

## Rock Island Urban Garden Program Policy

1. **Purpose.** The purpose of the Rock Island Urban Garden Program is to manage City-owned parcels designated as urban gardens so as to ensure their productive use and provide a benefit to the community.
2. **Designation as Gardens.**
  - a. Staff shall periodically review City-owned parcels and make a recommendation to the City Council as to which should be garden sites. Designation of said parcels as gardens sites shall be made by the City Council.
  - b. Before the gardening season commences, staff shall notify adjoining property owners that the City-owned parcel will be leased as a garden. Said notification shall include general information about the program noting that the property is actively for sale, instructions on where to find additional information on the City's website, and staff contact information to report issues.
3. **Garden Parcels.** Whole garden parcels are leased by a single program participant at a cost. No amenities are provided by the City to program participants leasing these parcels with the exception of one (1) water tank.
  - i. **Water.** Water shall be used responsibly and in such a manner as to remain on site and avoid soil erosion. The City shall provide one (1) full water tank for use on the garden parcel. The program participant may contact the City to refill the tank. Refills shall cost \$50.
  - ii. **Mowing.** Any portion of the parcel which is not under cultivation shall be covered in mowed grass as prescribed for residential property in the City of Rock Island Municipal Code. This shall include grass in the abutting right-of-way.
  - iii. **Compost Piles.** Compost piles on the parcel shall be well maintained and shall not contain non-compostable materials. No compost pile shall be within five feet of the garden parcel boundary.
  - iv. **Burning.** Fires for disposal of plant material, cooking, or any other use are prohibited on the garden parcel.
  - v. **Personal Property.** The City is not responsible for any lost or stolen personal property.
  - vi. **Sheds.** Tool storage sheds are prohibited.
  - vii. **Season-Extending Structures.** Greenhouses, hoop houses, cold frames, and other similar structures are prohibited.
  - viii. **Animals.** No animals may be kept on the garden parcel including chickens.
  - ix. **Set Back.** No vegetation exceeding four feet in height may be planted within five feet of the parcel boundary or nearer to the front property line than any principal structure on an adjoining property in the same block face, whichever is greater. Vegetation

within the required setback must not obstruct sidewalks in any way.

- x. **Hours of Operation.** Program participants may only work on their garden parcels between dawn and dusk.
4. **Eligibility.** Participation in the program is limited to citizens of the City of Rock Island. Residency will be confirmed by an Illinois identification card and/or a current City utility bill. Qualified applicants shall be those who are in good standing with the City. This shall mean that they have not violated any City ordinances, have not been the cause of nuisances, and are current on all utility payments.
  5. **Pricing.** All garden parcels shall have a leasing fee of one hundred dollars (\$100).
  6. **Community Benefit Refund.** A program participant may apply for a full refund of their leasing fee if they are able to demonstrate that they donated at least half of their harvest to a non-profit organization, food pantry, or similar entity that benefits the community by reducing hunger and food insecurity among low to moderate income citizens. The application for the refund shall be made available by Staff starting on November 1 and must be returned no later than November 30. Should the application be accepted, the refund will be made in December.
  7. **Lease Term.** No garden lease agreement term shall exceed one (1) year. All leases shall have a termination date of November 30.
  8. **Application Process.** The period for accepting applications opens on March 1 and ends on April 15. Applications will be available at City Hall and on the City website.
    - a. **Order of Preference.** Staff shall review applications and assign parcels or plots to applicants using the following order of preference: (1) returning gardeners who want the same parcel or plot as the previous year, (2) returning gardeners who want a different parcel or plot than the previous year, (3) new gardeners applying for the first time, (4) returning gardeners who have received a written warning in the previous year without forfeiture. Applicants who forfeited their parcels or plots in the previous year will not be eligible to participate in the program in the following year.
    - b. **Orientation Meeting.** Final approval of applications is contingent upon applicants attending an orientation meeting scheduled to take place between April 15 and April 30. The orientation meeting will detail the program's policies and procedures. Those applicants who do not attend the orientation meeting will need to meet with staff before they can have final approval of their application.
    - c. **Payment.** After attending an orientation meeting, applicants will need to pay the leasing fee in full to the City. After their payment is processed, they may begin cultivating their parcel or plot.
  9. **Substantial Planting Deadline.** Program participants must have at least half of their parcel or plot under noticeable cultivation no later than May 31. Staff may, at their discretion, extend this deadline if inclement weather negatively affects planting conditions. Staff shall notify program participants if the deadline is adjusted.

10. **Prohibited Plantings.** Any plant species designated as noxious or invasive in the Illinois Administrative Code, by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, or in the City of Rock Island Municipal Code is prohibited on garden parcels. Shrubs, trees, perennial vines, and other woody perennials are also prohibited.
11. **Poor Maintenance.** During the growing season, poor maintenance of parcels and plots shall include, but not be limited to, the following: less than one half of the parcel or plot is under noticeable cultivation; plants which are noxious, invasive, or prohibited are numerous; nuisance weeds and/or grass are present; activities are adversely affecting neighboring parcels or plots in the form of erosion, water run-off, encroaching vegetation, or some other form of inappropriate modification; prohibited practices, including the use of unapproved chemicals, take place; produce is not being regularly collected and is left to rot in place.
12. **Poor Maintenance Resolution Process.** If staff determine that there is an instance of poor maintenance, the following steps shall be taken.
  - a. Staff shall send a written notice to the relevant participant stating that there is inadequate maintenance of the parcel. The letter shall direct the participant to remedy the situation within fourteen (14) days.
  - b. Should the participant fail to remedy the situation within fourteen (14) days, they shall be sent a second written notice stating that they have seven (7) days to remedy the situation before they forfeit their parcel and become ineligible to participate in the program the following year.
  - c. At the end of the third week, should the situation remain unimproved, a written notice shall be sent to the participant explaining that they have forfeited their parcel or plot and have seven (7) days from the date of said letter to remove their plantings and any other property from the site. After the seven (7) days have passed, the plantings and other property left on the site will become the property of the City.
13. **Forfeiture.** In the event a parcel is forfeited by a program participant either through poor maintenance or voluntarily, staff shall take the following actions.
  - a. Should forfeiture occur prior to July 15, the parcel shall be made available to any applicant at its regular price.
  - b. Should forfeiture occur on or after July 15, the parcel shall be made available to any applicant at half of its regular price.
  - c. Should forfeiture occur on or after October 1, the parcel or plot shall not be made available for leasing during the remainder of the season.
  - d. Program participants who forfeit their parcels or plots must remove their plantings and any accessory items, including but not limited to trellises and cages, by a deadline established by staff. If they do not, they relinquish ownership of said plantings and items to the City. Staff may allow a program participant who leases a previously forfeited parcel to take ownership of said plantings and accessory items.
14. **Prohibited Substances.** No synthetic chemicals including herbicides, pesticides, or fertilizers may be applied to parcels or plots. No organic substance producing a prolonged noxious odor may be applied.

15. **Substantial Clearance Deadline.** Program participants must have their parcel or plot cleared of plantings and other items no later than November 30. The parcel must be returned to a level state by the program participant that will allow the City to seed the parcel with grass if necessary or desired. If a program participant does not meet the substantial clearance deadline, the participant will be ineligible to participate in the program the following year. Staff may, at their discretion, extend this deadline if inclement weather negatively affects the ability of program participants to clear their parcel or plot. Staff shall notify program participants if the deadline is adjusted.
16. **Data Collection.** Program participants shall report the estimated amount of food they grew in their gardens no later than the Substantial Clearance Deadline. Reporting shall be completed in a manner developed by staff and shall include both plant varieties and quantities. The data collected shall be made available to the public and used to improve the program.
17. **Fences and Signs.** Materials including, but not limited to, signs and fences used to demarcate or identify parcels and plots must be kept in place by program participants. Removal or damage to such materials may be considered poor maintenance.
18. **Subletting.** No parcel or plot may be sublet. Violation of this provision will result in immediate forfeiture.
19. **Partnering with Community Organizations.** Staff may enter into a partnership with one or more community organizations to provide additional services and resources to program participants. Such organizations must be in good standing with the City. This shall mean that they have not violated any City ordinances, have not been the cause of nuisances, and are current on all required payments to the City. The nature of any partnership shall be detailed in a memorandum of understanding that clearly identifies the roles and responsibilities of each party as they relate to the Rock Island Urban Garden Program.