Nillumbik Shire Council

Community Gardens Policy

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# Introduction

Nillumbik Shire Council values community gardens as a unique form of open space which is managed by the community for the production of food. They are places for developing practical knowledge of sustainable living practices, as well as building community connection and resilience.

# Definition and Scope

Community gardens are places where people come together to grow produce, to learn horticultural skills, to share seed, produce and knowledge, to relax and reflect, to make friends and connect with a diverse range of local people.

Community gardens are usually not-for-profit and run by volunteers. The majority are a registered incorporated association managed by a committee made up of elected members and operating under a constitution. Many community gardens act under a partnership arrangement with Local Government.

There are a number of different models of community garden structure. The most common forms are:

* Allocation of individual plots or allotments to members with some shared areas e.g. propagation shed.
* Collective management of the entire garden by members.
* Planter boxes on the footpath with collective management from local interest groups e.g. street traders.
* Verge gardens where garden beds are established on the nature strip. Verge gardening is not applicable to Nillumbik as the planting of verges is currently covered by the Council document ‘*Landscaping your Nature Strip’,* which stipulates that only indigenous plants listed in the ‘*Live Local Plant Local’* guide can be planted.
* School kitchen gardens can be defined as a community garden when local residents outside the school community can join the garden in partnership with the school.
* Gardens managed by Council, with the plot operator issued with a permit under a fee arrangement.

This Policy pertains specifically to community gardens that exist on Council owned and/or managed land, therefore community gardens that operate on private owned land or land owned by State Government are outside the scope of the policy.

It should be noted that while Council actively encourages the establishment of community gardens as long term projects, circumstances may arise where the land concerned may be required for other purposes. If this situation arises, Council will work collaboratively with the respective entities to find an alternative site to support the ongoing operations of the community garden and their re-establishment.

# Purpose

The Community Garden Policy outlines the role of Council in the provision and management of community gardens on Council owned and/or managed land, including its resource commitment and the outcomes it seeks to achieve. It includes the planning guidelines by which the gardens are expected to operate as well as how Council will assess requests for new community gardens. In addition the Policy clarifies the responsibilities and rights of community gardeners.

This policy responds primarily to the five goals of the Nillumbik Council Plan (2013-17):

* To enable a better future for Nillumbik residents and encourage healthy, safe and resilient communities through the provision of quality services.
* To preserve and nurture the natural environment of the Green Wedge for future and current generations through responsible leadership and stewardship.
* To provide infrastructure and plan for a built environment which respects and preserves the unique character of the Green Wedge.
* To develop a prosperous local economy through partnerships with local business, governments and community, consistent with our Green Wedge values.
* To provide good governance, leadership and responsible financial management and to make decisions in an inclusive and transparent manner.

This Policy aligns with the community values as identified in *Picture Nillumbik*, the Green Wedge Management Plan 2010-2025, Environment Charter 2013, Climate Change Action Plan 2010-2015, Open Space Strategy 2005, Environmental Education Strategy 2012 and the Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017.

The Nillumbik *Community Garden Guidelines* and the *Planter Box Guidelines* are the companion documents to this policy. The Guidelines provide advice for groups wanting to start a community garden, the operational and management considerations of community gardening and the application process.

# Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

* Facilitate the establishment of community gardens on council owned and/or managed land when it is in accordance with any master plan for the site.
* Provide guidelines and procedures to ensure consistency in the standards and management of all community gardens across Nillumbik.
* Provide appropriate opportunities for community gardens, according to the Shire’s capacity, community need and the availability of suitable land.
* Support the capacity of existing community gardens as assets within the Shire.
* Clarify the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in community gardens.
* Support community gardens to be self-managed to increase community ownership.
* Promote knowledge and access to fresh, organic and locally produced fruit and vegetables.
* Promote sustainable gardening practices.

# Planning principles

Nillumbik Shire Council will assist in locating a possible new garden site subject to the following:

* The existence of suitable available land.
* The support of neighbours living adjacent to and near the proposed site.
* Access to existing public facilities such as toilets and meeting rooms.
* Demonstrated interest and commitment.
* Alignment with existing Management Plans and all other planning, regulatory and legislative requirements.
* Usability of the site.
* Compatibility with surrounding land uses.
* Soil quality and drainage.
* Sun exposure.
* Accessibility to public transport.
* Accessibility to supporting infrastructure such as water and public toilets.

In addition, it will be important that existing open space users are not disadvantaged as a result of the establishment of a community garden.

# Benefits of community gardens

## Benefits to Community

* A sense of achievement that is obtained through cultivating fresh produce.
* Opportunity to socialise within an inter-generational and culturally diverse group and create a sense of belonging.
* Development of skills such as gardening, co-operation and collective decision making.
* Increased access to affordable and nutritious food.
* Opportunity to improve personal health through physical activity.
* Enhanced neighbourhood cohesion and sense of community.
* Enhanced local food security.
* Demonstration of best practice in sustainable gardening practices.

## Benefits to Council

* Opportunity to collaborate with members of the public.
* Provision of spaces for education, demonstrations and workshops, such as composting, food production and water conservation.
* Aesthetic improvement to community lands.
* Improved health and wellbeing of community.

## Benefits to the Environment

* Reductions in the amount of green waste sent to landfill through composting.
* Reduction in food miles associated with the commercial production of food.
* Reduction of pesticides and herbicides entering waterways.
* Onsite harvesting of rain water and efficient distribution of water.

# Role of Council

Nillumbik Shire Council recognises that community gardens provide a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefits. Council promotes the development of community gardens by supporting community groups to self-manage garden sites on Council land. Any direct involvement by Council is subject to available resources. This approach leads to increased community ownership and the long-term sustainability of community gardens. The role of Council is as follows:

* Provision of information, knowledge and resources to assist the community in developing, operating and participating in community gardens.
* Supporting training opportunities to build the capacity of community garden groups and volunteers to facilitate the success and sustainability of community gardens.
* Promoting existing community gardens and activities through Council’s website, newsletters and events.
* Advising community garden committees of any changes that Council makes that may impact the operation of the garden.
* Assessing applications, provision of land and compliance to guidelines.
* Determining what use will proceed if there are competing demands for any particular area of land, and ensure the uses on any particular piece of land are compatible.
* Managing the Nillumbik Community Fund through which small seed funding for community gardens can be sought.
* Planning the location of community gardens.
* Establishing a framework for community gardens in Nillumbik.

## Procedure for starting a new community garden

For more comprehensive information regarding the requirements and resource support for completing each step refer to the Community Gardens Guidelines.

* Step 1: Establish a Community Garden Group
* Step 2: Discuss your Proposal with a Council Representative
* Step 3: Conduct a Site Assessment
* Step 4: Public Consultation
* Step 5: Council Assessment Process
* Step 6: Complete and Submit the Community Garden Application Form
* Step 7: Enter into a Lease Agreement with Council

## Nillumbik Local Food initiatives

Nillumbik Council supports and/or encourages a range of local food production initiatives to accommodate the different needs of residents living and working in the Shire.

* Farms
* Farmers’ Markets
* Open Farm Day
* Backyard Production
* Local Food Directory
* PODs (gardening groups)
* Edendale Environment Centre
* Seed and Food Swaps
* Workshops
* Community Gardens
* Home Harvest
* School Kitchen Gardens
* Independent Retailers
* Food Networks e.g. Local Food Connect
* Trader Planter Boxes

# Role of Community Gardeners

Community gardens should be managed by the community, however this must be undertaken in such a way that the needs of a diverse range of stakeholders are taken into account. Further information on the responsibilities of community gardens is located in the Community Gardens Guidelines.

## Responsibilities

Community gardeners are responsible for maintaining their garden so that the health and safety of the neighbouring community is not adversely impacted. In particular, gardeners are responsible for ensuring that:

* They do not discriminate against anyone due to differences in disability, race, culture, sexuality, age or gender.
* They develop positive and cooperative relationships with the surrounding neighbourhood, local businesses, other users of the land and other gardeners.
* They regularly communicate with Council, neighbours and partners.
* Decision making is democratic, transparent and inclusive.
* Noise levels do not disturb neighbours.
* Any water leaving the garden is not contaminated by sediment, fertiliser, manure or excess organic matter.
* Recycled organic systems are maintained so as not to attract vermin or produce unpleasant odours.
* Noxious and environmental weeds are actively controlled and organic principles should be applied to the use of herbicides and pesticides.
* If rainwater tanks are installed they should be maintained to ensure water quality is high.
* The garden is kept tidy so as not to create an unpleasant environment for local residents.
* Visitors are welcomed to the garden, and members of the public can access the community garden during daylight hours.
* The terms set out in any lease and/or permit are adhered to and notifying Council of any changes to the community garden following the submission of the Community Garden Management Plan.

## Rights

Community gardeners have the right to:

* Develop their own internal policies, organisational procedures and Plan of Management providing they liaise with Council.
* Be informed by Council of any decisions or policy changes that may affect the project.
* Be treated with respect by other gardeners, local residents and Council representatives.
* Negotiate a secure and reasonable agreement with Council.