

Westbury Community Garden

Garden Orientation and Agreement for New Gardeners

I assume you've been to the garden. It's on 7 acres of land. If you've walked around, you've noticed a pavilion where there are festivals, classes, meetings and a place to hang out. There are three fruit tree orchards, two compost areas, 62 garden beds, several butterfly gardens, a native prairie, fruit orchards, apiary, native prairie, compost and PIFF farms. Gardeners are involved in all of these, not just their individual beds. When you join the garden, you become a member of the community, not isolated to your bed, and you are expected to participate in taking care of the other features of the garden.

Please feel free to ask questions as I go along.

1. Our motto is Growing Communities through gardening. The community aspect/part is what brought us all together. Without it we would not exist.
2. We are an organic garden. Therefore, only certified organic products (fertilizer, compost, soil in bags, pest management) can be used. If you have any question about a product you would like to use, please ask one of the long-time gardeners before using. And, we are a no-till garden (no tillers). The reason is that tilling disturbs the microscopic soil life and therefore reduces the health of the garden.
3. Gardening
 - a. Gardening is fun, great exercise, emotionally healing.
 - b. You can grow a lot of food in a small amount of space if you choose what you grow wisely and tend to its needs. The needs could be every day at times or a couple of times a week
 - c. Gardening is also time consuming, hard at times, hot in the summer, cold in the winter. Ask yourself if you are up to being in the garden in hot and cold weather. Because you will have to be in the garden in hot and cold weather to fulfill your obligation to the community.
 - d. Gardening is:
 - i. Being part of a community.
 - ii. Sharing successes and failures with fellow gardeners. Every seed we plant does not germinate. Every plant that grows does not produce.
 - iii. What is involved in gardening?
 1. Planning, weeding, fertilizing, planting, mulching, watering (daily when seeds are in), harvesting, eating the bounty. It not just about the fun part of planting seeds and harvesting.
 2. Removing diseased and old plants at the right time. We garden 12 months a year. Spring vegetables play out and must be removed to make room for summer plants and to keep diseases at bay. Ask yourself if you willing to remove out of season plants in a timely manner and move to the next season?"
 3. Participating in garden wide activities. There is a workday every month where you will join other gardeners in doing work other than in your garden bed and aisle. It is work that is needed for the garden to thrive. Ask yourself if you are willing and if you have the time and energy to participate regularly in these activities that are not specific to your bed and aisle.

4. Weeding your bed and aisle is a weekly, if not daily, necessity. Digging weeds is hard and time consuming and often frustrating. Ask yourself if you are willing and able to spend significant time weeding your garden bed and aisles?
5. The garden aisles need cardboard and leaves/pine needles/wood chips after being fully weeded. You are responsible to collecting these materials when leaves and pine needles fall. And collecting cardboard from stores (electronic, dollar, furniture, recycle bins, etc.). And then you are responsible to lay the cardboard and mulch over the cardboard. Ask yourself if you are willing and able to collect the materials (leaves and pine needles) and mulch your garden aisles a couple of times a year?
6. Starting in the spring, mulch (leaves, pine needles, alpha hay) needs to be placed around the plants in your garden bed (3" TO 4" thick) to keep the weeds down and to keep moisture in the soil. Ask yourself if you are willing to collect and move the mulch into your garden bed.
7. When seeds are planted in your bed, you will need to water every day in cool weather and twice a day in hot weather in order for the seeds to germinate and grow into small plants. Once they are small plants, you can water every 2nd or 3rd day. Ask yourself if you have the time and inclination to water that often when seeds are first planted.

4. Benefits of membership

- a. Garden bed
- b. Discounted seeds, free fertilizer and compost from our own compost bins
- c. Attending Urban Harvest classes free
- d. Discount for OHBA (Organic Horticulture Business Association)

5. Garden mentors

- a. There are a number of experienced gardeners who have lots of knowledge and are glad to share that knowledge.
- b. If you have a question, ask someone.
- c. If you want a mentor, a go-to person, ask the membership chair, who signed you up. That person will find you a mentor.
- d. Who wants a mentor?

6. Garden bed

- a. Your garden bed is about 25' x 5'. You can plant almost anything you want to plant with some exceptions:

Do not plant mint, sunflowers, amaranth, Malabar spinach, comfrey, Lambs quarter, jute or tall bushes or trees.

- i. We strongly discourage flowering plants that drop seeds, such as cosmos. Tropical Milkweed is discouraged for the health of Monarch butterflies.
 - ii. Ornamental (non-food) vines are not allowed in the garden beds.
 - iii. Do not allow vines (sweet potato, winter squash, tomato, ground covers) to creep into the aisles. Keep them within your bed. This is to allow gardeners to easily walk through the aisles.
 - iv. Ask yourself if you willing to not plant certain plants and are willing to remove them if they appear in your bed.
- b. You are responsible for the bed and the four aisles around your bed. You must keep both the bed and aisles weeded.

- i. This may seem like a by-the-way thing, but it's not. It's critical to the success of your garden bed and it is critical to the success of your neighbor's beds.
- ii. There have been a few Houston community gardens that have been completely taken over by weeds and then abandoned.
- iii. You will lose your bed if it becomes overrun with weeds that are not tended to.
- iv. The community will lose the garden if weeds get out of hand.
- v. The community has a process concerning issues with weeds, non-allowed plants, and vines in the aisles.
 - 1. If a bed or aisle is in non-compliance, a courtesy letter will be emailed to the member. It is expected that the member will read emails from the garden and respond within two days.
 - 2. If the member has not responded within two days, a 10-day email will be sent to the member. It is expected that the member will read the email and respond within five days and remedy the issue within ten days of the email being sent.
 - 3. If the issue has not been remedied within 10 days, the garden will send a Sorry-To-See-You-Go letter (abandoned bed letter), and you will be expected to clear the bed within five days or pay the garden \$65 to have someone else clear the bed. If you clear the bed or pay the \$65, you will be considered for a bed in the future.
 - 4. A refund of membership dues will not be provided after the first three months of becoming a member of the garden.
- c. Take all weeds out of your bed at a minimum of weekly. Some weeds can be pulled. Some need to be dug with a hand trowel or shovel. Check the website for a post on weeds.
- d. If you need to be away for a significant time (vacation, illness) or if you need to give up your bed, let the Membership chair, President and Compliance officer know right away. If you want to take on a co-gardener, let the membership chair know and the chair will try to find you someone to share your garden.
- e. There are two ways that a bed becomes available. First, someone gives the bed up, for whatever reason. Second, the bed is forfeited due to lack of required attention.

7. Shed

- a. The shed is used only for garden wide tools, not individual items. Items in the shed are lawnmower, wheelbarrows, edger, fertilizer, shovels, rakes, pitchforks, hand trowels, box cutters, toilet paper and more.
- b. A few gardeners have the combination to the shed. It is those gardeners who are at the garden often and have reason to get stuff out of the shed. If you need fertilizer, pest management items or something else from the shed, ask someone, or send an email to the Site-management chairperson.

8. Tools and supplies

- a. There are a few tools and a wheelbarrow in the fenced compost. Combination 1234.
- b. There are hoses attached to water spigots that will reach every bed.
- c. Gardeners are expected to purchase their own water spigot keys. Carry the key with you to the garden. Keys are sometimes hard to find, but you can get a 5/16" sillcocks key at TMS Plumbing on West Bellfort Avenue, near Stella Link or at Bering Hardware on Bissonnet St.

9. Work days

- a. Every gardener is required to do at least 12 hours of garden volunteer activities outside of their own bed and aisles. This can be done on regular monthly workdays or when you

have time. The president of the garden sends out a list of things you can do at any time, on your own or on the work day, which is the fourth Saturday of each month.

- b. Activities include: weeding common areas, watering common areas, working the compost, pest management, fundraising, seed ordering and packaging, picking up things such as fertilizer and pest management products and tools, repairing or arranging for repairs of things like water spigots and hoses, cleaning the garden of trash that has blown in, taking recycle and trash bags home for disposal, working with volunteer groups who come to the garden. Also included are collecting cardboard and leaves and bringing them to the garden, and off-site work on any of the committees.
- c. Record your hours worked on activities outside of your own bed and aisles on the community garden website (Bring up the website westburycommunitygarden.org. Under Documents, Click on Volunteer Hours. Record the hours worked and what was done. Be sure to do this, for you must show that you have worked at least 12 hours during the year in order to continue to have a bed for the next year.
- d. Ask yourself if you have the time and will do at least your 12 hours of community garden work outside of your bed and aisles?"

10. Committees and work

- a. All gardeners are required to participate with at least one committee. There are several work committees that can be joined to get your 12 hours or more of work in each year. Each has a chair. These include:
 - i. **Membership** maintains gardener contact info, waiting lists and monitoring member contracts. Membership also does orientation for potential new members.
 - ii. **Education** provides mentors for new gardeners and classes of interest to the community.
 - iii. **Community Outreach/Fundraising** works with schools and community groups and applies for grants and funding with Westbury Area Improvement Corporation (WAIC).
 - iv. **Site Maintenance** manages the maintenance and repairs on all aspects of the site, including upkeep of the grounds.
 - v. **Compost** manages the compost production areas
 - vi. **Watering** supervises the water needs of trees, butterfly gardens and shrubs on site.
 - vii. **Specialty Gardens** tends to the care, installation and upkeep of the butterfly gardens. Maintains the purple martin houses.
 - viii. **Orchard** supervises weeding, mulching, pruning and fertilizing the fruit orchards, and protecting cold-sensitive trees from freezes.
- b. **Specialty Positions**
 - i. **Pest Control** keeps the critters and pests at bay by using organic, nontoxic means.
 - ii. **Information Technology (IT)** maintains the WCG website, database and social media.
 - iii. **Seeds** selects, purchases, and distributes/sells seeds biannually
 - iv. **Volunteer Coordinator** manages workdays and coordinates volunteer groups.

11. Meetings

- a. There are open board meetings each month where the business of the garden is discussed, reported and decided. You are welcome to attend and give your input.

- b. Once a year, there is a meeting where there is a vote on the officers for the coming year. You are welcome to become an officer of the executive board – President, Vice President or Secretary. The treasury position is only open to members of the WAIC. It is a legal requirement.

12. Email etiquette

- a. If you have something that you want the entire membership to know, send the information to the President who will send it out to all members in the weekly email.
- b. If something needs to be addressed to one or two people, email them directly.
- c. If you have a particular issue that relates to specific things such as compost, seed order, pests, contact the person in charge of that effort. If you don't know who that is, ask someone.

13. Watering

- a. Water newly planted seeds every day in cool weather and twice a day or more in hot weather. Do this until seeds have germinated and the plants are an inch tall. Then back off to every other day or every third day depending on weather.
- b. Water enough so the soil is damp an inch deep. Stick your finger into the soil to check.
- c. Water with a fan nozzle, never with an open hose.
- d. Never lay a hose with water running in a bed or hang a hose with water running. Hold the hose in your hand at all times. It is a waste of water, a waste of money, and damaging to the plants. Wasting water is money out of the garden assets that could be used for something else, like soil or fertilizer.
- e. Water your seeds and plants well, but if water comes into the aisles, it is too much.
- f. Make sure you do not aim your open hose at an aisle. No one wants to walk in a muddy aisle.
- g. When you are finished watering your bed, turn off the faucet with your key and leave the fan nozzle valve open. It is important to make sure the water is not left on. This has caused flooding many times.

14. Planting

- a. There are planting charts for each of the four seasons. Use these charts to make decisions on what to plant and when to plant. If in doubt of when to plant something that might not be on the list, ask one of the experienced gardeners. Planting things out of season is a recipe for disease, pests and failure. These charts were developed by Dr. Bob Randall and are provided free through Urban Harvest (Internet search: urbanharvest.org; Education; Garden Resources, Planting Charts). It is a great gift. This information is critical to the success of your garden.
- b. The entire bed needs to be planted at least three seasons of the year. As soon as you remove one thing, plant something else. This will give you the most production.
- c. Before planting, dig all weeds out. Fertilize the bed. 1 cup per 4 to 6 square feet. Fertilizer is distributed to gardeners twice a year. If you need fertilizer, ask one of the regulars who has the combination to the shed where it is kept.
- d. Use only fertilizer that says Organic on the bag, if you plan to purchase your own.

15. Seasonal transition

- a. When weather changes, so do plants. Therefore, plants die or get diseased or just stop producing or almost stop producing when the outside temperature is outside of their desired range. Take those plants out. Do not hesitate or wait. The sooner you change over to the new planting schedule, the sooner you will have food to eat, and the fewer diseases and pests you will have to deal with and the whole garden has to deal with.

16. Use of compost bins

- a. The compost team distributes compost from the bins or lets gardeners know who and how much to take.
- b. Gardeners can bring home veggie remains to the compost site. Follow posted directions on how to deposit compost materials.
- c. When you put veggies, eggshells, coffee grounds or other green material in the compost bin, cover it fully with leaves. No meat or dairy products are allowed in the bins.
- d. Okra and corn trunks are placed in the dumpster, not the compost bins. They take too long to break down.
- e. Tomato vines, squash vines are to be bagged and taken home or dumped in the dumpster. Do not place them in the compost bins. They carry diseases that will be carried back to the garden when compost is distributed.
- f. Chop veggies before putting them in the compost. This will help make compost quicker and means that you will get compost for your bed quicker.

17. Harvesting

- a. Be very specific if you tell someone they can harvest from your bed. Make sure they know what they can and can't harvest and how much.
- b. You are not allowed to harvest from a bed other than yours unless you have been specifically told that you can.

18. Use of Dumpster

- a. The dumpster is shared with the PIFF farmers.
- b. It is emptied once a week.
- c. Place only materials from the garden in the bin.
- d. Do not overfill the bin. It will not be emptied by the company if it is overfull.

19. Porta Potty

- a. It is cleaned once a week.
- b. There is extra toilet paper in the shed.

20. Vandalism

- a. There is occasional vandalism of several types
 - i. Vegetables being harvested without permission. Melons and large squashes and large tomatoes and strawberries are the main crops that are stolen, however collard leaves and broccoli and cauliflower heads and even whole plants have been stolen.
 - ii. Other damage has been that people have stepped into beds to harvest what is not theirs.
- b. We suggest you grow things that are not attractive targets.

21. Garden Visitors

- a. Welcome visitors to the garden
- b. Show them around and talk to them about how the garden works, how the beds belong to individual gardeners who work hard and spend their money to grow their crops
- c. Let them know they are welcome at any time to walk through the garden, but to not touch or harvest. Let them know that harvesting is reserved for the gardeners who have grown their produce.
- d. If they have children, please let them know that they must make sure that their children do not walk into the beds or touch the vegetables.
- e. If they have pets, let them know that the pets have to be on a leash, and they need to pick up after them.
- f. If someone wants information on how to get a garden bed, direct them to the website or they can send an email to membership@westburycommunitygarden.org.

22. Safety

- a. We recommend gardening in daylight. Do not stay after dark. There are no lights in the garden, and the area is not safe at night.
- b. Mornings and late afternoons are the times when several gardeners are present, if you want to be there with others.
- c. Lock your car. Do not leave valuables in your car. There have been break-ins.
- d. Have the constable's number in your phone and use it if there is a problem 281 463-6666. Also have the garden address, the constable will ask for it (12581 Dunlap Street). If you feel safe, take a picture of the vandal.

23. If you are a good fit for the garden, you will need to complete and sign a Gardener's Agreement and pay for the plot before beginning to garden. The amount of money will be \$108 per year with a start date of February 1. A prorated amount will be calculated for memberships beginning during the year.

24. Probationary Period

- a. Every new membership comes with a one-year probationary period. This is for the benefit of the new member and the garden.
- b. At quarterly intervals, the Membership committee will check to see if the new member has planted the bed, weeded the bed and aisles to the satisfaction of the team that checks for violations and has recorded at least 1 volunteer hour per month of membership. At the same time, the new member will evaluate if the garden is what they expected and if they want to continue.
- c. If the new gardener chooses not to continue after three months, a refund of the remaining months of dues will be provided.
- d. During each quarter of the first year, if the new member has not planted, weeded and done the required volunteer hours, the new gardener will lose the membership. A refund of the remaining months of dues will be refunded only until the end of the first three months.

25. Hands-on part of the orientation

- a. The new member will be shown weeds and demonstrated how to remove different kinds of weeds. Then the prospective new member will remove each kind of weed.
- b. The new member will be shown how to lay cardboard and place mulch on top of the cardboard.
- c. The new member will be shown vines in the aisles and how to move the vines into the bed.

26. Questions

I _____ agree that I have read the Gardener's Agreement and the Garden Rules, and agree to what is laid out in the Gardener's Agreement and the Garden Rules. Date:
