



# GARDENING ON RENTAL PROPERTY

## A GUIDE FOR TENANTS & PROPERTY OWNERS

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In 2014, Gardening Matters conducted listening sessions and solicited written feedback from property owners and renters with the goal of creating resources to help them connect, communicate and have successful gardens.

This project is supported by the Minneapolis Health Department with Statewide Health Improvement Program funding,



### WHY GARDENING MATTERS

We can grow healthy, fresh, and culturally appropriate foods.

We can share resources, knowledge and food with our neighbors and communities.

We can rely less on the industrial food system and reduce our carbon footprints.

We can reduce our food costs, and sell food to build our local economies.

We can eat nutritious and delicious food, and control what we put in our bodies.

The Twin Cities are home to over 570 community gardens and urban agriculture projects. Gardening Matters recognizes the contributions of community and backyard gardeners to the health, vitality and liv-

There are multiple benefits of community gardening, ranging from mental health benefits to exercise, from crime prevention to food production. Most importantly, community and backyard gardens benefit our environment, our neighborhood, our communities and ourselves.

### WHAT DO RENTAL PROPERTY GARDENS LOOK LIKE?

For tenants and property owners considering a garden on their property, it can be helpful to consider the many forms gardens take. Gardens vary greatly in size. They can take up only one space on the property or be spread throughout. Gardens can grow in the ground, in raised beds, or in containers., and can contain vegetables, flowers, annuals (one-year plants) and perennials (multi-year plants).



## MORE RESOURCES FOR TENANTS:

### COMMUNITY GARDENING NETWORK:

<http://forums.e-democracy.org/groups/comgar>

### FREE RESOURCES:

<http://minneapolis.craigslist.org/search/zip>

<https://groups.freecycle.org/group/freecycleMpls/posts/all>

<http://twincitiesfreemarket.org/>

### MASTER GARDENERS:

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/master-gardener/ask/>

### PLANTS & SEEDS:

<http://www.gardeningmatters.org/membership/membership-details>

### PLANTING ZONES:

<http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/>

### SOIL TESTING:

<http://soiltest.cfans.umn.edu/>

<http://us.wlabs.com/>

### TENANT ADVOCACY:

[Homelinemn.org](http://Homelinemn.org)

## SOIL TESTING IS IMPORTANT!

Ask your property owner if the soil has been tested or remediated.

# FOR TENANTS

## INTERESTED IN TALKING WITH YOUR PROPERTY OWNER ABOUT GARDENING?

If you want to garden on rental property, remember to address the concerns of your property owner. If you want financial assistance from your property owner, put yourself in their shoes. They may say to themselves, "I can't charge the next tenant more because this tenant put in flowers and vegetables. So, why should I finance my tenant's desires when I can't recoup the cost in higher rent?"

However, a property owner can also say: "Well, \$50 on plants isn't much if it's going to give me a happy tenant who takes good care of my property." Helping finance a garden will likely cost less than losing you and finding someone to take your place. These costs might include: paint, landscaping, advertising and possibly lost rental income. Plus, if you choose to grow perennial fruits, herbs and flowers for pollinators, the garden will provide for you and future tenants over the years.

Consider these elements as you make your case. It's usually helpful to think about what to say to the property owner beforehand and make notes to direct the conversation.

The key to a successful rental garden is a well-structured garden agreement. Encourage your property owner to develop this agreement with you both understand and agree upon expectations regarding physical appearance, cost, and maintenance of the garden.

Collected here are a variety of elements that help define what a potential garden can and will be. The following tips can help build a persuasive argument and facilitate conversation with a property owner.



1. **ESTABLISH YOUR CREDENTIALS.** You say you're a great gardener/landscaper/handyman, but how can the property owner know this for sure? Figure out how to demonstrate that you know what you're doing. Perhaps you have a former property owner who benefited from your work and can be a reference. Maybe you have photographs. If you haven't gardened before, provide your property owner with the resources you have available for education and support (e.g. Master Gardeners, Gardening Matters, community organizations). You can also start small and plant vegetables in a few containers. Once a property owner see your skills and dedication, they may let you scale up.
2. **EXPLAIN THE GARDEN AS AN INVESTMENT.** Show your property owner that your work will not only improve the property visually, it may also allow improve the property value over time. Consider long-term elements like raised beds, perennial fruits or flowers. Use drawings or pictures you find in a garden book or online to demonstrate.
3. **KEEP THE STANDARDS HIGH.** If you are asking a property owner to reimburse you for materials, anticipate that they will want a high standard of work. Figure out how you will meet this standard. Envision the project from start to finish, thinking of the ways a professional landscaper might lay out a garden. Map out a physical plan and keep up with maintenance.
4. **PUT THE DETAILS DOWN.** Make an agreement – in writing – that lays out all of the specifics. For example, the garden bed you want to install will be constructed of cedar boards and be 4'x8'x1'. It will be located in the southeast corner of the backyard, close to the water spigot. It will be filled with compost and planted with tomatoes. Outline the roles and rules of the space. Include who can garden or harvest, and whether or not the property owner is welcome to participate or not. This way, you know what you need to deliver, and the property owner knows exactly what to expect. Be as explicit as possible.
5. **BUILD IN A "REVIEW & APPROVAL" PHASE.** Give the property owner a chance to inspect the garden at certain points throughout the season. This builds in flexibility and heads off future conflict over clashing expectations.
6. **MAKE A GARDEN FOR THE YEARS.** You may love colorful annual flowers, but they'll be dead and gone within a few months. If your property owner is willing, invest in plants that will fill out over time for permanent landscaping, or tools and equipment for the house. If you're growing a vegetable garden, consider including perennial herbs and fruits as well as flowers to attract pollinators. You can save seeds to continue growing the same crops year after year at no cost.
7. **EDUCATE YOURSELF.** Find out your planting zone. Use soil testing results to see what kind of soil you have. Observe how much light you are getting in certain areas (shade, partial shade, full sun). Consult Master Gardeners or garden stores and select plants suited to all of your specific conditions and any soil amendments you might need. If the



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# FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

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## SOIL

**Don't forget to test your soil!** You don't want your tenants growing food or digging in contaminated soils. If your soil is deemed unfit for growing, consider other options like container gardens, straw-bale gardens or raised beds.

There are a variety of soil tests to choose from. Testing for contaminants like lead and arsenic is the most important. Other tests provide an overview of the soil's nutrient content. If you are planning on making any financial investments in the garden, soil testing is a wise choice.



## LIABILITY

Most properties already have homeowner's insurance. Property owners that are interested in further layers of protection can create a waiver of liability for the tenant(s) to sign.

If your property isn't properly insured, check out the American Community Gardening Association's garden insurance options.

## MAINTENANCE

Develop a clear, written maintenance plan that works for you and the tenant(s) and include it in a lease or garden agreement.

## WATER

Gardens need to be watered throughout the season, particularly when seeds and plants first go in and during hot summer months. The amount of water used will depend on the amount of rainfall.

Develop a plan with your tenant(s) regarding who pays for the water. If water is typically included in rent, consider whether there will be an extra charge in cases of increased water use.

If you are particularly concerned about water use, facilitate or encourage creative water-saving techniques for the gardeners. Consider using a 55 gallon barrel to collect excess rainwater from roof runoff or gutters. Bury empty clay pots in the garden up to the rim to collect rainwater and irrigate the garden.



## MATERIALS & COSTS

Gardens may require a variety of materials, including: seeds, plants, compost or other soil amendments, potting soil, gloves, trowels, shovels, garden forks, hoses, watering cans, rain barrels, trellises, tomato cages, stakes, twine, and containers.

Building raised beds may require lumber, nails and some basic construction tools (e.g. tape measure, hammer, saw). Be aware of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations before constructing a raised bed for residents in wheelchairs.

If you choose to assist the gardeners financially, remember that tools are an important and long-lasting part of a garden's success. Perhaps multiple tenants will donate \$10 and share a communal shed or tools. Plants can also be a long-term investment. Consider perennial herbs, fruits or even plants that attract pollinators and beneficial insects.

There are a variety of places to acquire any of these items, and being resourceful can significantly lower costs. Many supplies can be found for free on craigslist.org, Freecycle, the Twin Cities Free Market or the COMGAR listserv. Don't be afraid to post for what you need. Inexpensive items can often be found at yard sales. Other items can be found for a range of prices at large stores like Menards or Home Depot and local nurseries or garden stores. Sometimes businesses donate supplies to new gardens. Be creative about garden equipment — a trellis can be an old bed spring or bike wheel!

If there are multiple gardeners, they can register as a Community Garden with Gardening Matters and become eligible for free city compost, or a membership with the Minnesota Green plant donation network.

Sign up to become a member of Gardening Matters each spring to receive low-cost seeds and plants and gain access to workshops, skill-shares and other garden-related events.

## YOUR ROLE

Outline with your tenant how involved or uninvolved you will be.

## MORE RESOURCES FOR PROPERTY OWNERS:

### **CITY OF MINNEAPOLIS COMPOST:**

(612) 673-2917

### **GARDEN INSURANCE:**

<https://communitygarden.org/programs/garden-insurance/>

### **PROPERTY OWNER RESOURCES:**

<http://www.lssmn.org/rented/>

### **PROPERTY OWNER TRAININGS:**

<https://homelinemn.org/speeches-trainings/landlords/>

### **MINNESOTA GREEN:**

<https://www.northerngardener.org/mn-green/about-mn-green>

### **SAMPLE LEASE (FOR LARGE PROPERTIES):**

[http://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/CommunityGardenToolkit\\_Final\\_\(CLS\\_20120530\)\\_20110207.pdf](http://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/CommunityGardenToolkit_Final_(CLS_20120530)_20110207.pdf)

### **SOIL TESTING:**

<http://soiltest.cfans.umn.edu/>

<http://us.wlabs.com/>

### **SOIL MANAGEMENT & REMEDIAION:**

<http://www.misa.umn.edu/FarmFoodResources/CropsLivestock/>

## RESOURCES FROM GARDENING MATTERS

### **GARDENING MATTERS:**

[www.gardeningsmatters.org](http://www.gardeningsmatters.org)

### **URBAN AGRICULTURE EVENTS CALENDAR:**

[http://  
www.gardeningsmatters.org  
/news-events/events-and-  
calendar](http://www.gardeningsmatters.org/news-events/events-and-calendar)

### **GARDENING ON RENTAL PROPERTY:**

[http://  
www.gardeningsmatters.org  
/find-garden/gardening-  
rental-property](http://www.gardeningsmatters.org/find-garden/gardening-rental-property)

### **MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM**

[http://  
www.gardeningsmatters.org  
/hubs/local-food-resource-  
hubs-membership](http://www.gardeningsmatters.org/hubs/local-food-resource-hubs-membership)

### **MULTIPLE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GARDENING:**

[http://  
www.gardeningsmatters.org  
/policy-advocacy/policy-  
advocacy](http://www.gardeningsmatters.org/policy-advocacy/policy-advocacy)

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# SAMPLES & EXAMPLES

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## SAMPLE:

### GARDEN AGREEMENT LEASE ADDENDUM (FOR SINGLE FAMILY OR DUPLEX PROPERTIES)

#### 1. Garden location:

Specify the area of the property where the garden will be located, including the size of the garden in approximate square footage. We advise staking the location together to prevent misunderstandings.

#### 2. Garden construction:

Specify if the garden is in the ground or in raised beds. Detail any construction requirements for removing any sod or preparing the soil. Specify any details about plants that won't be allowed.

#### 3. Garden maintenance:

Specify who will maintain the garden, and any standards for weeding or garden appearance.

#### 4. Water usage:

Specify what the water source will be, and any guidelines for water usage. Specify if the charge for the water will be included in the tenant's rent or as a separate charge, measured by a spigot water meter.

#### 5. Cost responsibilities:

Specify who will pay for the materials and plants for the garden.

#### 6. Close of garden season:



## EXAMPLE:

### GARDEN AGREEMENT LEASE ADDENDUM

#### (FOR SINGLE FAMILY OR DUPLEX PROPERTIES)

##### 1. Garden location:

*The garden will be located in the southeast corner of the backyard, from the side fence and extending 10 feet west and from the read of the property line extending 10 feet north (approximately 64 square feet plus a path). The fence may be used for trellising plants.*

##### 2. Garden construction:

*The garden will be in two 4 foot by 8 foot raised beds. Property owner will provide funds for the tenant to build two raised beds of cedar posts, and mulch for a 2 foot path between them. Tenant will supply soil and plants. The garden will be primarily for vegetable gardening. Plants over 3 feet in height are not allowed.*

##### 3. Garden maintenance:

*The tenant will pay a \$25 deposit for the garden. The tenant will completely maintain the garden, including all planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, pest management, and season-ending tasks. As long as the garden is maintained throughout the season, the deposit is fully refundable. In the event that the tenant is unwilling or unable to maintain the garden, the deposit will be used to cover costs for the property owner to maintain or deconstruct the garden.*

##### 4. Water usage:

*Water can be accessed at the spigot on the northeast corner of the house. Tenant will use water-wise gardening techniques. Water will be included in the price of rent.*

##### 5. Cost responsibilities:

*The renter agrees to pay for any plant material or garden supplies necessary to maintain the garden. The property owner will supply or pay for any permanent garden features that will remain on the property.*

##### 6. Close of the garden season:





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## GARDENING MATTERS CAN HELP YOU!

We serve as a central clearinghouse for community gardening and food growing resources in the Twin Cities. We host a comprehensive community garden inventory, hold community gardening events and gardener get-togethers, provide web resources, hold start-up, leadership and garden sustainability trainings, and serve as a liaison between gardens and the general public, the public sector, and businesses advocating