****

**SWCP Community Garden Coordinator Guidelines during COVID-19 Crisis**

**Updated April 30, 2021**

Due to the evolving public health guidelines and mandates in Massachusetts, this information is current as of the date listed above. A version of this document will be updated periodically, and the most current version will be available at <http://swcpc.org/gardening.asp>.

**Physical Access to Community Gardens**

As of today (April 30, 2021), we have lived and gardened for more than a year during this global pandemic. Much has been learned in the past year about how the virus does and does not spread, so these updated guidelines will reflect that knowledge. Along with that knowledge is an awareness that although the pandemic is slowly retreating due to effective behaviors such as masking and social distancing, as well as vaccinations for some, there are still several months to go before transmission in public spaces is not a concern. Last year demonstrated that safely spending time outdoors, and gardening specifically, became a significant activity that promoted mental and physical health and provided a source of fresh healthy local food, as well as beautifying neighborhoods and promoting community.

Coordinators are encouraged to continue to communicate with their gardeners about whether they feel comfortable gardening, and reminding them to be vigilant about social distancing, handwashing and mask wearing, when appropriate. As the SWCP gardens open for the second year during this health crisis, it is important to continue to utilize best practices regarding health and safety while using the community garden spaces.

**Role of coordinators**

 Although we are slowly advancing in the fight against the pandemic and many community members have received at least one dose of the vaccine, it is important that we are careful during the next few months. Gardeners will have different situations based both on whether they have received the vaccine, as well as their general health status.

It is imperative that garden coordinators ensure that their gardeners continue to adhere to masking and physical distancing guidelines during this transitional time. As this crisis wanes, coordinators must lead through education and example. It might be a good time to reach out to another experienced garden community member to help co-coordinate, both to have someone to help with decision-making and tasks, but also for emotional support and morale during this challenging time.

**Expectations regarding services from DCR and SWCP staff**

The DCR, along with many other state agencies, continues to have additional responsibilities during this crisis. They also have the same worries about keeping themselves safe while working and in public that many of us do. **Please continue funneling all questions and requests for services through me (****tracyobrien611@gmail.com****) , in order to reduce the strain on park and DCR staffers.**

**For All: Physical Distancing Guidelines in gardens**

* Anyone who is sick should stay out of the garden. Anyone who has a cough, fever or other symptoms of COVID-19, or has had recent contact with someone who has symptoms should stay home. Gardeners who appear ill may be asked to leave.
* Please continue to have virtual meetings, or communicate by email or a Google group rather than in-person meetings or shared workdays.
* If there is someone in the garden who is not on email, be sure to call them to inform them what is happening.
* Consider using a Google sheet to list common area tasks, and have gardeners sign up for a task, and timeslot in which to complete it.
* Gardeners should remain at least 6-10 feet apart while gardening. (As some people are getting vaccines and others are still waiting, it might feel harder to continue this physical distancing, but we should continue to maintain 6-10 feet distance out of respect for the varying health needs and risk assessment of all gardeners.)
* Coordinators may choose to set up schedules/set hours based on plot spacing for when gardeners can be in the garden or gardeners can coordinate with gardeners with adjacent plots to choose different hours for gardening. Alternatively, if a gardener arrives at the garden and someone is in an adjacent plot, the second gardener should come back at a later time.
* Gardeners must follow all current public health guidelines, including:
	+ morning/evening curfew hours (if applicable);
	+ Physical distancing
	+ recommendations for wearing masks in public

Gardeners not following these guidelines may be asked to leave the garden.

**For All Gardeners: Sanitation Guidelines**

* Gardeners should wash their hands before and after going to the garden.
* Gardeners should wear gloves as much as possible
* Bring your own small hand tools to the garden, and minimize use of shared tools. If you do use shared tools, wipe them down before and after use.
* Do not pick up litter or any other items that may be unsafe.

**For Coordinators: Supporting the garden community**

* Try to stay in regular communication with gardeners via email, Google group or social media.
* Maintain a positive and upbeat tone in communications, such as sending how-to videos, sharing gardening tips, or inspirational photos of plants.
* Be responsive to individual or group concerns, and be flexible.
* Be understanding if members of vulnerable groups do not wish to garden this year. Be flexible with solutions, such as covering a plot with straw for the year, or letting the plot holder allow a substitute gardener to tend their plot for the year. Do not reassign the plot if someone wants a temporary break due to the public health crisis.
* Take care of yourself, and ask for help as needed! Being a coordinator is a big responsibility even in normal times, and during this crisis, there is even more to respond to. Seek help, find accurate information as needed, and let gardeners know you are doing your best for the garden community.

On behalf of the DCR, and PMAC, thank you for all you are doing!