



COVID-19 GUIDELINES FOR SAFE COMMUNITY GARDENING



These guidelines are based on current information we have on the COVID-19 virus (March 24, 2020), as well as creative thinking from community gardeners from across the country (many ideas collected thanks to dedicated garden coordinator, Hannah Traggis, from several listservs). For updates on the COVID-19 virus and precautions, visit: the Center for Disease Control at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html> and the Vermont (or your state's) Department of Health at <https://www.healthvermont.gov>

THE BASICS



01 How long can the COVID-19 virus live on surfaces?

Current research suggests the COVID-19 virus can live for up to 3 days on surfaces, longer or less, depending on the actual surface material (plastics 72 hrs, stainless steel 48 hrs, cardboard 24 hrs - based on an article in [New England Journal of Medicine](#)). We don't know exactly how long it can live, but this is a good rule to follow regarding what we can and can't touch.

02 Do I need to be concerned with food safety when it comes to produce from my garden?

Always practice proper hand washing when handling food, as well as before and after eating. There is no evidence that COVID-19 is passed on through food. Thorough cooking will kill the virus. For more info go to: <https://www.fsai.ie/faq/coronavirus.html>.

03 What are proper practices for keeping my hands and surfaces sanitized?

- Soap, alcohol and bleach are the best agents to kill the virus. Soap with water is VERY effective.
- Set up a hand washing station at the entrance/exit to the garden. Here's how: <https://foodsafety.ces.ncsu.edu/building-a-handwashing-station/>.
- When washing hands with soap and water scrub for 20 seconds ("Happy Birthday" song twice). If soap and water are not available use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol). However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash with soap and water.
- Bring sanitizing wipes and thoroughly wipe down anything that you touch that someone else might also touch. Make your own sanitizing solution by mixing: 5 tablespoons (1/3rd cup) bleach per gallon of water. Dispose of wipes/paper towels after single use.
- It is good practice to wear gloves, however gloves do not replace proper sanitation procedures. The outside of your glove can still transmit diseases to yourself and others.
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue that fully and tightly covers your mouth.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

04 What's a safe distance for interaction with others?

- Maintain at least 6 feet between yourself and other gardeners (as far away as a long-handled garden tool!).
- When in doubt, STAY HOME. Do not come to the garden if you are showing symptoms, someone you've been in contact with is sick, if you have health conditions, are an older adult or a member of another high risk population.

05 How can I share these guidelines?

- Consider how people are receiving information in these days of social isolation. Share through a variety of remote methods (i.e. email, text, call, social media, etc.)
- Post laminated guidelines at the entrance of the garden and throughout, especially in locations where the spread of the virus is of highest concern.
- Take precautions and do not assume anyone else has followed these guidelines.

TOOLS & EQUIPMENT



- Inventory all areas in the garden where people commonly come into contact (i.e. spigots, hose, handles, gates, tools, garden cart, etc.)
- Close off the tool storage shed and remove all 'community' shared tools and equipment for the time being (particularly while the concern about the virus is highest).
- Ask gardeners to bring and use their own tools. If people aren't able to bring or afford their own tools, consider asking your community for tool donations for individual use. Use proper sanitizing when accepting donations.
- No tools or other personal items should be left in the garden. Gardeners need to take their tools, trash and other items home when they are done for the day.
- If any shared tools and equipment remain at the garden, be sure to use sanitizing wipes to thoroughly wipe down the handle BEFORE AND AFTER USE.
- Thoroughly wipe down the hose nozzle/spigot with sanitizing wipes BEFORE AND AFTER USE.
- Compost bin lids should not be handled. Consider removing lids for the time being so that gardeners can directly add garden waste. If lids are needed, have a small group of volunteers maintain the compost bins while using proper sanitation techniques (as indicated above).

SCHEDULING WORK



- If possible, wait to open the garden to gardeners until early May as we work to "flatten the curve" of the virus. Stay tuned to the CDC website (listed above) for up-to-date information.
- If the garden space is small and it will be hard for gardeners to operate with proper spacing, schedule community gardeners for specific garden hours to limit numbers present in the garden at any given time. In some situations it may make sense to schedule gardeners based on the location of their plot in the garden--spreading out gardeners across the garden space.
- Avoid group work while the concern for the virus is highest. Once group work can resume, continue to use the above precautions, including: stay apart by 6 feet, bring and wear your own gloves, wash hands thoroughly, and wipe down shared surfaces.
- Assign specific tasks to gardeners at a variety of times throughout the week. One simple way of managing a schedule for shared tasks is to set up a Google Spreadsheet with a list of tasks. Have gardeners add their names, contact info and planned time for task completion next to list items.
- STAY HOME if showing any symptoms or if you've been in contact with someone who is sick.
- Encourage gardeners to STAY HOME if they are considered more vulnerable to exposure to the virus (older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions). Support these gardeners by offering to plant or cultivate for them while risks remain high.

HOW TO SUPPORT FELLOW GARDENERS IN THESE CHALLENGING TIMES?



- Maintain regular and timely communication with gardeners. Keep gardeners up-to-date on guidelines. Be available to respond to questions and concerns.
- Share inspiration to keep gardeners hopeful and engaged--such as garden images or quotes.
- Encourage gardener communication through an email list, Google Group or Facebook Group.
- Share remote resources for continued preparations and garden learning--such as how-to videos, free online gardening classes, and the Extension Master Gardener Hotline.
- Offer free resources from sources you trust--such as seeds, seedlings, tools, and compost.

