Community Garden Guidelines
& Good Gardening Basics

Sustainable Gardening is a process that promotes and enhances biodiversity, natural biological cycles, and soil biological activities that restore, maintain, and enhance ecological harmony.

If sustainable gardening had a motto, it would be: **Feed the soil, not the plant!**

Here are some keys to feeding the soil without using synthetic chemicals:

Compost: Compost is the final product of natural decomposition of organic materials that can be added to soil to enhance soil fertility. Mix well composted organic material from the composting station into your plot.

Fertilizers: Fertilizers are single or blended substances that contain one or more recognized plant nutrient and are used in promoting plant growth. Synthetic fertilizers are prohibited (this means no Miracle Gro). Look for 'USDA organic' label when choosing a fertilizer. Gardeners are strongly encouraged to add organic material rather than fertilizers, i.e. compost, manure, leaf mold, and fish emulsion.

Cover Crops: Cover crops, or "green manure," are a great way to improve soil health and productivity. These plants can be grown with crops or alone and may assist in keeping weeds down, adding nutrients, and improving soil structure. Some examples of green manure are clover and other legumes. Make sure to research cover crops before introducing into your garden. In general, use annual cover crops and don't let cover crops go to seed to avoid introducing a pesky weed into your garden.

Mulch: Non-synthetic materials such as straw and leaves can be used as mulch to suppress weed growth, moderate soil temperature, conserve soil moisture, and will offer some organic matter after breakdown at the soil surface. Woodchips are used as pathway mulch at some gardens, but should not be used within the plots. Make sure to clean up mulch at the end of every gardening season.

Crop Rotation and Crop Diversity: Crop rotation is strongly recommended even in a small garden setting. Avoid growing the same crop in the same space year after year. Growing the same crops in the same soil year after year can promote pest, diseases and weeds in the soil. Plant a diverse garden and avoid planting too much of one plant family.

Insect & Disease Control: Use of synthetic insecticides and fungicides is prohibited. Building healthy soil, planting a diverse garden, and rotating crops will strengthen your garden's ability to ward off pests and diseases. Companion planting (see example below) and hand picking of insects or pests are recommended. Use the least intrusive methods first before using more drastic measures. If resorting to a plant based insecticide, i.e. pyrethrum, make sure to follow label directions carefully and apply under the correct conditions. For example, apply in early morning or evening and not on a windy day.
Connect with a Garden Coordinator or Farm Manager before applying insecticides or fungicides. To prevent the spread of disease, do not put diseased plants in the compost bin. These plants should be thrown away and removed from the garden.

Example of companion planting: A common pest is the black flea beetle. These beetles commonly eat the foliage of potato and tomato plants. Try planting crops such as radishes or turnips around these plants in hope of the beetles eating the radish foliage rather then your preferred plant.

Rototilling: Rototilling is strongly discouraged as a regular garden practice. Rototilling degrades soil structure and can also exacerbate an existing weed problem. For example, quack grass roots are broken into smaller pieces by the tines of the rototiller. Each piece of quack grass root is the beginning of a new plant. Rototilling is sometimes appropriate, however, such as breaking new ground or managing some abandoned plots.