



GreenThumb Bylaws Template

GreenThumb Overview

Established in 1978, NYC Parks GreenThumb is proud to be the nation's largest municipally led urban gardening program, assisting over 550 gardens and over 20,000 volunteer gardeners throughout New York City. GreenThumb gardens create hubs of neighborhood pride and provide a myriad of environmental, health, economic, and social benefits to the neighborhoods in which they thrive.

The majority of GreenThumb gardens were abandoned lots transformed by volunteers into green spaces for relaxation, socializing, and growing food, or a combination. These community gardens are managed by neighborhood residents with GreenThumb support. Together GreenThumb and community gardeners make the city safer, healthier, stronger, and more sustainable.

GreenThumb supports and educates community gardeners and urban farmers across the five boroughs, while preserving open space. By providing free garden materials, technical assistance, educational workshops, and seasonal programs, GreenThumb supports neighborhood volunteers who steward community gardens as active resources that strengthen communities.

How to get news from GreenThumb:

- Visit our [website](#)¹
- [Subscribe](#) to our email newsletter²
- Follow us on social media:
 - Instagram: [@greenthumbnyc](#)
 - Facebook: [@GreenThumbNYC](#)
 - YouTube: [@GreenThumbNYC](#)
 - Twitter: [@NYCGreenThumb](#)

¹ Visit GreenThumb's website at nyc.gov/parks/greenthumb

² Subscribe to the GreenThumb newsletter at nycgovparks.org/greenthumb/news-and-newsletters-archives



GreenThumb Bylaws Requirement

NYC Parks GreenThumb requires all community garden groups under Parks jurisdiction to submit copies of their bylaws to their respective Community Engagement Coordinators³ as a prerequisite to being licensed. For in-depth details on what's required in GreenThumb bylaws, please review the [GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook](#).⁴ We offer quarterly workshops on group structure and bylaws, and we encourage members of your garden groups to attend these workshops if you haven't already. There are also abridged video recordings available to view in our [GreenThumb Group Development Toolkit](#).⁵

Writing bylaws is a great opportunity to bolster the strength of your gardening group through a shared understanding of membership rights and responsibilities, rules and procedures, governance structure, and how the group makes decisions. This template should be completed in a group setting, inviting collaboration and discussion among garden members, and should not be the work of any single individual. Please work through this document collectively and choose only the options that apply to your garden and your garden group. Remember, establishing garden bylaws is a process and will likely require multiple meetings and conversations. On the last page, GreenThumb has provided a signing section as a reminder that the most successful bylaws have the support of the garden group.

³ Find your garden's Community Engagement Coordinator at nycgovparks.org/greenthumb/staff

⁴ Download the GreenThumb Gardeners' Handbook in multiple languages at nycgovparks.org/greenthumb/resources/handbook

⁵ Explore the GreenThumb Group Development Toolkit at nycgovparks.org/greenthumb/resources/group-development



GARDEN BYLAWS

Date Ratified (month/day/year): _____

A. Name and Location

The name of the garden is _____.

The garden is located at [address: _____,]
between [cross streets: _____].

For the purposes of this document, the garden will be referred to as “the Garden.”

B. Mission Statement

Learn more about writing a mission statement on our [website](#).⁶

The purpose of the Garden is to _____ (what) _____ for _____ (who) _____ (by) _____ (how) _____

C. Membership

C.1. Eligibility

Check only those that apply.

- The Garden does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, physical ability, nationality, or religion.
- All adults must join as individuals regardless of household
- A household may join the Garden under a single membership
- Children under the age of 18, whose parent(s) or guardians are *not* members, must present proof of permission from a parent or guardian to join the Garden.
- Children under the age of 18, whose parent(s) or guardians *are* members, do not need to pay dues and do not have a work requirement.
- Other: _____

⁶ Download a Mission and Vision Questionnaire for your garden group at nycgovparks.org/pagefiles/185/GreenThumb-Mission-and-Vision_639b53c093a0e.pdf



C.2. Process for Joining

Check only those that apply.

A person interested in becoming a member of the Garden must complete the tasks selected below. Please be sure your garden group has a process for each of the items checked off; for example if "Attend a new member orientation" is selected, include who or which committee is responsible for holding orientations. To define the requirements for once people actually become members, go to section C.3..

- Contact our (circle one): GreenThumb Primary Contact Garden Coordinator
Membership Coordinator Other: _____
- Complete a total of _____ volunteer hours over the course of [amount of time: _____]
- Join a committee
- Attend [number: _____] garden meetings
- Attend a new member orientation
- Attend [number: _____] hours of garden open hours
- Attend [number: _____] hours of a garden event
- Attend [number: _____] hours of a garden workday
- Fill out a membership application
- Sign a copy of the bylaws (*highly recommended*)
- Sign a membership agreement
- Other: _____

How many of the above are required?

- A new member must complete ALL of the items checked above in order to join the garden
- A new member must complete [number: _____] of the items checked above in order to join the garden
- Other: _____



C.3. Membership Rights and Responsibilities at Each Level

Check only those that apply.

Some community gardens offer different levels of membership, e.g. member with plot, member without plot, friend of the garden, etc. If your garden doesn't have membership levels, just complete Level 1. Under "Additional rights and responsibilities," you can include any communal areas that require maintenance, including sidewalks that must be shoveled and kept clean of snow during the winter.

The Garden has [number: _____] levels of membership:

1. Level 1 (or standard) Membership: _____

- No one will be turned away for lack of funds.
- Membership dues: Sliding scale from \$ _____ to \$ _____
- Additional fee for plot(s): \$ _____
- Or any amount the member can afford to pay
- Members who cannot pay dues can do the following instead (volunteer hours, provide a service etc.): _____
(Please keep in mind that requiring additional hours for non-paying members should be reasonable – 1-2 hours on top of the existing requirement for paying members)
- Key/code to the garden: YES NO
(Please keep in mind that at least one membership level MUST come with key/code access to the garden)
- Voting rights: YES NO
- Number of hours required to hold open hours and/or volunteer in the garden: [number: _____] every MONTH YEAR/SEASON
- Meeting attendance requirement: YES NO
- If YES, please describe: _____
- Members are required to participate in the stewardship of common areas (for example: sidewalks, street trees, fences, pathways, seating areas, trash pick-up, etc.). Please describe:

- Requirement to join a garden committee: YES NO
- If YES, please describe: _____
- Additional rights and responsibilities:



2. Level 2 Membership: _____

- ✓ No one will be turned away for lack of funds.
- Membership dues: Sliding scale from \$_____ to \$_____
- Additional fee for plot(s): \$_____
- Or any amount the member can afford to pay
- Members who cannot pay dues can do the following instead (volunteer hours, provide a service etc.): _____
(Please keep in mind that requiring additional hours for non-paying members should be reasonable – 1-2 hours on top of the existing requirement for paying members)
- Key/code to the garden: YES NO
(Please keep in mind that at least one membership level MUST come with key/code access to the garden)
- Voting rights: YES NO
- Number of hours required to hold open hours and/or volunteer in the garden: [number: _____] every MONTH YEAR/SEASON
- Meeting attendance requirement: YES NO
- If YES, please describe: _____
- Members are required to participate in the stewardship of common areas (for example: sidewalks, street trees, fences, pathways, seating areas, trash pick-up, etc.). Please describe:

- Requirement to join a garden committee: YES NO
- If YES, please describe: _____
- Additional rights and responsibilities:

3. Level 3 Membership: _____

- ✓ No one will be turned away for lack of funds.
- Membership dues: Sliding scale from \$_____ to \$_____
- Additional fee for plot(s): \$_____
- Or any amount the member can afford to pay
- Members who cannot pay dues can do the following instead (volunteer hours, provide a service etc.): _____
(Please keep in mind that requiring additional hours for non-paying



members should be reasonable – 1-2 hours on top of the existing requirement for paying members)

- Key/code to the garden: YES NO
(Please keep in mind that at least one membership level MUST come with key/code access to the garden)
- Voting rights: YES NO
- Number of hours required to hold open hours and/or volunteer in the garden: [number: _____] every MONTH YEAR/SEASON
- Meeting attendance requirement: YES NO
- If YES, please describe: _____
- Members are required to participate in the stewardship of common areas (for example: sidewalks, street trees, fences, pathways, seating areas, trash pick-up, etc.). Please describe:

- Requirement to join a garden committee: YES NO
- If YES, please describe: _____
- Additional rights and responsibilities:

(If the garden has more than three levels, please describe them on a separate sheet of paper and attach.)



C.4. Garden Plots

C.4.A Communal Plots

Check only those that apply.

This garden offers members access to communal garden plots: YES NO
If you checked NO, please move on to the next section: C.4.B. Individual Plots. If you checked YES, please complete the following:

In addition to the requirements outlined in Section C.3., the Garden requires the following:

Rights of communal plot members:

- Participate in crop planning (i.e. help decide what to plant)
- Tend to the plot(s) - planting, weeding, trellising/staking
- Enter the garden at any time before sundown to tend to the plot(s)
- Harvest from the plot(s) to take home
- Access to communal tools
- Access to compost, soil, lumber etc., produced by the Garden, donated to the Garden, or supplied to the Garden by GreenThumb
- Additional rights of communal plot members:

Responsibilities of communal plot members:

- Upkeep of the plot(s) - this includes weeding, cleaning out the plot at the end of the gardening season, and additional requirements. Who is responsible?

- Additional responsibilities of communal plot members:

How are the communal plots managed? Who decides what to plant? Who is responsible for managing the waitlist? Please describe:



Who has access to the food crops that are grown in communal plot(s)? Please describe:

C.4.B Individual Plots

This garden offers members individual/family garden plots: YES NO

If you checked NO, please move on to the next section: C.5 Meetings. If you checked YES, please complete the following:

In addition to the requirements outlined in Section C.3., the Garden requires the following:

Rights of individual/family plot-holders:

Check only those that apply.

- Decide what to plant in their plot
- Enter the garden at any time during the day to tend to their plot
- Take home the harvest from their plot
- Access to communal tools
- Access to compost, soil, lumber etc., produced by the Garden, donated to the Garden, or supplied to the Garden by GreenThumb
- Additional rights of plot-holders:



Responsibilities of individual/family plot holders:
Check only those that apply.

- Upkeep of their plot - this includes weeding, cleaning out the plot at the end of the gardening season, and additional requirements:

- Upkeep of the Garden's communal areas.
- If the plot is left unattended:

(For example: Should a plot be left unattended for more than 4 weeks after the start of the growing season and/or weeds/pests take hold in or around the plot, the plot holder will be asked to rectify the situation within a month or their membership will be forfeited. May also include protocol for if a plot holder is out of town for an extended period of time.)

- Additional responsibilities of plot-holders:

How are the plots assigned and managed? Who is responsible for managing the waitlist?

Check only those that apply.

- The Garden manages a waitlist for individual plots
- An existing plot-holder has the right to renew their plot annually if they let [role or committee: _____] know by [date: _____]
- The plot waitlist is managed by [role or committee: _____]
- Members aren't guaranteed their same plot from year-to-year and must re-apply annually for plots by [date: _____]



Please describe any additional details about how the plot waitlist or assignment is managed:

C.5. Meetings

Does the Garden group have an annual meeting?⁷ YES NO

If YES, please describe (when, what is decided there, how is it announced, etc.):

Does the Garden have regular membership/general meetings?⁸ YES NO

If you checked NO, please move on to the next section. If you checked YES, please complete the following:

Garden meetings are organized as follows:

Check only those that apply.

Meetings occur every ___ week(s) ___ month(s) ___ as needed

On a regular date (e.g. the 2nd Wednesday each month):

At a regular time: _____

Any member of the public can attend a general meeting

A minimum number of members are required if there is going to be a vote of any kind: [number or percentage of total membership: _____]

⁷ An annual meeting happens once a year, usually at the start of the season, and typically includes all leaders and members. This is a great opportunity to do things like plot assignments, voting for garden leadership, amending bylaws, collecting dues, and more.

⁸ General meetings happen throughout the year. They can be weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc., and typically include all garden leaders and members. These meetings typically include things like voting on new projects, financial reports, important garden updates, working through any garden-related issues, etc.



- Date/Time/Agenda for upcoming meetings are shared:
 - At the previous meeting
 - On the garden's email list
 - Over the phone
 - On the garden fence or bulletin board
 - On the garden's social media platform(s)
 - By group chat or text message
 - Other: _____
- Notes from the meetings are shared:
 - On the garden's email list
 - On the garden's website
 - On paper somewhere inside the garden (please describe: _____
_____)
 - On the garden's social media platform(s)
 - Other: _____

C.6. Process for revoking membership

Check only those that apply.

The Garden reserves the right to deny or revoke Garden membership to any person or people whose behavior is deemed:

- In violation of the Garden rules, bylaws, and/or GreenThumb License Agreement (*highly recommended*)
- In violation of city, state, and/or federal law (*highly recommended*)
- Destructive to or theft of the garden property, plants, tools, furniture, plots, and amenities
- Disruptive or abusive of the peace and wellbeing of the garden, its members, and/or the public: verbal altercations, hate speech, sexual harassment, etc.
- Unauthorized duplication/distribution of the garden key or code
- Unauthorized changing of the Garden lock
- Other: _____

Revocation of membership for any of these violations occurs through this process:

Check only those that apply.

- Three strikes, you're out! If the gardener violates the garden rules and/or bylaws three times, this is grounds for expulsion
- One violation of the garden rules and/or bylaws is grounds for expulsion or revocation for _____ [months/years]



- A series of warnings or membership probation (please describe):

- Other:

The gardener is notified through these method(s):

Check only those that apply.

- By phone
- By email and/or in writing (*highly recommended*)
- In person
- Other: _____

The gardener has this much time to respond: _____

Please describe who is involved in the process to decide whether to revoke someone's membership, how they will investigate the situation, and any meetings they will have with the gardeners to discuss.

The final decision is made by (i.e. a steering committee or general membership, via vote or consensus, at a general meeting or special meeting, with a quorum of ____, etc.):

Membership may be reinstated if:



Do these leadership positions have terms?⁹ YES NO

If YES, please describe: _____

Do these leadership positions have term limits?¹⁰ YES NO

If YES, please describe: _____

The Garden Leadership above is selected through:

Check only those that apply.

- Elections at an Annual Meeting held every [month or season: _____]
- Elections held as needed
- A nominee must receive [percentage: _____] of the vote to be approved, even if unopposed
- Any member in good standing can nominate themselves or another member in good standing
- A minimum/quorum of [number: _____] members must participate in the vote
- Members may vote via email or proxy (a signed statement authorizing someone at the meeting to vote on behalf of a member who can't make the meeting)
- Other: _____

For the purposes of this document, the garden's governing body or person is referred to as "Garden Leadership."

D.2. Meetings of the Garden Leadership¹¹

Does the Garden Leadership as described in section D.1. meet outside of regular/membership/general meetings?

YES NO

If you checked NO, please move on to the next section. If you checked YES, please complete the following:

The Garden's Leadership meetings are organized as follows:

Check only those that apply.

- Meetings occur every ___ week(s) ___ month(s)
- Meetings are held as needed

⁹ A term is a particular length of time that a person serves in a specific elected role. For example, U.S. presidents serve a term of four years.

¹⁰ A term limit is the maximum number of terms someone can serve in a specific elected role. For example, U.S. presidents can be re-elected once and serve two terms. Some organizations limit only the number of *consecutive* (back-to-back) terms.

¹¹ GreenThumb does not require this section in our bylaws, but we highly encourage garden groups to include it.



- Any member in good standing can attend and observe a Garden Leadership meeting
- A minimum number of members of the Garden Leadership are required if there is going to be a vote of any kind: [number or percentage of total: _____]
- Announcements about upcoming meetings are shared:
 - At the previous meeting
 - On the garden's email list
 - Over the phone
 - On the garden fence or bulletin board
 - On the garden's social media platform(s)
 - By group chat or text message
 - ____ days in advance of the meeting
 - Other: _____
- Notes from the meetings are shared:
 - On the garden's email list
 - On the garden's website
 - On paper somewhere inside the garden (please describe: _____)
 - Other: _____
- Other: _____

D.3. Garden Committees

Some gardens have different committees to handle specific administrative or garden-related work, such as a membership committee, events committee, fundraising committee, compost committee, communal areas committee, etc.

Please list and describe all committees at the Garden, if applicable. Please describe the roles, responsibilities, and rights of each committee, the frequency of their meetings, and anything else you'd like to add (other than decision-making, which will be in the next section). You can attach a separate sheet if this is not enough space, or there are more committees:

1. Committee Name: _____

Please describe the roles, responsibilities, and rights of this committee:



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2. Committee Name: _____

Please describe the roles, responsibilities, and rights of this committee:

3. Committee Name: _____

Please describe the roles, responsibilities, and rights of this committee:

4. Committee Name: _____

Please describe the roles, responsibilities, and rights of this committee:

5. Committee Name: _____

Please describe the roles, responsibilities, and rights of this committee:



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E. Decision-Making

Please complete the matrix on the following page to describe who makes decisions in the garden. Some questions to consider: Who decides what? Can committees and/or chairs make decisions on their own? Can the general membership overturn a decision of the Garden Leadership or a committee? Please include all committees listed in Section D.3. above. If the matrix isn't applicable to your garden, you can also describe your decision-making process on a separate page.

Use a “✓” to indicate that the chair or committee can make this decision on their own.

Use a “Δ” to indicate that the chair or committee can make this decision as a recommendation that needs to be brought to the full membership for final approval or voting.

Use a “○” to indicate that the chair or committee can make this decision as a recommendation that needs to be brought to the Garden Leadership for final approval.

Example:

	Garden Leadership	General Membership	Events Committee
Approve new members	✓		
Approve new projects in the garden	Δ	✓	
Approve event proposals			✓



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Decision-Making Matrix

<p>✓ = the chair or committee can make this decision on their own.</p> <p>△ = the chair or committee can make this decision as a recommendation that needs to be brought to the full membership for final approval or voting.</p> <p>○ = the chair or committee can make this decision as a recommendation that needs to be brought to the Garden Leadership for final approval.</p>	Garden Leadership	Garden Membership	[Other Committee or Chair]					
Approve new members								
Approve new projects in the garden								
Approve event proposals								
Revoke membership privileges								
Assign plots								
Approve purchases using garden funds								
Approve emergency expenses								
Vote members into the Garden Leadership								
Prune trees/shrubs								
Amend the bylaws								
Approve or submit a grant proposal								
Approve a new partnership with an outside group or elected official								



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The decisions outlined in the matrix on page 19 are made by:
Check only those that apply.

- Vote (51% or majority)
- Vote (2/3)
- Vote (other: _____)
- Consensus
- With a quorum of: _____
- Other:

Additional considerations:
Check only those that apply.

- Members who are unable to attend the meeting may still vote by
 - Proxy¹²
 - Email to _____
 - Text message to _____
 - Online survey
 - Other: _____
- Members who are unable to attend the meeting must respect the decision of the vote regardless of outcome
- Members who are not on the winning side of a vote must respect the decision of the vote regardless of outcome

F. Conflicts and Disputes

Disagreements are inevitable. The Garden handles conflicts and disputes as follows:
Check only those that apply.

- Consult the garden rules and bylaws for an answer and ensure that the subject of the dispute does not break any city, state, or federal laws.
- Conflicting parties must resolve the conflict amongst themselves
- If a garden member or volunteer accuses another member of misconduct, they should have proof in the form of another witness, photos, video, etc. Should they not have proof, the Garden Leadership will maintain a record of the incident(s).
- If conflicting parties cannot resolve the conflict, the disagreement must be brought to the attention of the Garden Leadership. The Garden Leadership will work to resolve the conflict and will maintain a record of the incident(s).

¹² Voting by proxy allows a garden member to designate another garden member to vote on their behalf if they cannot attend the election



- If the conflicting parties cannot resolve the conflict, the disagreement must be brought to a free mediation service (please see the “Conflict Resolution” chapter of the GreenThumb Gardener’s Handbook)
- If the conflicting parties cannot resolve the conflict, the disagreement must be brought to a special committee within the garden or the garden’s network that is specifically designated to handle conflict.

G. Finances

The Garden handles finances as follows:

G.1. Account

Check only those that apply.

- The Garden does not handle money
- The Garden only handles cash
- The Garden has a bank account
- The Garden has [organization name: _____] as a fiscal sponsor who holds the garden’s funds
- The person/people/committee authorized to access the bank account is:

- The person/people/committee authorized to hold the garden’s credit and/or debit card is:

- The person/people authorized to access the garden’s bank account for petty cash and reimbursements is/are: _____
- The person/people responsible for managing the garden’s cash is/are:

G.2. Purchasing Proposals

Check only those that apply.

- Garden funds may not be used for personal items.
- Any garden member can propose the purchase of a particular item.
- If the requested purchase is over \$____, the decision must go to the general membership.
- If the requested purchase is under \$____, the decision can be made by the
 - Garden Leadership Treasurer Finance Committee
 - Other: _____
- Other: _____



G.3. Reimbursements

Check only those that apply.

- Gardeners may request petty cash for small purchases under \$_____.
- Gardeners may use their own money for approved purchases and get reimbursed.
- The timeline for reimbursement is: _____
- Gardeners must get prior approval before purchasing items for reimbursement from:

- All purchases must have a receipt to be kept with the garden's financial records
- Other: _____

G.4. Reporting

Check only those that apply.

- The Garden has a system for keeping track of and reporting garden income and expenses
- A financial report including income and expenses will be shared at all general/membership meetings.
- Financial records will be shared with members upon request.
- An annual budget will be prepared by the Garden Leadership and presented for approval by the membership once per year
- Any financial decisions made and executed will be announced at the next general/membership meeting.
- Other: _____

G.5. Grants

Check only those that apply.

- Any person can bring up a grant opportunity to the general membership and/or Garden Leadership
- Garden members must get approval from _____ in order to apply for grants for the Garden
- Any garden member can participate in the grant application process.
- All grants for the garden are to be written and managed by:
 - Garden Leadership
 - Treasurer
 - Finance Committee
 - Member(s) who proposed the grant
 - Other: _____
- Garden members may propose fundraising ideas (markets, yard sales, events, grants, online fundraisers, etc.)
 - At membership meetings
 - To the Garden Leadership
 - To a committee (finance, events, other: _____)
 - Other: _____



- Grant funds are stored in the Garden's bank account or with the Garden's fiscal sponsor
- Garden members will be notified about fundraising project proposals
 - At a meeting
 - Over email to the full garden membership
 - By group chat or text to the full garden membership
 - [number of weeks or months:____] In advance of a membership meeting
 - Other:
- Garden members will be notified about any grant proposals that have been awarded
 - At a meeting
 - Over email to the full garden membership
 - By group chat or text to the full garden membership
 - [number of weeks or months:____] In advance of a membership meeting
 - Other:



H. Amending the Bylaws (check all that apply, and only those that apply)

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Garden members may propose changes to the bylaws as follows:

Check only those that apply.

- Once per year at an annual meeting
- At any membership meeting
- To the Garden Leadership
- To a special bylaws or arbitration committee
- Over email to the garden membership
- [number of weeks or months: _____] In advance of a membership meeting or annual meeting
- Other:

Changes to the bylaws will be announced to the garden membership:

Check only those that apply.

- Over email
- In the meeting notes
- On the garden fence/bulletin board
- At the next general/membership meeting
- Other:

A new copy of the bylaws will be distributed to all members:¹³

Check only those that apply.

- GreenThumb Outreach Coordinator
- Digitally over email
- Digitally on our website
- Printed copies distributed at the next general/membership meeting
- Printed copies in the tool shed
- Other:

¹³ Garden groups can request translations of their bylaws from their Outreach Coordinator. Translations will be subject to availability and staff capacity.

