COVID-19 Response Template for Community Gardens

Version 1: May 1, 2020

The purpose of this workbook is to help community gardeners plan actions they might take related to COVID-19 in their gardens. Because every garden is unique, each garden’s response plan will be unique. This workbook is intended to help you to develop best practices for your circumstances based on risks you identify in your garden. It includes example risk reduction measures that you may use, adapt, or expand upon.

This document reflects up-to-date researched based recommendations as of **May 1, 2020.** As we learn more about this virus, we will update the document. Current best-practices are based in the science of COVID-19 and what we know about how it spreads.

Many community gardens are located on land owned by cities, counties, park districts, or housing projects. Make sure to check with the land owner about their COVID-19 related policies before making any plans for the garden.

**SARS-Co-V-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 illness) is a respiratory virus that spreads primarily through droplets during person-to-person contact. According to guidance from the** [**CDC**](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html)**, the most important actions you can take to minimize the spread of the disease are the following. Your garden’s COVID-19 response plan should focus on these steps.**

1. ***Physical distancing*** *- maintain at least 6 feet between all staff, volunteers and visitors*
2. ***Don’t work if you are sick -*** *Know the symptoms like fever, cough, body aches, shortness of breath (*[*see CDC)*](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html) *and do not come to the garden if you have any of these symptoms*
3. ***Handwashing*** *- Wash your hands before work and often while you work for at least 20 seconds.*
4. ***Use good personal hygiene - sneeze into a tissue -*** *cover your cough, and wash your hands after sneezing or coughing.*
5. ***Clean and sanitize -*** *the high-touch areas including tools and surfaces at least daily to minimize the spread via surfaces.*
6. ***Wear a cloth mask -*** *if possible to prevent the spread of the virus, since you might not have symptoms. Masks can cause irritation; take care to avoid touching your face.*

Refer to our companion [COVID-19 FAQ document](https://docs.google.com/document/d/14bk7QiKmecysrlksh2j_ElPbdGOqFL_Y28jJSZZR0K8/edit?usp=sharing) for Midwest fruit and vegetable farms, gardens and markets.

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**How to use this template:**

Use this template as a guide to help you plan your garden’s COVID-19 response plan. Each section of this document will prompt you to identify risks throughout your garden and will prompt you to list the steps you plan to take to reduce those risks. For each section, think through how you can maximize physical distancing, keep high-touch surfaces clean, and encourage regular hand washing. For each identified risk, list at least one mitigation measure. If a section does not apply to you, simply delete it. This filled-in template can be used as the garden’s training guide and referenced by gardeners, volunteers, and produce end-users.

For best results, work through this guide with as many people from your garden as possible, so that everyone can offer input and ideas. Since guidance and research is still emerging on this novel virus, your plan will likely have to change as well. Revisit it regularly to update it with your current plans and policies.

***This document was developed by:***

*Natalie Hoidal, University of Minnesota Extension Educator for local foods and vegetable production*

*Annalisa Hultberg, University of Minnesota Extension Educator for on-farm food safety*

***Reviewers include:***

*Kay Sargent, University of Minnesota DEHS, Safety Professional (retired)*

*Neil Carlson, University of Minnesota DEHS, Industrial Hygienist*

*Jordan Romine, University of Minnesota DEHS, Safety Professional*

*Christy Marsden, University of Minnesota Horticulture Educator with the Master Gardener Program*

*Courtney Tchida, Minnesota State Horticultural Society, Community Outreach Manager*

*Neil Anderson, Professor, Department of Horticultural Science, University of Minnesota*

*Diana Rankin, UMN Extension Master Gardener, Kanabec County*

*Beth Plaetzer, UMN Extension Master Gardener, Olmsted County*

*Grace Brogan, Renewing the Countryside, Program Manager*

## Section 1: Gardener safety and training

Start with prevention. This includes open communication and the creation of health safety policies. Regular communication about plans and check-ins with garden members may help ensure that everyone is compliant with your plans, and will also encourage a culture of openness and honesty. Regularly remind garden members about why these safety plans are so important. Safety measures are an act of community care.

**Examples are provided for each prompt; delete those that do not apply, edit suggestions as you see fit, and add additional ideas.**

1. **Who is your COVID-19 point person (or people)?** This person will be the main point of contact for gardeners with questions about COVID-19, and gardeners should report to this person if they become ill. Ideally this person could also be involved in training garden members and staying up-to-date on COVID-19 related news and updates.
2. **Will gardeners be required to self-screen before they come to the garden?**

See guidance from the [CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html) for a complete list of COVID-19 symptoms.

*Some examples might include:*

1. *Have you had a cough or shortness of breath in the last 14 days? OR*
2. *Have you had at least two of the following symptoms: fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell?*
3. **How will you train gardeners to follow safety measures?** Training of all garden members and volunteers is recommended to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Remember to repeat training as needed to address ongoing questions or as your garden’s policies change. The training can be developed by all members or by just a few leaders.

*Your training might include:*

*1. A basic overview of COVID-19 symptoms, how it spreads, and best practices.*

*2. Your garden’s measures to reduce the spread, and the garden's required protocols that you have outlined in this document like handwashing and physical distancing.*

*3. How you will do specific tasks such as cleaning and sanitizing or other essential tasks.*

*4. Written SOPs (standard operating procedures) for things like cleaning and sanitizing.*

1. **How will you continually remind gardeners to follow safety measures?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will hang signs around the garden to encourage hand washing and distancing.*
2. *Use social media to send reminders.*
3. **How will you respond if a gardener becomes ill?** (See [FAQ document](https://docs.google.com/document/d/14bk7QiKmecysrlksh2j_ElPbdGOqFL_Y28jJSZZR0K8/edit) for guidance and details).

*Some examples might include:*

1. *Anyone exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms should remain home and self-quarantine.*
2. *We will request that any gardener who becomes ill to alert the garden manager*
3. *Garden managers will alert all other member gardeners that someone from the garden has COVID-19 if that person visited the garden within 14 days of becoming ill*
4. **Will you require or encourage masks or gloves?** Will you require them in certain situations but not others? Will you provide these resources or require gardeners to bring their own? (See [FAQ document](https://docs.google.com/document/d/14bk7QiKmecysrlksh2j_ElPbdGOqFL_Y28jJSZZR0K8/edit?usp=sharing) for guidance and details about masks and gloves).

## Section 2: Maintaining physical distance in the garden

**Examples are provided for each prompt; delete those that do not apply, edit suggestions as you see fit, and add additional ideas.**

1. **To minimize risk, consider only allowing garden members into the area.** List the individuals who will be allowed to visit the garden during this period of heightened precaution:

1.

2.

3.

1. **Is there anyone who will NOT be allowed in the garden?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *Children under the age of [5], who may be less likely to stay with their parents or refrain from touching shared surfaces.*
2. *Dogs (dogs and other pets should not be allowed in gardens anyways for food safety reasons).*
3. **How will you minimize the number of gardeners present at a given time?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will use a scheduling software to allow people to sign up for gardening time slots, and will cap the total number of people in the garden at a time at X.* 
2. *We will assign each garden plot a color in a checker-board fashion. Each color will be assigned a time to visit the garden (e.g. blue plots can visit every Tuesday and Thursday, green plots can visit every Monday, and Wednesday, white plots can visit every Saturday, orange plots can visit Fridays and Sundays).*
3. *We will encourage gardeners to only send one person from their household to the garden at a time.*



**3. How will you remind people to keep 6’ distance?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will place flags 6 feet apart to remind people what 6’ looks like.*
2. *We will post reminders around the garden such as the poster from* [*MDA’s guidance*](https://www.mda.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/inline-files/COVID-19%20Community%20Gardens%20Guidance%20Apr%202020.pdf) *to community gardens.*

**4. How will you handle deliveries of supplies?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will set up a designated delivery drop-off site [state location] where drivers and gardeners will not be present at the same time.*
2. *We will wash our hands immediately after handling packages.*

**5. If your garden is in a busy public area or frequently visited by non-members, how will you maintain physical distancing?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will post signs around the perimeter of the garden asking people to please keep distance from the plots and from each other.*
2. *We will create a temporary “fence” around the garden with materials like stakes and a rope to create a visual barrier around the planting area.*
3. *Direct the flow of people through the garden using arrow signs.*

**6. If you have garden members who perform tasks outside of their plots (such as mowing the lawn, turning compost, etc.), how will you ensure that they can do this work safely and effectively?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will set a time each week where only these people are allowed in the garden to allow for adequate physical distancing (e.g. every Thursday evening, no other garden members will be allowed in the space).*
2. *We will train back-up people to conduct these tasks in the event that the designated individuals become ill.*

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# Section 3: Handwashing, minimizing high-touch surface use, and physical distancing

Remember that this virus is spread primarily through person-to-person contact between an infected person and another person. The best ways to minimize spread is by maintaining adequate physical distance between individuals and encouraging people to wash their hands regularly. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is effective against the virus, but it is not a substitute for hand washing, since it is not effective when hands are dirty. It can be used when hand washing is not possible. If you use sanitizer, it must be at least 60% alcohol.

**Examples are provided for each prompt; delete those that do not apply, edit suggestions as you see fit, and add additional ideas.**

1. **How will you ensure regular hand washing in the garden?**
2. **How will you encourage regular hand washing?** Ideally, create systematic solutions to make hand washing convenient near the growing areas. Don’t rely on people to wash at home, as they need to be able to wash their hands as they are in the garden area.

*Examples might include:*

1. *We will* [*install portable handwashing stations*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMa5OTa3PnU) *in the garden.*
2. *We will provide hand sanitizer to gardeners to use when they arrive at the garden - (note that this is NOT a substitute for hand washing, as sanitizer is not effective when hands are dirty; see* [*FAQ document*](https://docs.google.com/document/d/14bk7QiKmecysrlksh2j_ElPbdGOqFL_Y28jJSZZR0K8/edit) *for more details.)*
3. **If using hand washing stations, how will they be maintained?** Who will refill the water in your hand washing station each day, and ensure that there are adequate paper towels and soap? How will these materials be stored overnight if you are worried about these materials being stolen?
4. **Will you have any official hand washing policies?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *Everyone must wash their hands before entering the garden, before harvesting or washing vegetables, after using the restroom, and upon leaving*.
2. *If someone notices that the water, soap, or towels are running low, they will notify [state person].*
3. **How will you remind gardeners of your policies?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will hang laminated posters around the garden.*
2. *We will send weekly email updates including COVID-19 reminders and policies.*
3. **High-touch surfaces: what are all of the high-touch surfaces in your garden?**

*Some examples might include gates, hoses, nozzles, handles*

1. **How will you reduce high-touch surfaces in the garden? (sanitizing considerations will be addressed in Section 5).**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *Rather than having everyone fill a watering can and water their plots individually, assign one person each week / day to water the entire garden at a time when few people are present.*
2. *Leave the gate and shed open while gardeners are present so that people do not need to touch the handle.*
3. **Tools**

Will you require everyone to bring their own tools? If not, will you encourage those who do have their own tools to bring them to reduce sharing? Do some gardeners have extra tools that they could loan to fellow gardeners for the season? List all tools that will be used by multiple people. What is your plan for sanitizing them between uses? Who will do the sanitizing?

1. **Restrooms**

Do you have restrooms on site, and if so, how often will you clean and sanitize them? Who is responsible for cleaning? Encourage people to use the restroom at home if possible.

1. **Picnic and rest areas**

Will you discourage gathering in the garden by taping off picnic tables and benches? Will you spread tables at least 6 feet apart? Do you typically have a shared water cooler? Will you encourage people to bring their own bottles? If people typically eat a meal together, will you postpone meals until further notice? Remember to include 6’ markers around these areas to help people visualize what 6’ of distance looks like.

## Section 4: Maintaining essential operations in case of illness

List your essential functions and people who are trained / able to complete each function. Do you need to train back-up people? Consider parts of your operation that may not be “essential” during this time, and whether you can postpone these activities until further notice.

**Function Point person Back-ups needed?**

*Unlocking the gate or toolshed Person X Give keys to person y and person z.*

*Re-stocking hand washing supplies Person Y Train person z and person w.*

…

…

..

**Regular functions that can be put on hold until further notice**

*Some examples might include:*

*1. We will suspend lunch time together and encourage everyone to eat at home.*

*2. We will cancel all public-facing events and tours.*

*3.*

*4.*

*5.*

*…*

**If a gardener becomes ill, or has to leave to take care of family, who will take over their plot? List garden volunteers who would be willing to care for a second plot if a fellow gardener is in need of assistance.**

*1.*

*2.*

*3.*

#

#

#

#

## Section 5: Cleaning and sanitizing

Cleaning and sanitizing high-touch surfaces is a key step in managing disease spread. Creating a routine and Standard Operating Procedures will help gardeners to remember to sanitize regularly, and will help to reduce the risk of errors such as running out of materials.

**Examples are provided for each prompt; delete those that do not apply, edit suggestions as you see fit, and add additional ideas.**

**1. What products will you use to sanitize surfaces at the garden, and at what rates?** See our corresponding [FAQ document](https://docs.google.com/document/d/14bk7QiKmecysrlksh2j_ElPbdGOqFL_Y28jJSZZR0K8/edit) for more information about sanitizers.

**2. Which surfaces will you sanitize, and how often (frequency may depend on surface)?**

 **\*This information may be compiled into a table (see below) or listed here depending on formatting preferences.**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will sanitize all tools every morning and every evening, and ask gardeners to sanitize them after use (if you are sharing tools at all).*
2. *We will sanitize all door handles and gate latches every morning and evening.*
3. *We will clean and then sanitize all food contact surfaces like sorting tables, tools, clippers and harvest knives at the end of each working day.*

**3. How often will you check to ensure that all cleaning and sanitizing equipment is sufficiently stocked? Who will be assigned to this task?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will check bathrooms each morning to ensure that there is sufficient soap and disposable towels for the day.*
2. *We will make a bottle of diluted bleach solution available to all gardeners each day; each morning someone will be assigned to make sure it is full.*
3. *We will check our supply room weekly to ensure that we have enough cleaning and sanitizing supplies for at least 2 weeks.*

**4. Will you keep records of your cleaning and sanitizing routine?**

*Use the following table as an example; adapt it as needed for your garden*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Surface** | **Sanitizer and rate** | **Frequency** | **Who will sanitize** |
| Tool handles | 1 T bleach per gallon water | Every morning and after each use | Garden leader in morning, each gardener after use |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

## Section 6: Sharing and donating produce

**Examples are provided for each prompt; delete those that do not apply, edit suggestions as you see fit, and add additional ideas.**

1. **How will you reduce risk at share / “help yourself” tables (some gardens have a space like a picnic table where people can leave extra plants and produce)?**

*Examples might include:*

1. *Our “share table” for the season will be a plastic or other non-porous surface that can be sanitized regularly, or we will cover the picnic table with a plastic tablecloth that can be sanitized.*
2. *We will post a laminated sign at the share table reminding gardeners to wash their hands before and after handling items from the share table, and to wash all produce before consumption.*
3. *We will post signage to require that only one person is at the share table at a time.*

**If you donate produce… (if not, delete this section)**

**2. How will you set up your packing area to maximize physical distancing and encourage safe produce handling when packing bags / boxes for produce donation?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *All volunteers packing produce will be required to wash their hands regularly throughout the process and to wear a mask.*
2. *All packing will occur on a non-porous surface that can be sanitized before, during, and after packing.*
3. *We will create a one way “flow” through the packing area to avoid people passing one another in close quarters.*
4. *We will schedule shifts to minimize the number of people in the packing area at the same time. We will communicate those schedules in advance.*
5. *We will set up individual packing stations so that one person can pack a single box while standing at least 6’ away from the next person.*

**3. How will you handle containers (bags, boxes, etc.) with produce set for delivery?**

 *Some examples might include:*

1. *All volunteers will wash their hands thoroughly before and after handling containers, or will wear disposable gloves.*
2. *Containers will be sealed / closed after packing, and only re-opened by the end user.*
3. *(If using waxed boxes or other reusable boxes that are returned to the garden each week): We will switch to disposable bags until further notice, or we will use boxes that can be sanitized upon return to the garden.*
4. **How will you reduce risks during the delivery and drop-off of produce?**

*Some examples might include:*

1. *We will include disposable gloves, a face mask, and hand sanitizer in each vehicle in case volunteers need to get gas, use the restroom, etc.*
2. *We will require volunteers to pack their own meals or snacks so that they do not need to make extra stops.*
3. *Drivers will coordinate with the recipient ahead of time to coordinate a contactless delivery.*
4. *Drivers will deliver produce in bags, not reusable boxes.*

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## Additional Resources

All gardeners should be made aware of the basic biology of COVID-19, how it spreads, and garden policies related to the virus. The following resources may be helpful.

[COVID-19 FAQ for fruit and vegetable farms, community gardens, and markets](https://docs.google.com/document/d/14bk7QiKmecysrlksh2j_ElPbdGOqFL_Y28jJSZZR0K8/edit)

**Basics of COVID-19**

[CDC COVID-19 homepage](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html)

[Posters in many languages with basic COVID-19 info](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html)

[CDC COVID-19 Youtube channel](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvrp9iOILTQaJa78zFQ0QgvShQ2HEwHxP)

[CDC COVID-19 YouTube channel en español](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvrp9iOILTQZdKZTcAaYdyu4wKmhGCJNc)

**Community garden specific guidance**

[City of Minneapolis Community Garden COVID-19 recommendations](http://minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/%40communications/documents/webcontent/wcmsp-223588.pdf)

[Minnesota Department of Agriculture Guidance for Minnesota Community Gardens](https://www.mda.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/inline-files/COVID-19%20Community%20Gardens%20Guidance%20Apr%202020.pdf)

[National Farm to School Network COVID-19 Garden Resources](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xcvNpc-S9FKJkjJC8ekx_tLBgdkRqEcHKMLzsv2JT5c/edit)

[North Carolina FAQ for Community Gardens](https://nccommunitygardens.ces.ncsu.edu/covid-19-faq-for-community-gardens/)

**Additional resources**

[Local Foods College COVID-19 sessions](https://extension.umn.edu/courses-and-events/local-foods-college)

[UMN Extension Food Safety Fact Sheets](https://sites.google.com/umn.edu/food-safety-fact-sheets/home)

**Posters**

The CDC has [an excellent collection of posters](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/communication/factsheets.html) in many languages to hang around the garden.

The state of Minnesota also published [a community garden poster](https://www.mda.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/inline-files/COVID-19%20MN%20Community%20Gardens%20Poster%20Apr%202020.pdf) reminding people to maintain distance and wash their hands.