

# COMMUNITY GARDENING AT MCVEAN INCUBATOR FARM

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McVeau Incubator Farm operates on part of Claireville Conservation Area, on leased land from the Toronto and Region Conservation Area (TRCA). We provide land, resources and guidance to help people in the community grow vegetables.

Our graduated program is designed to be inclusive, ensuring that everyone in the community can participate regardless of their level of gardening experience or the amount of time they are able to commit. Whether you are a complete beginner with no prior experience, someone who can only dedicate limited time to growing, or an experienced grower seeking to invest significant time and effort to pursue income farming, our program provides tailored support and opportunities to help you achieve your goals.

Our Community Gardener Program is one of our entry level programs and requires some basic prior experience gardening. Below are the minimum time requirements for each month during the garlic-growing season.

## 1 TIMELINE

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| Month          | Activity                   | Visits              | Time commitment  |
|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| March          | Registration               | 1 visit             | 1 hour           |
| May 1 – Oct 9  | Gardening Period           | 1-2 visits per week | 2 hours per week |
| Oct 9 – Oct 31 | Final Harvest and Clean Up | 1 visit per week    | 1 hour per week  |

## 2 REGISTRATION

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In early spring, as soon as the weather is agreeable, we will arrange a visit to the farm, where you will visit with the team and get familiar with the layout of the farm.

After this you will need to do the following

- Sign the lease
- Pay the fee of \$400
- Submit a basic crop plan for your plot showing a list of crops and a layout. The layout will help you plant efficiently and properly estimate the quantities you can fit on your plot. We will use your layout to erect any trellises or plant supports you may require as we provide these.

## 3 ACCESS YOUR PLOT

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From May 1st, you will be able to access your plot and start planting. You will receive a well-prepped, clearly marked 20 feet by 20 feet plot with a thick layer of organic compost mulch. We practice a no-till farming method at the community plots which means that we do not fork and turn the soil and aim to minimise the disruption of the soil.

You will receive the gate combination lock code and can access the plot at any time. We would like to preserve a serene, natural, healthful environment. Please observe the following:

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- No amplified music
- No smoking
- No drinking
- No dogs off leash
- No gatherings

## 4 PLANTING

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### 4.1 DIRECT SOWING

To direct sow seeds, make a trench by separating the layer of mulch such that the clay topsoil is just visible. Sow your seeds on the exposed soil. Generally, if the seeds are small, like carrot or lettuce, lightly cover them with the mulch from the edge of the trench. If the seeds are larger, like peas and beans, you can cover the seeds with more mulch from the edge of the trench. The idea is that the clay topsoil is always moist due to the thick mulch layer so that the seeds will not need water to germinate.

### 4.2 TRANSPLANTING

To sow transplanted seedlings, remove the layer of mulch so that the topsoil is exposed. Make a hole in the topsoil, place the transplant inside, and cover it with mulch.

### 4.3 PLANT SPACING

Planting in straight lines with sufficient space between plants and about two feet between rows makes it much easier to weed. Proper spacing also helps plants to grow larger. For example, your carrots will be larger if they are sufficiently spaced.

## 5 SOIL AMENDMENTS

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Based on soil testing done by a local university, the soil on our garden plots is some of the best quality compared to soil tested at other farms in the GTA. It is covered with a thin layer of compost made of wood chips as well as horse and chicken manure. Therefore, it should not be necessary to make any soil amendments, however, it is still a good idea to top dress your plants with organic compost or composted manure to make sure they have the nutrients they need. We are an organic farm and therefore those are the only allowed amendments.

## 6 WATERING

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We use a combination of trucked-in water, harvested rainwater from the barn and other structures, and water from the creek. Supplying water is very expensive so we are only able to supply a limited amount of water. However, our no-till farming method, including the thick layer of mulch on your plot, significantly reduces the need for water as the thick mulch layer keeps the topsoil moist.

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 We practice what is referred to as deficit irrigation. By limiting the immediate availability of surface water, the plant is "tricked" into searching deeper within the soil profile for moisture, thus strengthening and extending its root system. A robust root system makes the plant more resilient to actual drought conditions, better able to absorb nutrients, and often improves the flavour concentration of the produce.

Infrequent, deep watering prompts roots to extend downward into deeper, moister soil layers. In contrast, frequent, shallow watering keeps the roots near the soil surface, making them vulnerable to heat and drought stress.

We have successfully grown veggies on our plots without adding water. The typical spring showers are more than enough to provide deep watering for crops in spring. By the time summer comes around the well-developed root system is well able to handle the hotter, dryer summer months.

We have noticed that many gardeners feel it necessary to water each time they visit their plot without checking the weather forecast to see if it has recently rained or if there is rain on the way. Generally, they are unnecessarily occupied with watering to the point where it results in yellowing leaves, wilted, stunted growth, and soft stems because the roots are "drowned" and cannot absorb oxygen.

We provide barrels which we fill once a week. To water you will dip the watering can into the barrel to fill the can with water and then you will hand water your plants.

 To reiterate: access to water is a challenge at McVean Farm. Still, our farming method allows us to consistently produce healthy, abundant vegetables each year.

 **We will not be entertaining any complaints about water.**

## 7 WEEDING

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It is important to keep your plot well weeded for the following reasons:

- Better water retention 
- Reduced competition for space
- Fewer pests and diseases
- Improved soil health
- Prevention of undesirable compounds
- Enhanced visual appeal
- Easier harvesting

On occasion we will be able to help with weeding between rows if there is sufficient space (2 feet) between rows.

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## 8 TRELLISES AND OTHER GARDEN ADD-ONS

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We provide wire fencing to be used as trellises. This will be used for peas, cucumbers, tomatoes etc. Please do not add any other items like stakes, plant labels etc. to your plot. Also, only use biodegradable twine to secure tomatoes, for example, to the trellis.

## 9 FARM TOOLS

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Each gardener is responsible for bringing their own tools. We will have some tools available for gardeners in case they need extra tools.  Tools can be left on your plot as we do not provide a storage area.

## 10 HARVESTING

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We do not offer storage for your harvested veggies. You will have to take your harvested veggies home for processing (e.g. washing, cutting, packaging).

## 11 SEASON WRAP UP

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Here's a summary of the end-of-season requirements

- **Remove belongings:** All gardeners must remove any personal items, such as farm tools, from the farm by October 31.
- **Perennials:** If you have planted perennials and wish to keep them, you need to dig them up and take them with you.

Starting in November, the farm team will cut down all remaining plants and add mulch to prepare for the next growing season.