



Urbana Park District

Meadowbrook Organic Garden Manual 2018



Urbana Park District
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Edited and updated by Chelsea Prah1 10/15/18

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Urbana Park District. We are pleased to have you as a participant in the Organic Gardens—Community Gardens at Meadowbrook Park. The gardening program has served several thousand Champaign County residents since 1974. This manual describes the program procedures and guidelines and will assist you along the way.

Gardeners enroll in this program for a variety of reasons. Some lack space or are reluctant to dig up part of their yards. Others find that their yards are not suitable for gardening. And some simply enjoy gardening away from the city and meeting other organic gardeners. Whatever the reason, the gardeners and gardens are a positive addition to the park.

The Organic Garden program offers several different plot arrangements:

- Full-sized plots (17' x 30')
- Half-sized plots (17' x 15')
- Perennial plots (17' x 30') *available to returning gardens only*
- Raised Beds/ADA accessible plots (11' x 3')

Plots are rented “as is” meaning that what you rent is what you get. The fee for a Meadowbrook Park garden plot assists with: paying for a part-time Garden Supervisor; equipment such as wheelbarrows and hoses; and administrative costs including registration, record keeping and marketing. Services such as water and park maintenance are tax supported. This enables the district to offer the garden program at an affordable price.

Gardeners are responsible for providing all of their own materials. As with any vegetable garden, soil should be amended each year to replace nutrients and organic matter that have been removed by previous plantings. Gardeners are responsible for performing their own soil amendments. Varieties of organic compost and manure are readily available at lawn and garden stores and serve this purpose well.

This year our soil tested high in phosphorus and potassium. We will not be supplying manure this year and recommend compost that is high in nitrogen.

Organic gardening means that the **use of synthetic chemical pesticides or fertilizers is not permitted**. This policy places an additional responsibility on you, the gardener. You are accepting the challenge of deterring pests without chemicals. Though some of your produce may be blemished, it will most certainly be delicious and nourishing, plus the natural integrity of soil and surrounding wildlife will be preserved.

Community gardening allows gardeners to get to know their neighbors and learn from each others' techniques. Gardeners are encouraged to network, share information, and look to each other for advice and assistance. Please get to know your fellow organic gardeners. Your shared experiences will be all the more valuable.

Perennial garden plots are tended year-round and are not tilled by the park district in the fall. Only returning gardeners in good standing (those who have earned their full deposit refund at the end of the season) are eligible to register for perennial plots. The Environmental Education Coordinator maintains a wait-list of gardeners who would like to rent perennial plots. Gardeners who would like their names to be added to this list must contact the Coordinator (see contact information below). Available perennial plots will be distributed in the order of first request.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Questions and concerns regarding the Organic Garden Service should be directed to the Environmental Education Coordinator at the Anita Purves Nature Center.

Anita Purves Nature Center
1505 N. Broadway
Urbana, IL 61801
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ORGANIC GARDENING RULES & GUIDELINES

Upon registration for the Urbana Park District's Organic Gardens—Community Gardening at Meadowbrook Park, you agree to abide by these rules and guidelines, or you are subject to relinquish your plot and deposit. Please read the following guidelines carefully. Contact the Anita Purves Nature Center, 217-384-4062, with any problems or concerns.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines will result in the following procedures:

- 1. Gardener in violation will receive one warning by e-mail and/or postcard.**
- 2. Gardener in violation will have up to 10 days to correct the violation. Deadline for correction will depend on the particular violation—specific deadlines will be stated in the warning notice.**
- 3. If the issue has not been resolved by the deadline, the garden plot in violation and its contents will be forfeited and mowed, and the garden deposit will be forfeited.**

1. Non-organic pesticides, herbicides and/or fertilizers are strictly prohibited. (Rotenone, although listed as an organic method, is not allowed.) If something is questionable, please ask.
 2. The garden season runs from the first Sunday in March to the first Sunday in November. Gardeners must maintain weed control in their plots for the duration of the garden season.
 3. Remove all weeds in a timely manner. Plots with weeds taller than 12" or weeds going to seed will receive a warning. This includes any weeds along the garden edge—see Rule #4. Unattended weeds are cause for garden forfeiture.
 4. Plots are for *active* use by gardeners. A plot will be deemed inactive if more than three weed warnings have been issued from March-November. Inactive plots will be issued a fourth and final notice to remove weeds within one week. Following that, any subsequent weed warnings will result in an automatic eviction and forfeiture of deposit.
 5. Keep your plantings within your assigned plot area, and maintain a **mandatory weed-free edge** around your garden. Leave a **one foot pathway on the east and west borders** and a **six inch pathway on the north and south borders**. These borders allow access to water hoses and gardens, and also clear a mowing edge for maintenance of the grass paths.
Full plots w/ border will measure: 16' x 28'
Half Plots w/ border will measure: 16' x 13'
 6. Fences must allow for the mandatory edge outside of the fence. Keep in mind, fencing is not required. All fencing materials must be hauled to and from the parking area by hand—no vehicles are allowed beyond the paved parking area.
 7. Thin, plastic mesh netting will not be allowed. This light netting can blow away and poses a threat to park visitors and wildlife. If you have questions regarding your fencing, please ask.
 8. Provide and store your own tools, equipment/ supplies, seeds/plants, and organic soil amendments.
 9. Wheelbarrows, hoses, and water are provided. The Urbana Park District is not responsible for loss of personal equipment/supplies, plants or produce by acts of man or acts of nature.
 9. Keep pathways free of tools and debris. Recoil hoses neatly after use, and return them to the hose posts. Report problems with hoses or wheelbarrows to the Garden Supervisor.
 10. Perennial plantings are only permitted in perennial plots. If something is questionable, please ask.
 11. Diseased plants should be removed from the park and disposed of in your home waste bin to prevent spreading disease to other gardens. Do not put diseased plants in the organic refuse pile or trash bins at the park.
 12. Transport unwanted, disease-free plant material to the organic refuse pile. Only biodegradable materials are allowed in the organic refuse site.
 13. All items grown are for personal use only.
- END OF THE SEASON CLEANUP - The following must be completed by 4:00pm on the first Sunday in November. Failure to meet these standards at that time will result in forfeiture of garden deposits.*
14. All full-plot, half-plot, and resigning perennial plot gardeners must clear their plots of all non-plant (fencing, stakes, strings, plastics, cardboard, fabric, etc.) and large plant material (corn, broccoli, sunflower stalks, weeds over 12", etc.).
 15. All non-plant items (stakes, fencing, tomato cages, etc.) must be removed from the park. In order to keep fees affordable, the Urbana Park District relies on gardeners to remove **all** materials brought in during the season. Do not put non-plant materials in the park waste bins.
 16. Return the plot to a level state to enable fall plowing by park district equipment. Break up large soil clumps and raised beds, and fill in holes and furrows.

GENERAL INFORMATION

GARDEN SEASON

The garden season runs from the first Sunday in March to the first Sunday in November. Illinois's typical growing season is from April-November, depending on the dates of first and last frosts. Participants are granted access to their plot as soon as they have received their plot number confirmation by mail or e-mail.

Timeline:

Last Friday in January	Returning gardener registration deadline for all annual plots
First Sunday in March	Garden season begins
Mid-April	Water turned on and public restrooms open*
May 1	Deadline for full refunds (minus \$5 processing fee per plot)**
After May 1	Refunds, minus the garden deposit, will be issued on a case-by-case basis**
Mid-October	Water turned off and public restrooms close for winter*
First Sunday in November	Garden season ends at 4pm
First Friday in December	Returning perennial gardener registration deadline

*A Port-a-Potty, located in the parking lot, is available during the off-season.

**See the *Frequently Asked Questions* section on Pg. 8 for more information.

Full-plot, half-plot and resigning perennial gardeners must have their plots cleared of all plant and non-plant material and returned to a level state by 4pm on the 1st Sunday of November.

Returning Perennial Gardeners have access to their plots all year and are not required to remove anything at the end of the season unless they do not plan on returning the following year.

GARDEN SUPERVISOR

The Urbana Park District employs a part-time Garden Supervisor to assist gardeners by providing information, sharing concerns with district staff, checking garden status, enforcing garden guidelines, monitoring weeds and making sure all guidelines are met.

The supervisor visits the garden plots 1-2 times per week to answer questions and assist gardeners in person. A sign will be posted at the garden kiosk when s/he is on duty. The supervisor will also patrol the gardens at other times.

Since the Garden Supervisor works limited hours, the park district encourages gardeners to work cooperatively. When problems or questions arise, call the Environmental Education Coordinator at 217-384-4062. The environmental staff are available to answer questions and relay messages to the garden supervisor.

CONVENIENCES & AMMENITIES

The following conveniences are provided by the park district. If you encounter problems with any of these, please call 2178-384-4062 immediately or notify the Garden Supervisor.

- **Wheelbarrows** are found near the parking lot. There are only a few wheel barrels for all the gardens, so please share and return wheelbarrows to their proper place.
- **Water spigots** are located throughout the gardens and are marked by an X on the plot map (see Pg. 2 or the garden kiosk).
- **Restrooms** are located at the pavilion. They are open for the season from mid-April through mid-October. A port-a-potty is available near the parking lot during the off-season.
- **Picnic tables** are located near the gardens. The Garden Pavilion is available to reserve by calling 217-367-1544. Otherwise, it is available on a first-come basis.
- **Garbage barrels** are available for the disposal of small items. Any large items like fencing materials or stakes must be completely removed from the park by the gardeners. If gardeners want to offer fencing, stakes or other items to other gardeners they must do this on an individual basis. Plant refuse is not permitted in the garbage bins.

Organic Refuse

The organic refuse deposit site has been relocated to the west side of the gardens next to the parking lot. Gardeners may use this site to dispose of disease-free plant material. **Place plant waste as close to the back of the holding area as possible** to help contain the waste.

Should you remove any diseased plant material from your plot, please take it home and dispose of it in your home waste bin to prevent spreading disease to other gardens.

END OF THE SEASON

Clean-up Procedures

The garden season ends on the **first Sunday in November at 4pm** regardless of weather conditions. Full-plot, half-plot and resigning perennial plot gardeners must clear their plots of all plant and non-plant material and return the soil to a level state. See the guidelines on Pg. 2 for more information. See the picture below for an example of a cleared plot.

If you have cleared your garden earlier in the season, you are responsible for keeping weeds under control for the remainder of the season. It is recommended that you visit your plot within one week of the cleanup deadline to make sure that it is still in an acceptable state in order to get your deposit refunded. **Contact the Coordinator in advance if you have any concerns about clearing your plot** (see contact information on Pg. 1).

Your garden plot should look like this at the end of the season:



Your deposit will NOT be refunded if your plot looks like this:

Plot Not Level



Weedy Plot



Large Plant Material Present



Non-Plant Material Present



Refunding Deposits

Garden deposit refunds will be issued either by check or directly to credit card in November for all gardens that pass the end of the season inspection. All gardeners receiving refunds are considered returning gardeners and get first choice of the same plot for the next garden season as long as they re-register by the last Friday in January.

For those gardens that do not pass the end of the season inspection or were negligent of garden guidelines during the season, the garden deposit will be forfeited. These gardeners do not get first choice of the same plot, must re-register as a new gardener, and must attend a garden meeting. Multiple-year deposit forfeits may result in loss of future garden plot registration privileges.

Next Season Registration

Returning Annual Gardeners (Full-Plot, Half-Plot & Raised Beds)

- Returning annual gardeners will re-register through the Phillips Recreation Center at 505 W. Stoughton, Urbana, 217-367-1544. The garden deposit is half-price for returning annual gardeners.
- The returning annual gardener registration **deadline is the last Friday in January.** This deadline allows returning gardeners first choice for the plot they gardened during the previous season. Failure to register by this deadline opens that plot to new gardeners.
- Returning gardeners desiring a different or additional garden plot should contact the Coordinator. After the returning gardener registration deadline has passed, the Coordinator will be able to discuss which gardens are available. Changed or additional plots will not be assigned until after the second week of February.

Returning Perennial Gardeners

- Returning gardeners have a choice of being issued their deposit refunds or applying their deposit to next years deposit fee. **The park district is now able to rollover deposits from one garden season to the next.**
- Returning perennial gardeners will re-register through the Phillips Recreation Center at 505 W. Stoughton, Urbana, 217-367-1544, between the first week in December and the first week in January.
- The returning perennial gardener registration **deadline is the last Friday in January.** Failure to re-register by this deadline opens that plot to other returning gardeners and will result in forfeiture of the deposit and all garden contents.
- Perennial plot gardeners must notify the Coordinator in writing **by the first Sunday in November** whether or not they are keeping their plot for the next garden season. (See contact information on Pg. 1).

Questions regarding deposits, plots requests or registration are to be directed to the Environmental Education Coordinator at 217-384-4062.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Vandalism and Theft

Unfortunately there is always a risk of theft in a community garden setting. Since the gardens are on public land, vandalism and theft are extremely hard to control. The park district counts on gardeners to get to know their fellow gardeners.

Building a community of gardeners allows everyone to help educate park visitors about the garden program. All gardeners should know their plot number and have proof of identification if asked.

If you think someone has tampered with a garden:

1. Introduce yourself and ask who they are. If their name does not match the name listed on the kiosk garden map, explain to them that the gardens are rented and that taking produce is not allowed. Direct them to the kiosk for registration information.
2. If the person ignores you, or if you are not comfortable approaching them, call the **Urbana Police Department nonemergency line: 217-384-2320.**
3. Provide as much information as possible including:
 - a. Description of the person
 - b. Date, time, plot number
 - c. Description of their vehicle including license plate number
4. **Make a report to the Urbana Park District** as well by calling or emailing the Coordinator. (See Pg. 1 for contact information.)

Animals & Insects

Wildlife: The organic gardens are just one feature of Meadowbrook Park. Over 80 acres of the park are managed as natural area. Land surrounding Meadowbrook Park also provides excellent wildlife habitat. Wildlife such as deer, rabbits, raccoons and voles are some of the larger animals you may encounter. Others like beetles, slugs and caterpillars are much smaller. All may take advantage of your hard work and visit your garden for a meal. Some tactics gardeners have employed to ward off wildlife visits include:

- Using pet or human hair, soap, and other methods to deter animals
- Installing fencing; keep in mind that all structures must be removed from the park by the end of the season, and you must place your fence within in the mandated distance of your garden edge (See Pg. 2 for rules)
- Planting companion flowers or vegetables
- Planting a bit extra in anticipation of nibblers

Insect Pests: These pests present a difficult task of removal for organic gardeners. It can be especially challenging to identify the guilty pest and remove it. Sensible use of Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*), diatomaceous earth, and other organic pesticides are acceptable under the guidelines. Read all labels **carefully** and follow the directions. Staggering your planting schedule, using companion plants, and planting extra will also help. The University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service (217-333-5900 or www.extension.uiuc.edu) provides information on pest identification and control.

Mosquitoes: Plan your garden visits around midday when mosquito numbers are at their lowest. Typically mosquitoes are most active around sunrise and sunset. A windy day is the best time to avoid mosquitoes.

Pets: Visitors with dogs are common to Meadowbrook Gardens. All dogs must be leashed. Reminding dog owners of this rule helps everyone enjoy the park.

Meadowbrook Park Climate

Sunlight: Meadowbrook Park is a beautiful open area, great for gardening. However, the gardens experience certain climate conditions not often found in town. The location provides a great deal of direct sunlight. If you want to grow plants that cannot tolerate the hot summer sun, then shade must be provided. This can be achieved by planting tall plants to the south or west of the shade-lovers, or planting the shade-loving varieties early or late in the season when the sun is not quite so intense. Garden plots on the south side of the gardens get more shade due to the nearby tree line.

Soil Moisture: Some plots, particularly those on the northeast side of the gardens, are subject to flooding during heavy rains. This can be beneficial to plants during hot, dry summers but can be troublesome during wet periods. You may have to wait longer to work in your garden because of the wet conditions. Gardening while the soil is still very wet can compact the soil, limiting plant growth. Setting up paths early in the season can reduce soil compaction. Some of the drainage problems can be relieved by using raised beds, trenches, or mixing compost into the soil. The Urbana Park District is not responsible for loss of plants or produce by acts of nature.

Mulch

Mulch is anything applied to the top of the soil, under the plant leaves. You can use leaves, straw, grass clippings, composted materials, and even newspaper—as long as it's free from pesticides, herbicides, and non-organic fertilizer. Mulch is used to improve soil quality and moisture content. In hot months the soil temperature may be lowered significantly by this process. Mulch also helps to prevent the growth of weeds. In most cases, it is best to mulch early in the season. Early mulching for tomato and pepper plants will help with moisture retention and weed control. Remember to check the kind of mulch you use. Mulch varies in pH, and some plants are pH-specific. Most gardening books or stores can help with this information.

Wood chips and cardboard are not recommended as mulch in your garden as they do not decay within a growing season. Though plastic and landscape fabric may be used as a cover, it is recommended to use more natural and biodegradable materials. **If you use plastic or fabric, you must remove it from the park when you are finished using it.** Buried tarps will clog tilling equipment and are not recommended.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What does my fee cover?

The fee for a Meadowbrook Park garden plot assists with: paying for a part-time garden supervisor; equipment such as wheelbarrows and hoses; and administrative costs including registration, record keeping and marketing. Services such as water and park maintenance are tax supported. This enables the district to offer the garden program at an affordable price. Deposits help to cover the cost of staff time to clear, mow, and maintain plots that have been abandoned or forfeited due to unmanaged weeds or other issues.

I can no longer garden. How do I request a refund?

Personal circumstances sometimes necessitate that gardeners withdraw from the garden program before the end of the season. If you feel you can no longer garden and would like to request a refund, contact the Coordinator as soon as possible. (See Pg. 1 for contact information.) The deadline for requesting full refunds, minus a \$5/plot processing fee, is May 1. After that date, refund requests will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Why isn't water available year-round?

The water service at the gardens is turned off and winterized in mid-October to prevent water pipes from freezing and breaking. Water service resumes in mid-April or whenever the severe winter freeze cycle is over. The winterization dates are determined by the annual freeze dates. If you have questions, please contact the Planning and Operations Office at 217-344-9583.

How do I protect my garden from deer?

Deer are prevalent in Illinois and throughout Urbana, and they will always present a problem to gardeners who share space with them. Many resources say that it is best to implement deer-deterrent strategies early on, before the deer discover your garden. Keep in mind, no strategy is perfect. Deer will eat practically anything if they are hungry enough.

Here are some tips that can help you deter deer from eating your produce:

- Plant strong-smelling herbs along your garden border like mint, garlic, or lavender.
- Plant prickly, thorny, or hairy-leaved plants along your garden border.

- Scaring techniques can include scarecrows (visually frightening) or hanging aluminum pie plates that will bang together in the wind (auditory scare). It is best to use a combination of scare tactics and alternate them every few weeks.
- Place wire or netting around individual plants when they are ready to fruit.
- Homemade repellents include hanging bars of lanolin soap, strips of fabric softener, or bags of human or pet hair around plants.
- Hot pepper sprays (like watered-down hot sauce) can be applied directly to plants. Remember, these will need to be reapplied after a rainfall.
- Granulized urine from predator species can be purchased online and in some home and garden stores.

How do I protect my garden from theft?

There is always a risk of theft in a community garden setting. Fences have been proven not to deter theft. Here are some techniques that may help to deter theft of produce from your garden:

- Get to know your fellow gardeners so that it will be easier to recognize people who are up to no good.
- Personalize your plot by hanging a sign with your name. Outsiders may make the connection that the gardens are not communal but “belong” to somebody.
- Plant leafy or thorny plants as cover.
- Plant difficult-to-harvest crops, like beans and carrots, near the outside of your garden.
- Harvest your crops regularly. Harvest brightly-colored produce before it turns its full color.
- Inform park visitors. Many visitors enjoy walking through the organic garden area. Often they are not aware that you have paid to participate in the program. Share with them the value you gain from the experience and direct them to garden kiosk and park district offices for more information.

Why doesn't the Park District put a fence around the gardens?

At the request of gardeners, staff at the Urbana Park District have researched the installation of a fence around the perimeter of the organic gardens. There are several reasons why the park district does not wish to provide a peripheral fence. First, as many as 32 garden plots might need to be removed from the garden program in order to accommodate a peripheral fence, and the fence would limit future growth of the gardens. Fencing would limit access to the gardens for park maintenance like mowing, plumbing repairs, and annual tilling. Additionally, fences built to deter deer are recommended to be at least nine feet tall—imagine a fence of this size surrounding the gardens! Much of the aesthetic beauty and welcoming feel of the gardens would be lost.