

Garden Leadership Committee Toolkit

One-on-one member communication

Overview

Communicate one-on-one with specific gardeners if their plots become weedy/abandoned, work with membership committee to reassign plots and assist with interpersonal issues if individual issues arise. This may involve conflict management.

Time commitment: Varies, March – October

Keys to success

- The best way to prevent conflict is to proactively and collectively establish and document clear guidelines, processes and protocol for when rules are broken.
- Conflict is inevitable whenever you have two or more people sharing a space and resources. Many conflicts arise out of misunderstandings, miscommunication and a lack of clearly documented garden policies.
- Be consistent when implementing guidelines. Set yourself up for success by having templates and step-by-step procedures — then use them!
- Document, document, document!
- Try not to take other's mistakes personally. When addressing conflict, always assume best intentions and come from a place of support.

In any situation involving two or more people, a certain amount of conflict is inevitable. Learning to manage conflict with a proactive approach to minimize misunderstandings, rather than operating from a place of reactivity, helps keep conflict to a minimum and often leads to more effective resolution.

The following two scenarios offer insight into navigating conflict to achieve the best possible result for everyone involved.

Scenario 1

Sue has a weedy plot. You have asked her multiple times to weed. Other gardeners have offered to help. She always responds that she will take care of it soon, but after a month, the weeds are beginning to encroach into her neighbor's space and are about to set seed.

Best possible result

You remind Sue that she received a copy of your garden's gardener handbook at the beginning of the season, which was also

emailed to her, and that she agreed to abide by the garden's guidelines.

You have emailed her a photo of her plot and provided a deadline of two weeks for her to address the weeds, and followed up with a phone call and an offer to help — all of which you documented.

Now, per the garden's procedures, you must weed wack and tarp her plot and she may not receive a plot next year.

1. Set clear guidelines and processes

Sue received the garden's guidelines and procedures in multiple formats.

- Offer information in multiple formats like print, email, a handbook or text.
- Learn what kind of communication works best for your garden members (ex. email, text, WhatsApp). This is a question you can include in your garden's registration form!
- Give both grace and realistic procedures for violation of garden guidelines.
- Provide tangible examples of past situations that have broken guidelines like weedy or neglected plots, vacant plots, alcohol or drug use, smoking, pets in the garden or harvesting others' produce.

2. Confrontation

You communicated with Sue that help was available and set a two-week deadline to address the issue.

- Be clear and concise about the issue and its consequences.
- Be supportive and ask about extenuating circumstances that may be exacerbating the issue like health, family, work, etc.

- Offer options for support.
- Have a hard deadline for follow up and/or issue resolution.

3. Document

You kept records of each attempt to remind Sue of garden guidelines and to weed her plot.

- Keeping a record can help you remember how many times you have communicated with a gardener about the issue, what was communicated and what the results were.
- Take photos of the offending issue, if applicable.

4. Consequences

Although consequences can feel harsh, they are agreed upon procedures that were created to keep gardeners accountable to their role in the health of the entire garden.

- Always communicate consequences clearly, respectfully and kindly.
- Differentiate between a gardener actively choosing to ignore guidelines and a gardener whose lapse in following guidelines is due to life vents or circumstances out of their control.
- Be flexible when needed as you are able — "life happens" for everyone and sometimes grace is needed when addressing an issue.

If you deviate from typical consequence procedure for a particular issue, make sure to clearly communicate why the decision to deviate was made.

5. Next steps

You weed whip and tarp Susan's plot.

- Because it was too late in the season, you tarped Susan's plot to prevent weeds from going to seed and affecting next year's season.
- If a plot is abandoned early enough, consider reassigning it with the help of the committee member responsible for plot assignment. Be clear about how you choose the new gardener and how you will handle the plot assignment next year.

Scenario 2

Your garden opens and new gardener Lisa plants in Tom's plot because she misread the map and was confused. Tom is very mad because when he showed up there were already plants in his plot. Lisa does not want to move her plants because she is afraid that they will die.

Ways to avoid this scenario

- Walk new gardeners to their plots.
- Put names on stakes in each plot.
- Share clear plot maps in multiple formats.

Things to consider

- Cultural norms
 - Because of the prevalence of subsistence farming in many cultures, taking someone's gardening space can feel like you are taking food from their family – therefore, emotions can escalate quickly.

- Languages barriers can make frustrating situations more difficult and slower to resolve.
- Sometimes a third party can be helpful for mediation. If you have a partner agency, see if someone will arbitrate. If you are not able to resolve the conflict as a garden committee, please contact Garden Project for additional support. Once an issue gets elevated, Garden Project has the "final say" in the way forward.
- When dealing with conflict, consider the person's personal request and if it is good for the garden as a whole.

It is possible for conflict management to provide a positive experience for groups or projects.

Sticking to your agreed upon and communicated guidelines and processes allows your garden to uphold its mission, ensure equity and demonstrate its values in practice.

Additional documents

- [Dealing with conflict](#)
- [How to use Google Translate](#)
- [I Speak poster](#)
- [Plot offender notice postcard example](#)
- [Weedy plot email example](#)

Further reading

- [Crucial Conversations](#)
- [The Sandwich Method: Not very tasty](#)