

Community Organic Garden

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Community Organic Garden

1. General Information

History

The [Community Organic Garden \(COG\)](#) is a 1-acre community allotment garden situated on the main campus of UM-Dearborn. The first organic garden was established at the university in 1970. It was subsequently relocated to its current location in the NW corner of campus in 1994.

Purpose

The Garden provides several services for the local community:

- It provides a recreational garden space for people to plant, tend, and harvest fruit, vegetable, and ornamental plants.
- It serves as a demonstration area for the promotion, training, and application of organic gardening techniques.

- It provides opportunities for participants to socialize and network with others who share an interest and enthusiasm for gardening.
- It hosts a [children's gardening program](#) throughout the summer during which children and family members learn about a variety of garden subjects, including basic gardening skills, composting, soil health and maintenance, pollinators and beneficial insects, and plant pests and diseases.

Who Manages the Community Organic Garden?

The Community Organic Garden site is managed by the [Environmental Interpretive Center \(EIC\)](#), an environmental education and research unit of the University of Michigan-Dearborn. [Rick Simek](#), the EIC Program Supervisor, oversees the garden program. Dale Browne coordinates operations/maintenance. A student intern coordinates volunteer and social events, on-site needs/maintenance, and compost system.

What Does the Community Organic Garden Provide for Gardeners?

Number of Garden Plots: between 50-55.

Garden Plot Size: the dimensions of full-size plots average 18' x 18' (approximately 300 sq ft).

Tools: a limited supply of garden tools can be borrowed from storage sheds on site.

Water supply: water taps, garden hoses, and rain barrels are available for communal use.

Garden Community Activities: various classes and workshops are also periodically planned to encourage greater awareness of organic gardening techniques.

2. Garden Plot Rental

Returning Gardeners

A current gardener can renew the rental of their garden plot from the previous year until April 30. **It is the responsibility of current gardeners to renew their garden plot rental using the online [plot rental application form](#).** Failure to apply for plot renewal by April 30 may result in the garden plot to be assigned to another gardener.

New Gardeners

New gardeners can inquire about garden plot availability by contacting Rick Simek, the EIC Program Supervisor via e-mail (rsimek@umich.edu). Applications for new garden plots must be submitted using the online [plot rental application form](#). Current gardeners will be given the opportunity to renew their plot rental or change plots before new gardeners will be assigned plots.

Garden Rental Cost

The annual garden plot rental fee is \$40. **Fee payment is due by April 30.** Rental fees are nonrefundable. If payment is not received by April 30, the garden plot will be assigned to a gardener on the waitlist. Instructions for online payment will be given when a plot reservation is confirmed.

Transferring Rental Plots

When a gardener chooses to end their rental agreement, they must notify EIC staff. Unauthorized transfer of the plot is not permitted. However, with permission from the EIC a gardener may transfer the rental mid-season. This transfer will only be valid through the end of the season, and the plot will become available to wait-listed gardeners the following year. If the original renter would like to renew in the following season, they will have the opportunity, but must make EIC staff aware of their intention before rental agreements are sent in the spring.

Abandoned Garden Plots

Garden plots must be planted, or clean and prepared for planting by May 31st. Any plot not in prepared condition will be subject to reassignment. If during the growing season a plot appears to be abandoned, the gardener will be contacted to determine the reason for the lack of care. If plot condition is not improved within the agreed upon timeframe, the plot will be made available to another gardener for the remainder of the growing season.

3. Gardeners are expected to ...

- prep and plant plots by May 31.
- maintain walkways bordering your assigned plot (ie., mown, weeded, free of debris, etc.) throughout the growing season.
- complete end-of-season plot clean-up by October 31, except for hardy vegetables that can be harvested later.
- spend at least 5 hours volunteering for various projects and other communal needs at the garden, such as weeding, mowing, and compost maintenance.
- be collegial and welcoming with other gardeners and garden visitors.
- refrain from posting political signs of any kind.

4. Gardening and Land-Use Policies

Non-Acceptable Plants

The Community Organic Garden cannot allow plants with the following characteristics to be grown in any of the garden plots:

- Invasive plant species, such as mint, comfrey, garlic mustard, purple loosestrife, Japanese honeysuckle, etc.
- Trees, bushes, or other woody perennials.
- Illegal or dangerous (toxic or allergenic) plants.

Watering

Water and hoses are supplied on site. The gardener must stay on site during watering. A gardener may water for a maximum of 30 minutes per day. The water should be turned off at both faucets and the hoses should be bundled neatly and off the paths and walkways. Use of rain barrel collected water is encouraged.

Fertilizers and Soil Amendments

Certain products of plant and animal origin (i.e. compost, leaf mold, blood and bone meal, cover crops, fish emulsion, kelp meal, liquid seaweed, and commercial organic fertilizers) are acceptable as fertilizers and soil amendments. Natural mineral fertilizers, such as greensand, granite dust, and ground limestone, are also acceptable. Use of livestock manure (e.g., horse, cow, pig, sheep, chicken, turkey), pet manure, or human manure is prohibited. Gardeners are strongly urged to add as much organic material as possible to their plots to maintain soil fertility. Soil testing is available through the local agricultural extension service.

Composting

Compost bins are for disease free plant material only. Diseased plant material should be disposed of off-site. Please adhere to posted instructions regarding proper operation of the composting system.

Weed Control

Synthetic herbicides of any kind are prohibited in the Garden, as they are hazardous to human health, may kill or damage desirable crops, drift into neighboring gardens, or persist in the soil. Plastic mulches are not allowed. Mechanical controls, such as hoeing, mulching, and hand weeding, are recommended for weed control. If using grass clippings as mulch, the clippings must not be stored at the community organic garden in bags. The clippings start to decay and the smell can get quite obnoxious. If a gardener will be on vacation longer than 2 weeks, then arrangements should be made by that gardener for someone to care for their garden plot during their absence.

Insect/Pest Control

Use of any synthetic insecticides, fungicides, or other pesticides is prohibited. Preferred control methods are crop rotation, hand picking of insect pests, introduction of native predator species, companion planting, and soil solarization. Use of B.T. bacteria, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, is prohibited, because it is a nondiscriminating bacterium that attacks the larval stage of moths and butterflies.

Disease Control

Maintaining healthy soil, choosing disease-resistant varieties, and removing diseased plants from the garden should control most plant-disease issues.

Trash Disposal

All non-plant materials must be disposed of off-site. Weeds and other vegetation should be put in the compost bins. The dumpsters in the nearby parking lot are available for non-organic debris.

Non-biodegradable materials

Non-biodegradable materials, such as black plastic, are not allowed in the garden area. This also includes the addition of other abiotic materials like concrete bricks, blocks, pavers, metal fences, and other non-biodegradable materials. This does not include temporary materials such as tomato cages which can easily be removed and stored in the off-season.

Fencing

The maximum height of a fence in the garden is five feet (5'). Treated wood is prohibited.

Garden Clean-up

End of season garden clean-up must be completed by October 31, except for hardy vegetables that may be harvested later. All non-organic materials (e.g., stakes, plant supports, pots) must be taken down and either removed from the plot or neatly stacked in the plot. These materials, once stored in the gardener's plot, must not exceed the height of the fencing around the plot.

Note: Garden guidelines were last revised on February 19, 2025.