

Overmarsh Farm Commons Community Garden

Policies & Frequently Asked Questions

Updated Fall 2025

The following policies and answers to common questions are designed to support a healthy, inclusive, and well-cared-for community garden at Overmarsh Farm Commons (OFC).

Overmarsh Farm Commons is a cooperative endeavor where we work and learn together to grow food on shared land, guided by the principles of regenerative agriculture. The project is a collaboration between the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank and the San Juan Island Grange.

Policy 1: Active Gardening & Plot Care

You are welcome to garden all year long! During the main growing season (**April – October**), gardeners must actively maintain their plots by:

- Preparing and amending soil
- Planting and tending crops
- Harvesting ripe produce regularly
- Managing weeds—especially those going to seed
- Removing dead or diseased plants



Land Stewardship Ethic: Participants are expected to uphold the core principles of ecological farming—maintaining soil fertility, maximizing living roots, practicing integrated pest management (IPM), rotating crops, managing and conserving water, and minimizing soil disturbance. These practices ensure sustainable food production and the long-term health of our soil and water for current and future growers.

****Consult with the Farm Manager before planting any perennials.***

Common Questions:

1. Can I only garden during summer?

You are expected to show active gardening from April through October. If you prefer a shorter growing season, you can plant cover crops or simple food crops before or after your main season to keep your soil healthy and prevent weeds.

2. I can't get started until May—will that be a problem?

Plots assigned by April should show some activity that month (weeding, prepping soil, or early planting). If you can't begin until May, please contact Amanda, Farm Manager, so your plot isn't mistaken for being unused.

3. How often should I visit my plot?

There's no strict rule—it depends on your crops, weeds, and watering needs. Most gardeners spend **2–5 hours per week** during the main season. Smaller plots often take less time; larger plots may take more.

4. I want to save seeds—can I leave plants to dry?

Yes, as long as you collect seed heads before they shatter and spread weeds. You can dry seed indoors in paper bags to prevent unwanted reseeding.

Policy 2: Caring for Your Plot Year-Round

When you're not actively growing (usually **November – March**), continue caring for your plot by:

- Keeping it free of weeds
- Removing diseased or dead plants
- Storing temporary structures neatly (stakes, cages, trellises)
- Covering soil with mulch or a cover crop to prevent erosion



Common Questions

1. Can I garden through winter?

Absolutely! Many gardeners plant garlic, kale, or winter greens. Others rest their beds with cover crops or mulch—it's up to you.

2. What can stay in my plot through the winter?

Seasonal supports like tomato cages or stakes should be stored neatly. Please remove all plastic from beds.

Policy 3: Pathways, Shared Spaces & Structures

Pathways & Plots: Each gardener helps maintain the paths and edges that touch their plot. Please:

- Keep paths **2–3 feet wide** and level for accessibility
- Remove weeds from paths and fence lines
- Store all personal items inside your plot
- Keep plants within plot boundaries



Structures: All structures must be temporary, removable, and approved by the Farm Manager. They should be practical, safe, and in keeping with the character of Overmarsh Farm Commons.

Parking and Road Access: Parking is allowed only in designated areas.

Shared Facilities: Growers must follow protocols for the use and maintenance of shared facilities. Labeling personal items and maintaining cleanliness are required.

Policy 4: Equipment & Waste Management

Offsite Equipment Usage: All equipment brought on-site must be cleaned to prevent soil-borne disease contamination. Any mechanized equipment must be pre-approved by the Farm Manager.

Compost: Gardeners are responsible for all waste and plant material from their plots. You may:

- Compost organic material in your plot or add to the communal compost area.
- Bury plant matter directly into the soil
- Please do **not** dump debris in pathways, fencelines, or common areas

Plastic Policy: To help maintain a microplastic-free environment, we strongly encourage growers to limit the use of plastic mulches.

- If plastic is used, it must be removed at the end of the growing season, unless arranged differently with the farm manager.
- Fraying plastics are not permitted, as they contribute to microplastic pollution. Any plastic used must have sealed edges (e.g., cut with a blowtorch or a similar method) to prevent fraying.

Trash & Recycling: Growers are responsible for managing and disposing of their trash and recycling off-site. Overmarsh Farm Commons does not provide trash or recycling pick-up.

Common Questions

1. How do I compost within my plot?

Try composting in your plot using trench or chop-and-drop methods.

2. Can I use the communal compost?

Yes! We will let you know at the start of the season where to deposit plant material.

3. What about non-compostable waste?

Take home plastic pots, tags, or trash.

Policy 5: Pest Prevention

Help keep the garden safe and clean for everyone by preventing pests:

- Remove debris piles
- Keep weeds cut back to decrease vole habitat, as they prefer dense vegetation.
- Harvest produce before it rots
- Avoid leaving food scraps or standing water

Common Questions

1. Why does it matter if I choose not to harvest all my produce? Sometimes my plants produce more than I can eat.

It's important to harvest your produce to keep it from being an attractive food source for animals such as rats. Produce that has dropped and begun to rot is a magnet for scavenging rodents. This is a primary reason we ask that all gardeners stay on top of harvesting their plants, rather than letting things fall to the ground and/or begin to rot. Another reason is that even if you're not going to eat your produce, someone else would benefit from it. If you need a place to donate excess produce, consider donating to the Food Bank, or share the bounty with your family, friends, and extended community.

Policy 6: Organic Gardening Only

Overmarsh Farm Commons is committed to organic, ecological growing methods.

Use only **organic fertilizers, soil amendments, and pest controls** or products generally considered to be safe for organic practices, such as straw, biochar, cardboard, and compost.

If you're unsure about a product, you can check the **Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI)** list at www.omri.org or check in with the Farm Manager.

If using manure in your plot, it must be adequately "aged," and no human manure is allowed to ensure no soil-borne pathogens and food contamination. If you are unsure, please contact the Farm Manager.

Common Questions

1. Are organic seeds required?

No, but all fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides must be organic.

2. Why is this required?

Organic practices protect our soil, pollinators, and shared water systems while creating a healthy, safe environment for everyone.

Policy 7: Community Service Hours

Each garden plot is part of the Overmarsh community—and we truly can't make this project thrive without everyone's help! Fortunately, many hands make light work.

Throughout the season, we'll offer a variety of volunteer opportunities to accommodate different schedules and abilities. We're still finding the best way to make this system work, but as a guideline, we suggest contributing around 10 hours of community service over the year.

Please keep track of your hours and let us know what you worked on at the end of the season so we can get a better idea of what is needed to make Overmarsh a success.

Policy 8: Community Conduct & Inclusion

Respectful behavior and cooperation are essential to the success of our garden. At Overmarsh, we aren't just growing food — we're growing community.

We ask all participants to communicate kindly, share space thoughtfully, and work together to maintain a welcoming, supportive environment for everyone. Differences in experience, perspective, and style are valued, and constructive problem-solving is encouraged when conflicts arise.

Commitment to Inclusion: Overmarsh Farm Commons welcomes all individuals and does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, or any other protected status. Every participant deserves to feel safe, respected, and included in this shared community.

Policy 9: Safety

OFC is committed to providing a safe environment for all participants.

- Growers must help maintain safe working conditions and report unsafe situations to the Farm Manager.
- Be mindful when using tools and equipment, and store them properly when not in use.
- Children are welcome but must be supervised at all times for their safety.

Gardener Accountability and Policy Enforcement

Gardeners are responsible for following the garden policies. The Farm Manager will regularly monitor plots throughout the year, with garden checks around the 15th of every month. If a gardener is not following the garden policies, the Farm Manager will send them a reminder.

- If a garden plot looks abandoned during the main garden season (April – October), garden staff will check in with the plot holder. The plot holder has 2 weeks to respond and start gardening. If there is no action after 2 weeks, the plot will be reassigned.
- When a gardener receives their third reminder during the garden season, they have the option to enter a trial period where they work with staff to create a garden plan to help them keep their plot.
- Gardeners who receive a fourth reminder in a year will have their reservation cancelled and the plot will be reassigned.
- Gardeners may request an appeal of a garden reminder or plot cancellation by submitting that request to the Farm Manager, who will evaluate the request with the steering committee.

Gardener Accountability and Policy Enforcement Common Questions:

1. What do you look for to determine whether a garden is abandoned?

Abandoned plots are usually marked by an obvious lack of activity or attention and tend to be overrun with weeds, dead crops, or other signs of inactivity. In early spring, an abandoned plot might be one that shows no signs of a gardener having begun to prepare the soil, manage weeds, plant crops, set up seasonal structures, etc. During the summer and fall months, an abandoned plot might be one that is overgrown with weeds and/or unharvested or rotting produce, lots of plants that have gone to seed, and obviously unmaintained pathways. During the winter season, when many plots are prepared for winter with mulch, winter crops, and/or cover crops, an abandoned plot might be one full of dead summer crops, left-behind seasonal structures, excessive weeds, and a lack of end-of-season clean-up.



2. If I am going to be out of town for a period of time, what can I do to avoid getting a notice?

If you are planning to be out of town, you are welcome to recruit a friend or family member to care for your plot while you are away. As the primary plot holder, you are responsible for letting them know what they need to do in the plot and orienting them to the garden (sharing garden rules, showing them how locks work, etc). You can also contact your garden manager to see if there is a way to connect with a garden neighbor who can care for your plot while you are away.

3. What is the difference between an abandoned plot notice and an active plot maintenance reminder?

See the chart below to learn more about the differences.

Garden Reminder Process



