

Community Gardens

Bright flowers, crisp vegetables, plump fruit and happy faces. Community Gardens deliver all this and more. They are nature's classrooms. Not just a way to grow tomatoes, but a gathering place for neighbours, a healthy way to connect with new and old friends, and a learning environment. Volunteers are more than happy to share their knowledge of composting, food production, and sustainable use of land.

A lot of people have felt particularly confined during the COVID pandemic and late-to-arrive spring weather. I know many were concerned that the restrictions would limit access to these gardens, so I am pleased that the City has worked out a safe way that Community Gardens can go ahead. Additionally, the program will be expanded this summer to meet increased demand.

To do this, we'll be allowing land owned and leased by the City, as well as by Community Leagues, to be turned into gardening space. We'll also be streamlining the application process to make Community Garden development easier than ever.

In order to protect the health of all Community Garden users, administration has put together new user guidelines. These include observing physical distancing, not sharing garden tools, and ensuring that any other health and safety recommendations are followed. When out in Community Gardens, please be respectful, courteous and aware of others in the area – this may mean that you'll have to choose alternate times to do your gardening, but with a little bit of understanding and cooperation, we should all be able to make it work.

Communal gardening is not new and Edmonton has a long history of urban food production, with shared garden spaces dating back more than a century. During the First and Second World Wars, residents would plant Victory Gardens on private and public land to reduce pressure on the public food supply and boost morale. Eventually, this movement led to the creation of initiatives like our Community Garden program, which now operates 80 garden sites. We are encouraging Edmontonians to make use of their front yards for these modern-day Victory Gardens. Along with Urban Hen and Urban Beekeeping initiatives, Community Gardens are part of the city landscape and contribute to the efforts to reduce waste and ensure food security. To find a garden near you and learn more about the new guidelines or how to get involved, visit edmonton.ca/communitygardens.

These past few weeks have brought about unprecedented changes in our community, but I'm thrilled to see so many Edmontonians adapting and cooperating. I want to thank you for this. As always, if you have any questions about Community Gardens or any other civic issue, you can reach me at ben.henderson@edmonton.ca.