



# Community Garden Guidelines

*Guidelines for the development of Community Gardens on Council owned land*

## What is a Community Garden?

A **Community Garden** is a shared space where people come together to grow fresh vegetables, share gardening knowledge, make new friends and take part in a creative outdoor activity. The area is planned, designed, built and maintained by community members for the use and enjoyment of the entire community. The land may be Council owned or on private land. Community Gardens may be solely used to raise food for gardeners and the surrounding community or they can be a decorative formal garden or an educational or rehabilitative facility. The produce grown in Community Gardens is for personal or shared use, not for commercial sale.

South Gippsland Shire Council recognises the importance of Community Gardens in supporting community sustainability. Community Gardening is an effective and meaningful way of creating sustainable, resilient and liveable towns and Council seeks to support and encourage the community in food growing activities.

Council has a role as a land owner/land manager and has adopted procedures for assessing and approving (where appropriate) the establishment of Community Gardens by community groups on land owned by Council.

We encourage local groups to initiate, design and self manage Community Gardens with the support of Council. These guidelines and the associated application process have been developed to assist in making Community Gardening effective, enjoyable and safe for all. Council's Sustainability Team is available to guide and help you through the process.

Council cannot consider applications for Community Gardens on privately owned land. These gardens are to be developed in conjunction with the land owner. Advice and support for groups liaising with other public authorities where land has been identified as being suitable for a Community Garden may be supported by Council's Community Strengthening and Sustainability Teams.

**Before you get started, please consider the step-by-step process below:**

### Step 1 – Develop a proposal

1. The first step is to take your idea and develop it into a clear proposal. Create an outline that includes:
  - a) The purpose of the garden;
  - b) The goals and objectives you want to achieve;
  - c) How the garden will be used; and
  - d) Who will be able to access it.
2. At this point it is good to consider your management and governance structure. Remember that your group will need to become incorporated or seek another auspicing agency in order to receive Council support.



3. You will also need to think about the ongoing financial management of your garden to ensure the economic sustainability and longevity of the project as Council will not take over the management of the garden.

If you have any questions or would like some help to develop your idea Council's Sustainability Team are available for assistance along the way. Please contact them on 5662 9200.

### **Step 2 – Finding a site and undertaking site assessment**

Community Gardens could potentially be established in any area of the municipality. When you have a site in mind the first things you need to do is identify the owner of the property. The Sustainability Team will help you to determine who the owner of the land is and whether there are any planning restrictions such as covenants or overlays that restrict the activity on that property. The availability of the site would also need to be ascertained. Council may have current or future plans for the site that may take precedence over its use as a Community Garden.

You will also need to consider other potential site issues such as:

- Current land use, neighbours, safety and vandalism, accessibility, location, size, soil quality, sun wind and water
- The design and construction of the Community Garden including sustainable sources of construction materials and soils; and
- Sources of information, including links to online resources provided by Council and Community Garden organisations.

Soil contamination is something that you need to consider also. In general South Gippsland soils are of a good quality, however investigation into the history of the site is needed to ensure it has not been contaminated by previous uses. Using raised beds with new clean soil and organic matter may be required to manage potential risk. Depending on the history of the site, soil testing may be required.

### **Step 3 – Public Consultation**

Before commencing formal community consultations, your group should gauge the opinions and attitudes of local residents/owners and community groups to get a sense of how well your proposal would fit the needs of your community.

Your Community Garden project can only be strengthened by including or partnering with other community groups and individuals. Seek the opinions of neighbours, town associations, community centres, local organisations and your Ward Councillors. Door-knocking is a great way to communicate your message at this stage of the process and will help you identify potential supporters and partners.

If you find that there are issues that are important to the wider community or to specific groups that are not addressed by your project, you may be able to win the support of these groups or individuals by reworking the concept to respond to these issues before consulting more broadly. It is important to consult with all neighbouring residents and property owners.





The Sustainability Team will support your community group in the planning and implementation of the community consultation process. Signage must be erected at the site of the proposed garden to advise users of the proposal. You could convene a town meeting to explain your initiative and give participants the opportunity to have their say. Your group could advertise the meeting by doing a letter box drop and putting up notices at the proposed garden site and local bulletin boards.

These notices should include the following:

- Details of when and where the meeting will be held;
- Purpose or objective of the meeting;
- Discussion topics that will be covered; and,
- Contact information in case individuals want to get in touch to confirm details or ask questions.

If some residents and property owners cannot attend the group event, make sure that they are aware of who to contact to voice their opinion. Invite participants at the meeting, particularly those living or owning property within 100 metres of the proposed site to participate with the group to address any issues raised and further develop the proposal. Anticipate that there may be concerns about the project. Make sure there is room for these to be heard and that you have the background information to address them.

#### **Step 4 – Submitting formal application**

In order to enter into an Agreement with Council for the establishment of a Community Garden, your group must be a community based not for profit incorporated association or have an auspice arrangement with an existing incorporated association. Your group must also be able to demonstrate that your project has support within the town.

When your group has support from neighbouring residents and property owners and developed a site plan you will be ready to present a written proposal to Council by completing the Application for Approval to Establish a Community Garden on Council Owned Land.

This should include:

- The proposed location and site plan for the garden (including the layout of plots, communal areas and location of any proposed structures or fences);
- The community consultation process your group used to engage neighbouring residents and property owners in planning the initiative;
- The outcomes of the community consultation process including the nature of any significant opposition expressed by neighbouring residents/owners;
- The name and contact details of the person/s nominated as the primary contact in relation to the planning of the garden; and.
- Payment of the \$800 application fee.

Applicants for Community Gardens on Council owned land could apply for a community grant to assist with meeting the application and bond costs.



If the Community Garden site is on public land that is normally accessible to all, your group needs to develop a means of facilitating public access on a regular basis. The preferred option is that fencing should be avoided or minimised and any gates should not be locked to prevent public access. However, your group may request restricted access based on personal safety grounds or other extraordinary circumstances. Council will assess these requests on a case-by-case basis. When the Council is satisfied that an appropriate public consultation process has been completed and that any objections from local residents/owners have been addressed as far as possible, Council's Sustainability Team will prepare a report on the project for consideration by Council.

### **Step 5 – The Approval Process**

A report will be prepared and presented to Council for consideration by Council's Sustainability team. A copy of the report will be provided to you, along with the date and time that the application will be presented to Council. You will have the opportunity to present to Council at a Public Presentation session prior to Council considering your application. You will be advised of the outcome as soon as possible afterwards.

### **Step 6 – The Agreement**

Following Council approval for the development of the Community Garden, Council will enter into an Agreement with the responsible incorporated community organisation.

The Agreement will:

- Acknowledge and support the objectives of the garden;
- Specify the permitted purpose(s) of the garden;
- Ensure that participation in the garden is open to all;
- Confer ownership of specified garden infrastructure to the Council;
- Specify responsibilities of both the Council and the community group for undertaking and funding the establishment costs; management, maintenance and on-going running costs;
- Specify responsibilities for public liability insurance;
- Specify any priorities for the allocation of plots;
- Detail the responsibilities of the community group in relation to maintaining the garden in a clean and weed-free state, employing organic gardening principles and restricting the use of pest control products; and
- Allow for periodic reviews of the community group responsible for managing the garden and specify requirements for reporting to Council on membership and financial performance.
- Requirement to complete an Annual Report
- Detail the requirements for payment of the \$1,000 bond.

A register listing the locations of Community Gardens for which Agreements have been executed by Council will be placed on the Council website.