

Opening Community Gardens Safely

April 24, 2020

COVID-19 Prevention Measures

These measures apply when sustained community transmission is confirmed by the public health authorities.

Context

A number of questions are arising from regional public health directorates, organizations, and national and regional partners on the possibility of starting the season for community and collective gardens while respecting physical distancing and hygiene measures against COVID-19. Many partners are trying to determine if it will be possible to open community gardens on May 1, the start date for direct seeding. The most significant production usually begins in the second or third week of May. Québec has a short cultivation period. The decision to open the gardens warrants timely examination as a delayed opening may compromise production capacity for the entire summer season.

This document's purpose is to support the decision-making of local authorities regarding the opening of community gardens by providing evidence of their benefits to population health as well as the conditions to respect to ensure the protection of their users in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A community garden generally refers to a piece of land divided into parcels that can be tended by an individual, a family or collectively by a group of friends. A collective garden refers to a single parcel of land tended by a group of members who share the decision-making and tasks (MAPAQ: <https://www.mapaq.gouv.qc.ca/fr/Productions/agricultureurbaine/trucsconseils/Pages/Jardinagedanslesespacespublics.aspx> [in French only]). The organizations responsible for managing this type of initiative vary (e.g. municipalities, boroughs, organizations, citizens' groups and public institutions).

In the context of this pandemic and the increased demand for food aid, gardening could help improve access to nutritious foods for Québec residents. However, not all Québec residents have access to a private space where they can grow fruits and vegetables, hence the importance of considering opening community gardens in the coming weeks to ensure, if applicable, that protection measures are in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission among gardeners.

Analysis

The scientific literature analyzed suggests that community gardens contribute to healthy lifestyle habits, the physical and mental health of their users and the social cohesion of communities. Community gardens play a number of roles in the community. They contribute to food production through gardening activities while promoting interaction among users (Alaimo et al., 2016).

A number of studies show that community gardens have a positive impact on certain physical health determinants of the gardeners: improved access to and increased intake of fruit and vegetables, improved knowledge and attitudes toward a healthy diet, increased physical activity, a lower BMI and reduced blood pressure (Malberg Dyg et al., 2019; Kunpeuk et al., 2019; Garcia et al., 2018). Their use could also contribute to mental health by reducing stress (Kunpeuk et al., 2019; Genter et al., 2015) and improving self-esteem (Malberg Dyg et al., 2019).

International studies also show that community gardens can improve quality of life for individuals and increase social capital within local communities (Glover et al. 2005; Twiss et al., 2003). Some evaluative research demonstrates that these gardens create opportunities for social and intergenerational interaction among residents that is conducive to their well-being (Pascoe & Howes, 2007). Research conducted in Québec also reports that these initiatives help combat social exclusion and are important spaces for promoting social ties (Boulianne et al., 2010).

Data regarding the role of community gardens in promoting food security for low income or food insecure households is inconclusive (Malberg Dyg et al., 2019). Studies in Canada show that the use of community gardens cannot on their own protect low-income households from food insecurity and that these households are more likely to obtain food through other means (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2009; Huisken et al., 2016). By definition, community and collective gardens can be gathering places. However, it is possible to adapt practices to respect the protective measures against the coronavirus, thus allowing the public to enjoy the benefits of gardens during the summer.

The decision whether to open community and collective gardens is ultimately that of local authorities, in consultation with the regional public health directorates. This decision must take into account the regional epidemiology of COVID-19 and the capacity to create the conditions necessary for respecting the distancing and hygiene recommendations listed in the following section.

Recommendations

To allow the opening and safe use of community food production spaces (community gardens, collective gardens or other), it is recommended to:

1. Prohibit all gatherings and ensure compliance with physical distancing.
 - Restrict access to authorized individuals only (registered users).
 - Limit the number of users present in the garden at the same time, depending on the size of the garden and configuration of the space. Display the maximum number of users permitted at the entrance of the garden. Depending on the garden, the measures for ensuring physical distancing can include, for example, a rotating schedule for access where users must reserve their time slot in advance, naming a person responsible for controlling comings and goings, and extending the garden's opening hours to allow users to access the garden at different times.
 - Configure the space to allow for a 2-metre distance between individuals at all times. Pay particular attention to bottlenecks and areas where people may cross paths or crowd (e.g. entrance, sheds and lineups). Install markers to promote compliance with distancing guidelines in specified locations.
 - Prevent the same plot being used by more than one person. Assign one specific lot per family living in the same household.
2. Ensure the safe use of physical spaces, equipment and tools.
 - Have an employee or volunteer at the entrance to control the comings and going of users, direct them and supervise their use of the equipment and tools, while maintaining a 2-metre distance from them.

Hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette

- Set up an area for hand washing with water and soap or a hydroalcoholic solution, accessible at the entrance of the garden.
- Ask each user to wash their hands each time they enter and exit the garden.
- Provide the necessary cleaning products.
- Display posters reminding users of hand hygiene measures and respiratory etiquette.

Using equipment and gardening tools

- Avoid the sharing of material and equipment as much as possible. Encourage users to bring their own personal tools and equipment.
- Gardening tools that belong to the garden must be disinfected before and after each use. Limit the use of tools to one user, or to users from the same household, at a time.
- Display instructions for users on how to use and disinfect the tools and shared equipment clearly and in an appropriate area.
- Provide the necessary disinfectants. Refer to the following list as needed: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.

Using common spaces and toilets

- Limit the use of common spaces to a minimum.
- Frequently clean work and storage spaces, frequently touched surfaces and common areas (picnic tables, sheds, accessories, etc.): <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/covid-19/environment/surface-cleaning>.
- Reserve sanitary facilities (toilets) for employees and volunteers only. Note that this recommendation can be adapted to each region's recommended practices with regards to access to municipal buildings and other facilities of the same type, according to the evolution of the epidemiological situation.
- Clean common areas and disinfect sanitary facilities following the recommended procedures and using a normally-used disinfectant a minimum of 3 times daily or more, depending on the area's frequency of use. Refer to the following list as needed: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.

3. Communicate measures to follow to users

- Inform users, from the start of the season, of the procedures to follow when using the community garden in the time of COVID-19, through the regular communication channels (e.g. letter or email).
- Display posters at the garden entrance and by the equipment, reminding users of the measures to take: physical distancing, hand washing, limited use of common areas, limited use and disinfection of tools, etc.
- Prohibit access to any user presenting symptoms compatible with COVID-19 or who are in voluntary or mandatory isolation.

Applying the general public health measures in effect

It should be remembered that the public health guidelines for the population as a whole also apply to the use of community and collective gardens, as with all other activities outside the home.

- It is currently recommended that individuals over 70, with chronic conditions, or who are immunocompromised stay at home. It is therefore recommended that they do not visit the gardens in the current context.
- Isolating in the home is still recommended for anyone experiencing symptoms of illness (cough, fever or other symptoms as mentioned on the following site: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/>, or who is a high- or moderate-risk contact of a COVID-19 positive person. Under no circumstances should these individuals enter a community garden.
- If a user develops symptoms while in the garden, they must immediately leave the premises, follow the isolation guidelines and call 811 or the Government of Québec's public helpline for COVID-19, at 1-877-644-4545.

Note: This document was written in response to a request in the health emergency context of COVID-19. As it was created within a short time frame and based on knowledge obtained from a quick examination of publications and from a non-exhaustive summary analysis of the scientific literature, the findings presented in this document may need to be reviewed as the scientific knowledge related to the current pandemic develops.

References

INSPQ documents consulted

- Avis de l'INSPQ sur les jardins communautaires et collectifs, April 8, 2020 [in French only]
- INSPQ publications on COVID-19
 - Recommandations intérimaires concernant les organismes communautaires, March 29, 2020 [in French only]
 - Interim Recommendations for Agricultural Workers in a Crop and Livestock Production, March 28, 2020
 - Interim Recommendations for Garden Centres and Swimming Pools, Nurseries and Landscaping Companies - Gradual Resumption of Activities Phase, April 13, 2020

Scientific articles

- Alaimo, K., Beavers, A. W., Crawford, C., Snyder, E. H., & Litt, J. S. (2016). Amplifying Health Through Community Gardens: A Framework for Advancing Multicomponent, Behaviorally Based Neighborhood Interventions. *Current Environmental Health Reports*, 3(3), 302-312. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40572-016-0105-0>
- Boulianne, M., Olivier-d'Avignon, G., & Galarneau, V. (2010). Les retombées sociales du jardinage communautaire et collectif dans la conurbation de Québec. *VertigO: La revue électronique en sciences de l'environnement*, 10(2).
- Garcia, M. T., Ribeiro, S. M., Germani, A. C. C. G., & Bogus, C. M. (2018). The impact of urban gardens on adequate and healthy food: a systematic review. *Public Health Nutrition*, 21(2), 416-425. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980017002944>
- Genter, C., Roberts, A., Richardson, J., & Sheaff, M. (2015). The contribution of allotment gardening to health and wellbeing: A systematic review of the literature. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 78(10), 593-605.
- Glover, T. D., Parry, D. C., & Shinew, K. J. (2005). Building Relationships, Accessing Resources: Mobilizing Social Capital in Community Garden Contexts. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 37(4), 450-474.
- Huisken, A., Orr, S. K., & Tarasuk, V. (2017). Adults' food skills and use of gardens are not associated with household food insecurity in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 107(6), e526-e532. <https://doi.org/10.17269/cjph.107.5692>
- Kirkpatrick, S. I., & Tarasuk, V. (2009). Food insecurity and participation in community food programs among low-income Toronto families. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 100(2), 135-139.

Kunpeuk, W., Spence, W., Phulkerd, S., Suphanchaimat, R., & Pitayarangsarit, S. (2019). The impact of gardening on nutrition and physical health outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Health Promotion International*, 9008939, d00. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daz027>

Malberg Dyg, P., Christensen, S., & Peterson, C. J. (2019). Community gardens and wellbeing amongst vulnerable populations: a thematic review. *Health Promotion International*, 9008939, d00. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daz067>

Pascoe, J., & Howes, M. (2017). A Growing Movement: Motivations for Joining Community Gardens. *WIT Transactions on Ecology and the Environment*, 226, 381-389.

Twiss, J., Dickinson, J., Duma, S., Kleinman, T., Paulsen, H., & Rilveria, L. (2003). Community Gardens: Lessons Learned From California Healthy Cities and Communities. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(9), 1435-1438.

Unpublished document

Information sheet – Jardins communautaires et collectifs, MSSS

Opening Community Gardens Safely

AUTHORS

Comité promotion prévention [Prevention Promotion Committee]

Marie-Claude Paquette
Laurie Plamondon
Caroline Laberge
Julie Lévesque
Annie Montreuil

COLLABORATORS

Comité sur les mesures populationnelles [Population Measures Committee]

Marilou Kiely
Vladimir Gilca
Chantal Sauvageau

TRANSLATION

Emily Wilson

LAYOUT

Charlène Bessenay

© Gouvernement du Québec (2020)

Publication N°: 2982 -English version

The French version is entitled *Ouverture sécuritaire des jardins communautaires* is also available on the website of the Institut national de santé publique du Québec at: <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/publications/2982-jardins-communautaires-collectifs-covid19>