected to be actively engaged in your plot. This may be a great time to think about a crop you might add before or after tomato season (perhaps an easy to grow cover crop or simple food crop) that could help feed the soil and/or suppress weeds. If you want an idea on what to grow when, here's a [handy planting guide for our region](#). See policy 2 below for suggestions on how to care for your plot when you're not actively growing (i.e. late fall and winter months, if you choose not to grow food during that time).

Q **I don't typically start working in my garden plot until May. Will this be a problem?**

A If you have been assigned a plot by April, you will need to start working in your garden during the month of April to avoid a check-in from staff who think your plot is abandoned. There are many things you can do during this month to prepare the plot for May crops -- preparing the soil, removing weeds, or putting in an early Spring planting. You might consider growing an easy crop to donate to [Produce for People](#). Or if you have a friend in the garden, you can see if they would like to plant something in your plot for the month of April.



Example of Spring bed preparation

Q **How often am I expected to show up and work my plot to show that I'm actively gardening?**

A There is no strict expectation; each plot varies in what it needs based on what you plant, how often your plants require watering, and how fast the weeds grow. During the active growing season (April - October), you may need to be at the garden more often than during winter months. Based on our garden surveys, most gardeners report spending 3-5 hours per week in their plots; if you have a smaller plot, you might spend less time, and larger plots might require more time. You will need to figure out what is needed based on your garden plan.

Q **I like to leave plants to dry for seed collection. How can I let you know this is my plan so it doesn't simply**

look like my plot has been neglected?

- Ⓐ You are welcome to allow certain types of crops flower to attract bees and other beneficial insects but in a community garden setting, but you need to save the seed in a way that doesn't build up a seed bank in the soil or impact neighbors. Often times gardeners will gather seed before it dries and drops by cutting the seed head and putting it in paper bags indoors to help it mature and dry out. This is an effective way of seed saving in a community garden because it prevents the plant from dropping seed in the garden while allowing you to save seeds, furthering their life cycle.



Collecting coriander seeds in a paper bag to save for next season.

Policy #2: When you are not actively gardening, continue to care for your garden plot by:

- Removing weeds, especially those in flower or setting seed
- Removing dead and dying plants, especially if they are diseased or covered with pests
- Neatly storing seasonal structures like tomato cages, stakes, trellis materials, and wood when not in use

Common Questions:

Ⓞ **Can I grow crops all year round?**

- Ⓐ Yes! You are more than welcome to be actively gardening in your plot every month of the year. Because November through March are often less active months for growing, those are the months that community gardeners can be less active in the garden -- but that doesn't mean you have to be! We have many gardeners that grow late fall and winter crops.

Ⓞ **Which months am I allowed to “not actively garden” in my plot?**

- Ⓐ During the months of November through March, gardeners do not have to show that they are actively growing or prepping their plot for growing. You are still expected to maintain your plot, however, by following the suggestions in this policy #2 (removing weeds, removing dead/dying/diseased plants, storing any seasonal structures, etc.). Leaving dying or diseased plants can cause blight and spread disease beyond just a single plot, and weedy crops left too long can also begin growing into others' plots and build up unwanted seed banks in the soil. If each gardener does their part to maintain their plot, the entire garden benefits.

Ⓞ **What kinds of structures are considered seasonal and must be put away? What can be left up through non-active winter months?**

- Ⓐ Temporary structures that help to support plants (e.g. tomato cages, stakes, etc.) are considered temporary and should be taken down and neatly stored during non-active growing months. Intentional, sturdy structures such as compost bins, raised bed frames, well-secured arbors and trellises, plot borders (fences/edging around plots) may be left up as long as they are maintained.



Example of a winterized plot at Brentwood Community Garden



Example of a structure that can be left up during winter months

Policy #3: You are responsible for maintaining the paths and fence lines that touch your plot.

- Keep paths bordering your plot 2.5 to 3 feet wide and level so others can safely pass
- Remove weeds from the paths and directly outside the fence, if your plot touches a fence
- Store things inside your plot
- Keep plants within the boundaries of your plot

Common Questions:

Q **Can I receive community service hours for cleaning the public paths by my plot?**

A Yes! You can mark as community service hours any time you put in clearing and maintaining the public paths around your plot to make sure that they are level, clear, and 2.5-3 feet wide.

Q **Can I grow things along the fence bordering my plot?**

A Yes! As long as the crops are planted within your plot itself, inside the fence and not spilling out into public pathways, the fence can be used to trellis plants. Many gardeners have used fencing along their plot in creative ways.

Q **I am at the end of a row and no one uses the path next to my plot except my neighbor and me. If we're both okay with storing things at the end of the path by our plots, is that okay?**

A All paths must remain clear and level, even where the pathways end. As the policy states, everything associated with your plot must be stored within the bounds of your plot, not in neighboring pathways. The policy is in place to maintain safe conditions in each garden, as well as promote a sense of fairness among gardeners whose plots border the end of a pathway and those whose plots are surrounded on all four sides with shared pathways.



Help make sure paths are clear, wide and maintained



Policy #4: Portland Parks & Recreation does not provide garbage or plant waste pick up. You are responsible for managing the plant material and trash from your plot.

- You can compost plant material in your plot, bury it, or dispose of it in home yard waste bins.
- Do not dump material anywhere inside or outside the garden.

Common Questions:

- Q **I take the bus or walk to tend my community garden plot and/or I live in an apartment complex that does not provide garden waste disposal. Bringing plant material back to dispose of at home is therefore not an easy option for me. What do you recommend?**
- A Composting plant material in your own plot can be a great way to add nutrients back into the soil. See our [Debris Management Factsheet](#) for helpful suggestions. You can find more resources on how to do this through [Oregon Metro's helpful composting guide](#). We also offer composting classes each year for our gardeners; you can reach out to our office at 503-823-1612 or check out our [website calendar](#) for more information on when the next class will be offered. Some gardens independently sign up for yard debris pick-up; talk with your garden manager if you're interested in exploring that option. Additionally, other gardeners in your garden can earn service hours for helping you dispose of your plant material. Check in with others in your garden to see if anyone might be interested in helping compost your garden waste.
- Q **What do I do with non-compost materials like plastic plant pots, identification tags, stakes, or trash?**
- A All of this material must also be disposed of outside of the garden. Please take with you any trash that you might have brought. And if you want to help out on a larger level and clean up trash that others have left behind, remember to count that time towards your community service hours!
- Q **My garden plot does seem to have a communal compost system. Am I allowed to use that?**
- A If your garden has set up its own communal compost system, talk with your garden manager about how it works. Some gardeners have their own compost bins within the boundaries of their plot. Personal bins are for the plot holders use only. Do not put your materials in those bins unless you are invited to do so.
- Q **Can I receive community service hours by helping a fellow gardener manage their plant waste?**
- A Yes! This is a great way to help fellow gardeners who may not have easy access to managing plant waste at their home. If you support a fellow gardener in this way, you can count any time spent helping collect debris and hauling it away.
- Q **I was at a work party where plant waste was taken away by Community Garden staff. Why is this service sometimes provided but not at other times?**
- A During organized work parties that produce a lot of plant waste from the garden's common areas, the Community Garden staff is able to help haul this plant waste away. With four staff members and 51 gardens across the city, however, there is limited capacity to pick up plant material outside of these work parties. In order to keep the cost of the garden plots down, gardeners are in charge of managing their own plant waste. If you would be interested in organizing with others at your garden to sign up for and pay for yard debris pick-up service for the garden, talk with your garden manager about the idea.

Using corn stalks as mulch to winterize a plot



Policy #5: Prevent rodents and stinging insects from building homes in your garden.

- Remove piles of debris and regularly turn your compost pile
- Remove food sources by harvesting produce when ripe, and leaving food scraps from your kitchen at home
- Dump water that has been standing for more than 3 days to keep mosquitos from laying eggs

Common Questions:

- Q **How can I compost directly into my garden but not create habitat for rodents?**
A Burial or trench composting tends to be a great option; chop and mulch composting is another technique used by some gardeners. You can find resources on how to do this through [Oregon Metro's helpful composting guide](#).



**Trench
composting**

- Q **What if we already have a rat problem at our garden? What can we do to get rid of them once they are there?**
A We have a partnership with [Multnomah County Vector Control](#) who have been providing educational consulting/resources to some of our sites where rats have become problematic. Specifically, we recommend maintaining an active plot by weeding and harvesting regularly, as well as hauling debris and other material off site. If you choose to actively compost in your plot, make sure you are turning and watering your pile regularly. All of these techniques have shown to greatly reduce rodent habitat and food sources. If you have extra produce, we encourage them to donate to the Produce for People Program or pass the food to friends and family; produce left to rot produces waste and leads to increased rat activity. Rats are attracted to ripe fruits like tomatoes, cucumbers, and summer squash so staying on top of the harvest will really help.

At some sites, where rats have become a large issue, a team of garden volunteers, “the rat patrol,” have taken on the cause as part of their service hours. They help to educate gardeners about prevention and best practices. They also volunteer to trap and monitor rats. Our partner at Multnomah County can supply free traps and an onsite visit if this is something you or other gardeners would like to take on. Here's a link to our handout on [Preventing Rats in Community Gardens](#); you are welcome to share with fellow gardeners and post at your garden.

- Q **Why does it matter if I choose not to harvest all my produce? Sometimes my plants produce more than I can eat.**
A It's important to harvest your produce to keep it from being an attractive food source for animals such as rats. Produce that has dropped and begun to rot is a magnet for scavenging rodents. This is a primary reason we ask that all gardeners stay on top of harvesting their plants, rather than letting things fall to the ground and/or begin to rot. Another reason is that even if you're not going to eat your produce, someone else would benefit from it. We've heard over and over from gardeners how sad it is for them to see food go to waste in their gardens. If you need a place to donate excess produce, check with your garden manager about whether your garden has a Produce for People donation program; or share the bounty with your family, friends, and extended community.



**Fallen, rotting fruit attracts
rodents to the garden**

- Q **I like to let water sit out to dechlorinate before using it to water my crops. Can I continue to maintain my practice and still be within policy?**
A Yes, you can let water sit for up to three days. We ask that every three days (or sooner) you make sure to use the standing water you have saved and refresh it, rather than letting it sit for longer. This will help ensure that the water does not stand long enough for insects like mosquitos to lay their eggs in it and let them hatch.

Policy #6: Organic gardening is required.

- Use only organic fertilizers, weed killers, or bug killers
- If you are unsure whether a product you want to use is allowed, search for it on the Organic Materials Review Institute website at www.omri.org, or call the Master Gardener Hotline at 503-655-8631.

Common Questions:

Q **Are we required to use organic seeds and/or plants?**
A No. You are only required to use organic fertilizers, weed killers, bug killers, or other off-the-shelf products. The plants and seeds themselves do not have to be certified organic.

Q **Do you have recommendations for where to get organic fertilizers at low cost?**

A There is a lot of collective knowledge among the gardeners in our program. We recommend talking with your garden manager or fellow gardeners, to learn more about resources available in your area.

A **Why is organic gardening required?**

A Organic gardening is about gardening without the use of chemical inputs or fertilizers but it is also about gardening with nature and community in a harmonious way. Organic gardeners focus on building soil health so the soil can sustain healthy plants which sustain healthy people. We offer organic gardening classes throughout the season to share about best practices for community gardens and seasonal techniques. You can also [contact the Master Gardeners](#) for organic gardening resources and questions. Multnomah County's Master Gardener Hotline is 503-445-4608 and you can also email them at mcmastergardeners@yahoo.com.



Policy #7: Contribute and log a minimum of 6 hours per year in service to your community garden. Three hours must be completed by June 30, and a total of 6 hours must be completed by October 31.

- Contact your garden manager for a list of tasks that will count towards your service hour commitment.
- If you are unable to contribute service hours due to disability or personal circumstance, contact staff to request an exception.
- Gardeners who do not complete and log service hours, or request an exception for 2 years in a row, will not be allowed to renew their reservation and their plot will be reassigned.

Common Questions:

Q **Is the six-hour minimum community service requirement per person (primary gardener and co-gardener) or per plot?**

A Per plot, regardless of plot size. This means that co-gardeners who share a plot are welcome to split the six hours between them. Additionally, you are welcome to invite family or friends to come help care for the public areas of the garden to help fulfill your plot's community service requirement. For example, if a family of four worked for 1.5 hours clearing and weeding pathways in the garden, you would earn six hours for your plot and your requirement would be complete. All parties contributing community service hours should record their hours in the notebook in the shed on one log sheet for the specific plot.

Q **What kinds of work in the garden or event attendance counts towards service hours?**

A There are many things you can do to complete your service hours. There are dedicated programs and roles that you can do to get involved (see the "[Ways to Get Involved in the Garden](#)" resource guide), as well as general tasks that you can do to support your garden throughout the season (see [a list of helpful garden tasks here](#)). We also recommend you speak with your garden manager to see what the current priority is for your garden.



Friends and family can work together to earn community service hours for a single plot

In short -- if you are doing work that supports the garden as a whole or other gardeners, rather than just yourself or your own plot, you can earn service hours for the time you spend. This could mean attending a work party, preparing food for a garden event or potluck, taking on a leadership role at your garden, helping a fellow gardener, growing food and donating through Produce for People, or helping out maintain the public spaces of

your community garden in a way that makes sense for you.

Q **I am not sure how to log my service hours. Is there a system for this?**

A Each garden has a specific way of tracking service hours, so it is most helpful to check in with your garden manager to learn more about the system at your garden. You can also learn more through this [Community Service Hours Requirement FAQ](#), which answers a lot of questions about service hours and tracking. Please note the deadlines for completing your service hours - you must log at least three hours by June 30th, and a total of six hours by October 31.

Community Service Hours for Portland Community Gardens

Community Garden Site: Peace Garden

Insurance Information for Volunteers
Portland Parks and Recreation has an excellent safety record for our volunteer program. We don't anticipate that you'll be involved in an accident, but it is important you understand the extent to which our volunteer program is covered by the City of Portland insurance. We want you to be aware of any potential risks involved with the tasks you have selected and use good judgment in performing those tasks.

As a volunteer, you are NOT covered by the City of Portland's Workers Compensation program. You are urged to have your own health insurance in the event you are injured while performing your volunteer duties. You ARE covered by the City's General Liability Fund. This will protect you in the event of property damage or accidental injury to the public as a result of your volunteer duties assigned by Portland Parks & Recreation.

Community Garden plot holders are required to complete six hours of community service at their garden site per year (Nov. 1 - Oct. 31). Three hours must be completed by July 1 and the other three by Oct 31.

DATE	PLOT #	NAME	TASK	HOURS
10/20/14	#2	Tatyana Bondarchuk	Picking ^{wed} chips on path. 1 hour	

Q **I've heard that if I help a fellow gardener, I can get service hours for this. Is this true?**

A Yes! We love it when gardeners support one another. There are a number of ways you might help a fellow gardener - from helping them water or harvest their plot if they are sick or on vacation, to offering garden expertise if they ask for tips, to helping them clear their garden debris. For example, if there is a gardener who doesn't have access to composting their own garden debris at their residence and you are able to take their garden debris yourself, you can count that time towards your community service hours.

Q **How often do you check my service hours to tell if I'm on track?**

A With 51 gardens across the city, community gardens staff does not have the capacity to check in on service hours before each deadline. We only see your service hours twice during the year: once after the June 30th deadline, to determine who has met their 3-hour requirement, and once after the October 31 deadline, to determine who has met the 6-hour annual requirement. Each plot holder is responsible for keeping track of the service hours you have worked, to make sure you are on track to meet the requirement of 3 hours by June 30 and a total of 6 hours for the year by October 31.

Q **I've been really sick this year and haven't been able to contribute to my community service hours; and the deadline is coming up soon. What can I do to request an exception?**

A Great question! There are three types of exceptions available to gardeners who can't complete their community service hours within the allotted time -- an extension, a waiver, and an exemption.

- o You can request an **extension** if you feel confident you will be able to complete the hours but need more time beyond the deadline in order to do so.
- o You can request a **waiver** if you are not able to complete your hours due to temporary disability or personal circumstance; you can request a waiver for 3 hours or all 6 hours.
- o Finally, you can request an **exemption** if you are not able to complete any service hours due to a permanent disability.

For all of these options, you must make your request for the option that fits your situation from the Community Gardens Office directly by email at pkcomgard@portlandoregon.gov or by phone at 503-823-1612. Please submit your request well before the community service hours deadlines (June 30 or October 31) in order to avoid receiving a *service hours reminder* for uncompleted hours. Extensions and waivers must be re-filed each year. Exemptions are permanent and do not have to be re-filed each year.

Q **I wasn't able to complete my service hours last year and forgot to request a waiver. What can I do to get back on track this year?**

A As long as you successfully complete this year's 3 service hours by June 30 and 6 total service hours by October 31 (or request an extension, waiver, or exemption prior to the service hours deadline), you won't be at risk for losing your plot due to missing service hours. If you aren't able to complete your service hours for a second year due to disability or personal circumstance, please remember to request an extension, waiver, or exemption -- otherwise you will be on track to lose your plot.

Gardeners are responsible for following the garden policies. Staff and volunteer garden managers will regularly monitor plots throughout the year. If a gardener is not following the garden policies, staff will send them a reminder.

- If a garden plot looks abandoned during the main garden season (April – October), garden staff will check in with the plot holder. The plot holder has 2 weeks to respond and start gardening. If there is no action after 2 weeks, the plot will be reassigned.
- When a gardener receives their third reminder during the garden season, they have the option to enter a trial period where they work with staff to create a garden plan to help them keep their plot.
- Gardeners who receive a fourth reminder in a year will have their reservation cancelled and the plot will be reassigned.
- Gardeners may request an appeal of a garden reminder or plot cancellation by submitting that request to the Community Gardens Program Coordinator. The appeal request will be reviewed by the Community Gardens Program Coordinator, the Garden Manager of the site where the appealing person gardens, and one other Garden Manager who is a member of the same racial/ethnic group and/or speaks the same language as the gardener (if possible).

Common Questions:

Ⓞ **What do you look for to determine whether a garden is abandoned?**

Ⓐ Abandoned plots are usually marked by an obvious lack of activity or attention and tend to be overrun with weeds, dead crops, or other signs of inactivity. In early spring, an abandoned plot might be one that shows no signs of a gardener having begun to prepare the soil, manage weeds, plant crops, set up seasonal structures, etc. During the summer and fall months, an abandoned plot might be one that is overgrown with weeds and/or unharvested or rotting produce, lots of plants that have gone to seed, and obviously unmaintained pathways. During the winter season, when many are plots prepared for winter with mulch, winter crops, and/or cover crops, an abandoned plot might be one full of dead summer crops, left-behind seasonal structures, excessive weeds, and lack of end-of-season clean-up.

Examples of Abandoned Plots

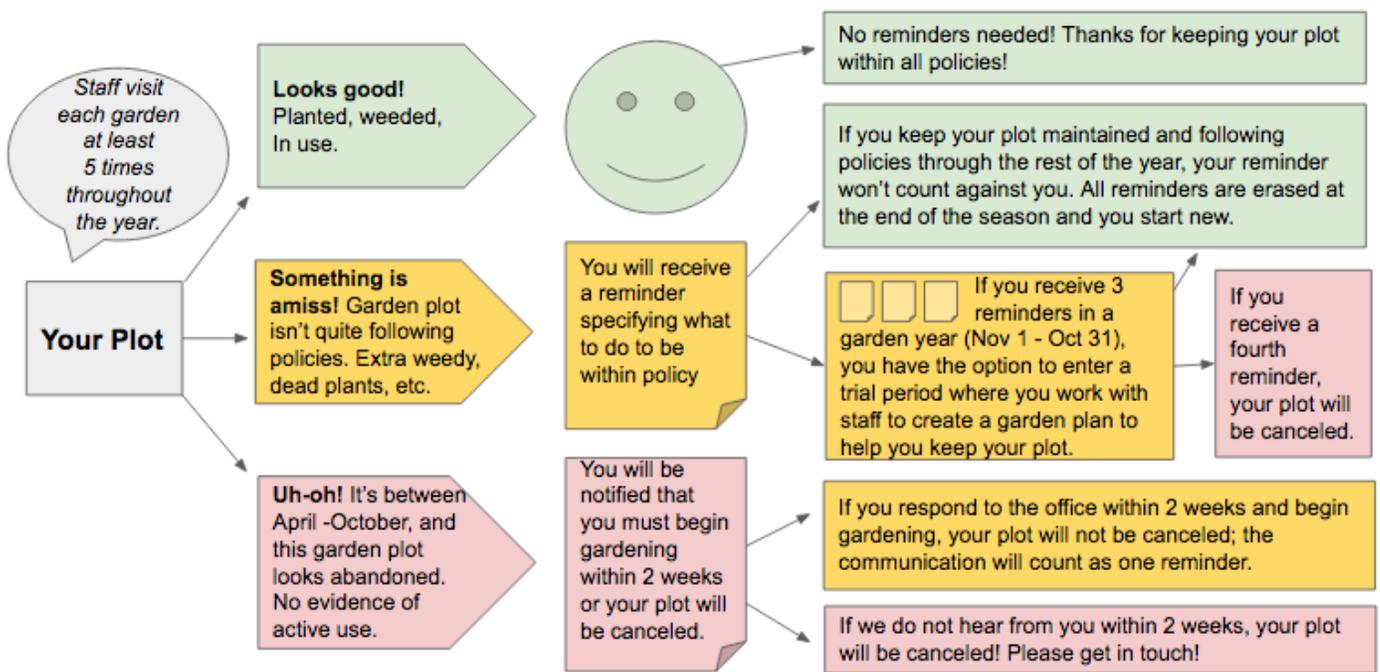


Ⓞ **If I am going to be out of town for a period of time, what can I do to avoid getting a notice?**

Ⓐ If you are planning to be out of town you are welcome to recruit a friend or family member to care for your plot while you are away. As the primary plot holder, you are responsible for letting them know what they need to do in the plot and orienting them to the garden (sharing garden rules, showing them how locks work, etc). You can also contact your garden manager to see if there is a way to connect with a garden neighbor who can care for your plot while you are away.

- ⓐ What is the difference between an abandoned plot notice and an active plot maintenance reminder?
- Ⓐ See the chart below to learn more about the differences.

How Garden Plot Reminders work:



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