

FACT SHEET

Community Gardens

Getting Started

The most successful community gardens are those where the initiating group undertakes a detailed process of planning and design. This factsheet looks closely at the various aspects of project planning as they apply to community gardens.

To begin a community garden, it takes time, commitment, energy and a strong network of like-minded community members to bring the vision to life. The following questions will help you to identify if a community garden is the right project for you:

- Do you have an established incorporated community group that wants to do this project?
- Is there enough interest and energy within the group to sustain the project in the long term?
- Is a community garden the most effective way to address your community's needs? (For example, social opportunities, health/nutritional benefits, nature and social inclusion, knowledge sharing, etc.)

If you answered no to any of the above, is there another form of 'gardening in the community' that is more suitable? For example, sharing and distributing produce from neighbourhood fruit trees, volunteering for Council groups such as the "Rockhampton Friends of the Garden" or gardening collectively in backyards?

If you wish to proceed with a community garden, you need to consider the following tasks as priorities for your group to ensure your community garden has the best chance of success:

- Develop a strong and committed group that can share the load, and form partnerships with other organisations in the community – the garden will be a community resource.
- Research your project thoroughly.
- Work together as a group to agree on and articulate a clear vision for your project.
- Conduct planning that will provide a road map and priorities towards achieving your shared vision.
- Design your garden carefully with your vision in mind.
- Incorporate your community organisation (if not already incorporated). Being an incorporated group provides structure to the group, requires regular meetings to be held, establishes a management committee, allows the group to be a legal entity, provides the ability to obtain public liability insurance and allows the group to apply for grants.

When planning methodically to build solid foundations for your project, please use this document as a guide to identify areas and matters requiring further consideration.

Establishing a Community Garden Group

A community garden group can start with a group of friends or people with a common interest and built on a sense of community. Forming a working group of committed people with a range of skills and experience is the first step in establishing the groundwork for your project. Consider the size of the group; a larger group will provide more energy and input, but a smaller group may be easier to manage in the initial stages.

Draw on your personal networks to gather interested participants and recruit involvement. Some good places to start include bulletin boards, local schools and social media. It may also be beneficial to extend the invitation to your local community including environmental organisations or already established gardening groups.

When a desirable level of community interest is achieved, a meeting should be convened where ideas, concepts and relationships can be formed. Matters such as the structure, motivation, vision, aims, goals, objectives, priorities and management of the group can be discussed. It is recommended where possible, that the group visits an existing community garden to observe how it operates, to discuss the pros and cons with the operators of the garden and to gain ideas and support.

It is important to define what the purpose of the group is. Is it for the production of food, to create an informal/passive garden for appreciation of nature, for relaxation or social interaction?

Once you have established a committed group, work to develop trust and collaboration through social events such as barbecues, skill-sharing workshops and planning days. Maintain enthusiasm through celebration and activities that foster both personal and group development.

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Clarifying Aims and Objectives

The information provided above outlines how essential it is for the group to develop a shared vision for the garden and to establish exactly what it is the group wants to achieve. A community garden can be many things to many people and unless group members own and actively support the purpose of the garden, it is likely that conflict will emerge at an early stage of the project and the group may not have the integrity to survive it. Conflicts may arise from important issues such as organic versus non-organic gardening, whether to get certification, the types of plots to use on site, or how to distribute excess food. It is important to have an open mind and consider all ideas otherwise you may limit the ability of the group to renew itself and attract new members.

At the outset, keep an open mind. Spend time brainstorming what the group would like to see the garden become in five years' time. Some things to consider are:

- Gardening practices (organic/non-organic);
- Code of conduct and communication of site rules;
- Member and visitor responsibilities;
- Social spaces, seating and outdoor eating areas;
- Shady and covered areas;
- Spaces for performance and areas for workshop delivery;
- Tools, tool sheds and work areas;
- Signage, displays and noticeboards;
- Composting and waste management areas;
- Storage areas for materials such as manure or straw;
- Fruit trees;
- Plots and shared garden areas;
- Rainwater tanks and an irrigation system; and
- Propagation area.

Once you have a shared vision you can begin to plan in earnest. Create a five-year action plan that prioritises tasks, allocates responsibility for these tasks to different group members and sets a timeframe for their completion. Developing a plan of management for your garden is an essential tool as it will help clarify the practical procedures by which the garden will be developed and organised.

Site Selection Considerations

Once the community group is formed, the group needs to consider potential sites for the proposed garden. To evaluate the appropriateness of a site for the intended purpose, the following set of selection considerations are provided to assist.

Location	It is desirable for community gardens to be located in appropriate areas which minimises potential conflict with surrounding land uses but also maximises and embraces the potential users of adjacent and nearby sites. Sites located close to higher densities of people, schools, aged care facilities, community centres, higher education facilities and the like are desirable as the use of the site can potentially be partnered with these groups. Land should preferably be vacant, devoid of structures, have limited vegetation and be generally underutilised by the public. The planning area or zone of the site should be investigated to ensure the use is permitted under the planning scheme. The proposed site cannot be a part of road reserve land.
Ownership	Only sites that are owned or leased by Council, such as public parks, drainage reserves, nature strips and other public open spaces will be considered for the purpose of a community garden. Where Council is the trustee or owner of the land, owner's consent from the relevant State Government department is required.
Topography	Consideration should be given to the topography of the site. In particular, preferred sites shall be unencumbered, have a flat or relatively flat gradient, be outside of a drainage line or significant flow path and be devoid of embankments and retaining walls.

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Flooding	Where structures, sheds, fencing, garden beds and the like are proposed, consideration with respect to drainage, flood levels and storm tide surge at the site needs to be made. Sites located outside of the Q100 inundation area and storm tide surge should be given preference over sites within these areas. Sites should be setback from riparian areas such as creeks and streams to minimise impacts to the stream bank.
Size	The site must contain an adequate area capable of containing all of the proposed uses and associated necessary resources, such as plots, garden beds, structures, seats, sheds, water tanks, shade shelters, pathways and the like. Sites must be a minimum of 1000sqm in size.
Proximity	Council will not support more than one community garden per suburb or within a 2km radius on Council controlled or owned land. The community garden is to be located and designed such that it is visually unobtrusive, including fencing and sheds and must be set back a reasonable distance from surrounding residential or other land uses to minimise amenity impacts (setback to be determined by Council based on site and surrounding land uses).
Water	Access to clean and readily available water is required. This may include water tanks, diversion of roof water, other sustainable means of access to water and a water connection to Council infrastructure. Connection and ongoing cost of water use is the responsibility of the group. Any connection to Council's water supply would be via a metered connection and an approved backflow prevention device. Any plumbing work or water connections requires a plumbing permit and Council should be contacted prior to commencement of works.
Access	Sites should be chosen so that they are readily accessible by community gardeners on foot as well as people with a disability. Proximity to public transport and car parking areas is an important consideration. Existing on-site parking is preferable however use of such parking is not to impinge upon existing users of the car park. The community garden must not prevent usual public access requirements, for example, gardens must not be placed on footpaths.
Infrastructure	An investigation into the existing infrastructure at the site needs to be made. Access to water and power needs to be considered. Consider the location of gardens and buildings in relation to existing underground infrastructure, including drainage lines and access. Toilets are generally not supported in community gardens. Contact with 'Before You Dig' is recommended. Water and sewer mapping overlays are available via Council's online interactive mapping portal . Any infrastructure works must have prior consent from Council.
Legislative Requirements	The existence and/or location of any easements, leases, existing development approvals, environmental covenants or other restrictions as to user needs to be determined. Often the use of a site will be restricted or prevented by these. The organisation will be responsible for ensuring that all members and visitors are adhering to all relevant legislative requirements at all times.
Vegetation	The site should preferably be free from vegetation or have no significant vegetation (for example, large trees or remnant vegetation) located on the site. The removal of areas of natural bushland, forest, rainforest or riparian areas to create a community garden will not be supported.
Contamination	Some public land within the Council area may be contaminated or potentially contaminated due to previous land uses. Sites must be checked for contamination through the relevant State Government Department. If the site is potentially contaminated then an expert will need to be engaged by the Community Garden group at no cost to Council to ascertain the levels of contamination, and what remediation is necessary and what the costs of such remediation might be. A site must be free of contamination before it can be used for the production of food.
Safety	Safe work methods are to be developed and a safe work plan must be adhered to by all users of the garden. Crime Prevention through Environmental Design matters must be taken into consideration. Sites should have no safety or health concerns and must have a good level of passive surveillance and must be designed to ensure it is maintained. Fences and structures should be designed to minimise harm to garden users. Investigation for unexploded ordinance is also required. The presence of biting insects such as crazy ants, electric ants, mosquitos and the like should be taken into account.

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Waste	Access to waste services is an important consideration. Significant green waste and compost may be produced by the garden. Removal of waste and access to appropriate waste facilities should be considered.
Soil	The suitability of the soil at the site needs to be considered to ensure an appropriate soil type is available for the type of garden intended. If soil is to be imported to the site, it must be sourced/treated appropriately to reduce the likelihood of weed seeds and pathogens.
Biodiversity	The presence of rare, threatened, or endangered plants and animals needs to be taken into consideration and appropriately managed.

Design Considerations

If possible, seek guidance from a professional in regard to the design of your proposed community garden. The following points are worth considering during this stage:

- Waste management
- Integrated soil fertility management
- Biodiversity
- Solar access
- Water management and efficiency
- Accessibility
- Windbreaks
- Integrated pest management
- Safety
- Learning
- Sociability

During the application process, the community garden group is to work in conjunction with Council's Parks Section to formalise an agreed garden design that is practical and easily maintainable. Once the garden is operational and if the design changes or additional structures etc. are being considered, prior consent from Council is required before installation.

Funding Your Garden

The community garden group is responsible for funding the project from the initial design and construction through to ongoing maintenance. Once you have a clear vision for your garden it is important to consider a budget for your project. The requirements of each unique garden will vary, but most gardeners will need to consider the following:

- Cost of incorporating your group (applicable to newly established groups);
- Public liability insurance;
- Construction materials;
- Organic material for soil enrichment and or no-dig bed construction;
- Plants and/or seedlings;
- Tools and equipment;
- Irrigation equipment;
- A lockable tool shed;
- Rainwater tanks, including costs of fittings and professional installation; and
- Promotional material/signage.

There are additional resourcing and funding opportunities available to community groups. This can be achieved through in-kind support from local groups, Council's Community Assistance Program grants, fundraising (including the sale of produce grown on site), donations or sponsorship from local businesses, government grants and by reusing 'waste' resources.

Public Liability Insurance

Insurance protects both the community group and Council against charges made against them if a visitor is hurt or injured. 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 when searching for a public liability insurance provider it is recommended that you shop around. As the garden expands and changes it is recommended you conduct regular reviews of your insurance policy. Changes such as increasing numbers of volunteers, changes to activities and investment in equipment could change your requirements and/or premium costs.

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Fees and Charges

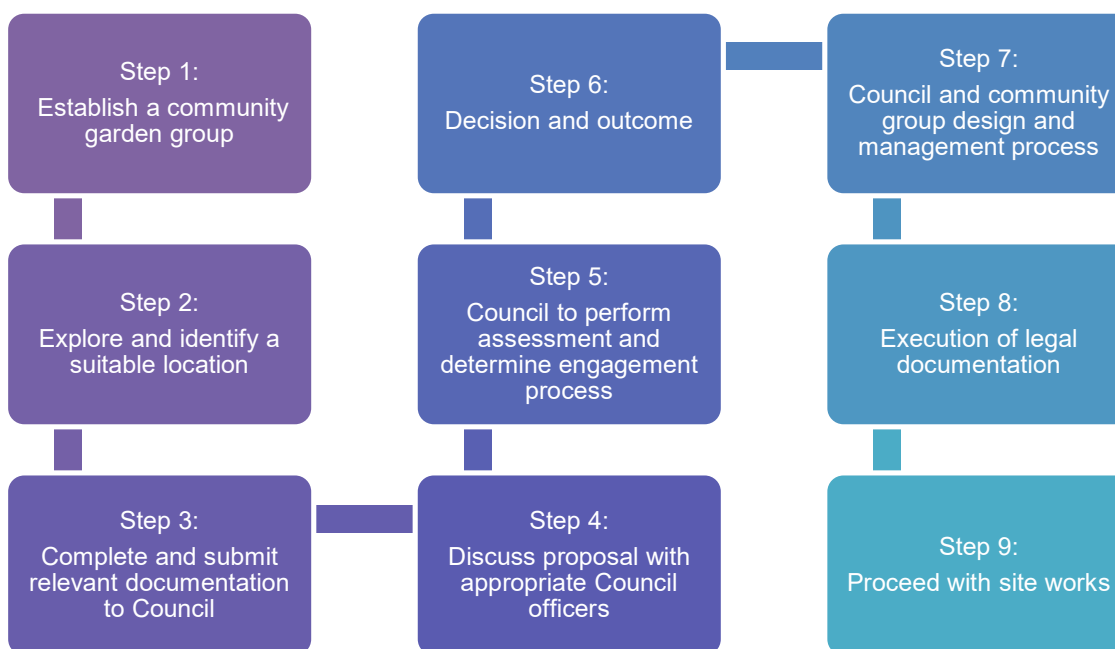
The community garden group will be responsible for multiple fees and charges throughout the implementation, operation, and establishment stage of the community garden such as:

- Waste;
- Water;
- Electricity;
- Lease; and
- Permit.

For full details on the above mentioned fees and charges, please refer to Council's [Fees and Charges Schedule](#).

Application and Approval Process

The following steps will be undertaken during the application and approval process.



The relevant documentation outlined in step 3 includes the Request to Establish and/or Operate a Community Garden Application Form.

Operating and Managing your Community Garden

It is important for your community garden group to establish a code of conduct or policies and procedures to ensure the garden is managed in a harmonious, fair, safe and enjoyable manner. This factsheet is a great tool in the initial stages of establishing your group to understand the risks and potential issues that may arise whilst managing a community garden. It is essential that all group members are aware of the risks and responsibilities involved with gardening on public land prior to any works being carried out.

It is important for the community group to establish a good working relationship with Council and advise of any issues or changes that may arise throughout the usage agreement period. An [Improvement Works on a Lease Site Application Form](#) should be completed and submitted to Council prior to any additional structures being erected on site as further development applications may be required.

Cessation of Use by Council

Council reserves the right to induce cessation of use of site in case of misuse of site, commercial use of site, conditions of the usage agreement are not adhered and/or multiple complaints by adjacent property owners.