COVID-19 GUIDELINES FOR SAFE COMMUNITY GARDENING

THE BASICS

01 How long can the COVID-19 virus live on surfaces? Recent research suggests the COVID-19 virus can live for up to 3 days on surfaces, longer or less, depending on the type of surface. Evidence that COVID-19 can spread through food is limited. However, this is a good rule of thumb when disposing of any garbage that contains food. 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 remember to stay up to date with news at the Vermont (or your state’s) Department of Health at www.vcgn.org-guidelines.

02 Do I need to be concerned with food safety when it comes to producing from my garden? While producers should always practice good hygiene and wash hands before and after handling food, evidence that COVID-19 is passed on through food. Thorough cooking will kill the virus. For more info see: https://foodsafety.ces.ncsu.edu/building-a-handwashing-station/.

03 What are proper practices for keeping my hands and surfaces sanitized? Take precautions and do not assume anyone else has followed these guidelines.

- 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/.
- Use the things you do daily, like birthday party songs, to help wash your hands. 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 non-perishable seeds and thoroughly wash down anything that you touch that someone else may also touch. Make your own sanitizing solution by mixing ½ tablespoons (3% hydrogen peroxide) bleach per gallon of water. Disinfecting wipes/soap are also effective.
- It is good practice to wear gloves, however gloves do not replace proper sanitation procedures. 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, hoses, handles, gates, tools, garden cart, etc.).
- Close off the tool storage shed and remove all “community” shared tools and equipment for the time being (these may be options to keep the garden open). 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 are not washed down before and after use, disinfect or sanitize them.

Scheduling Work

- If possible, wait to open the garden to gardeners until early May as we work to “flatten the curve” of the virus. Store the CPC website (linked above) for more 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 spaces to limit movements 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. One group work plan will assume, continue to use the above procedures, including staying at least 6 feet, bringing your own personal gear, wash hands thoroughly, and wipe down shared surfaces.
- Pool a group of gardeners from 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 name, contact info and planned time for task completion next to lists of tasks.
- 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 masks 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.
- Offer free resources from sources you trust—such as seeds, seedlings, tools, and compost.
- Accept donations. Offer gardeners the opportunity to become garden stewards, accepting donations. Consider asking your community for tool donations for individual use. Use proper sanitizing when accepting donations.
- Keep the garden open for volunteers (particularly while the concern about the virus is highest). Stay tuned to the CDC website (listed above) for up-to-date information.
- Consider offering to plant or cultivate for them while risks remain high.
- Share remote resources for continued preparations and garden learning—such as how-to videos, free online gardening classes, and the Extension Master Gardener hotline.


These guidelines are based on current information and recommendations by the covid-19 virus and the Vermont Community Gardening Network. For more information please email the Vermont Community Gardening Network at cpcgarden.org/guidelines.