

A man wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, dark pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses is watering plants in a garden. He is holding a long-handled watering can. The garden is filled with various plants, including a tomato plant on a trellis and a pepper plant. The background shows a wooden fence and trees under a clear blue sky.

DUKE FARMS COMMUNITY GARDEN HANDBOOK 2026



Duke Farms



CONTACT INFORMATION

Address

1112 Dukes Parkway West
Hillsborough, NJ 08844

Community Garden Website

www.dukefarms.org/cg

Gardener-Only Portal

www.dukefarmscommunitygarden.wildapricot.org

Slack (Alerts & Updates)

Email cg@dukefarms.org to gain access

Email

cg@dukefarms.org

Security (24/7)

908-243-3600

Duke Farms Community Garden

Legend

- Neighborhoods**
 - Tomatoville
 - Cauliflower Corner
 - Turnip Town
 - Garlic Grove
 - Cucumber City
 - Rutabaga Ridge
 - Broccoli Boro
- Specialty Gardens**
 - Education Plot
 - Giving Garden
 - Accessible Plot
 - Garden Waste

Woodchips

Gazebo

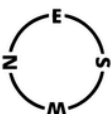
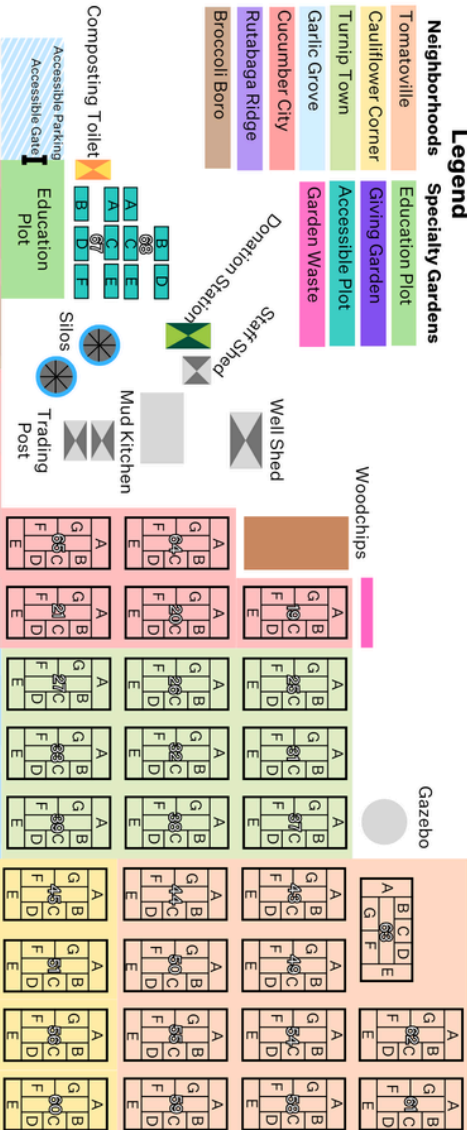


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PLOT REGISTRATION

All garden plots are registered online.

Plot Sizes & Fees

10 x 10 – \$20

15 x 15 – \$40

15 x 30 – \$60

Accessible Plot – \$20

Registration Schedule

Renewals open in early November

Additional plots for returning gardeners open two weeks later

Public registration opens January 2

Policies

- Plots are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis
- There is no waitlist
- New gardeners may register for one plot
- Returning gardeners may hold up to three plots
- Plots are for personal use only; commercial growing is prohibited
- Fees are non-refundable

Eligibility is limited to individuals who live or work in Somerset County, NJ.

REQUIREMENTS

These requirements support garden safety, shared responsibility, and Duke Farms' mission of sustainability and community stewardship.

Communication

- Maintain a valid email address
- Participate in required communication channels, including Slack for urgent alerts
- Notify staff of contact changes promptly

Maintenance

- Meet all plot maintenance standards outlined in this handbook
- Address maintenance notices within required timeframes
- Arrange for plot care during absences

Continuing Education

- Complete one gardening-related course annually
- Courses may be offered by Duke Farms or another approved provider
- Record course title and date in Gardener Profile

First-year Gardeners Must Complete:

- New Gardener Orientation
- Introduction to Organic Gardening
- One elective course

Volunteer Requirement

- 4 hours for the first plot
- 1 additional hour for each additional plot
- Hours must be completed and logged by October 31

Failure to complete any requirement by the deadline may result in loss of renewal eligibility.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Gardeners are responsible for maintaining their plots in a safe, productive, and respectful condition throughout the growing season.

Planting Standards

- At least 50% of each plot must be planted with fruits or vegetables

Weeds & Plot Condition

- Weeds must remain under 25% of the plot area
- Weeds may not exceed 12 inches in height
- Weeds must not be allowed to go to seed

Boundaries & Pathways

- All plants and materials must remain within plot boundaries
- Gardeners must maintain the half-pathway adjacent to their plot
- Required pathway maintenance does not count toward volunteer hours unless explicitly designated as a volunteer task

Structures & Materials

- No plant, structure, or item may exceed 5 feet in height
- Only approved soil amendments are permitted (OMRI-listed, USDA Organic, or staff-approved)

Harvesting & Pests

- Harvest regularly to prevent rotting produce
- Address pest issues promptly using organic methods

PLOT RULES

- Plots are provided as is; Duke Farms is not responsible for soil or drainage conditions
- Arrange for plot care during absences; extended unattended absences are not permitted
- Only shared hoses may be stored in common areas
- Trash is carry in, carry out
- Water from spigots is non-potable and may not be used for drinking or washing produce

Fall Cleanup (Deadline: October 31)

- Remove all non-secure items
- Clear plots if not renewing
- Materials left behind become Duke Farms property



RESTRICTED

To protect soil health, wildlife, infrastructure, and neighboring plots, the following restrictions apply.

The following are not allowed anywhere in the Community Garden:

- Mechanical tillers, sprinklers, or powered equipment
- Gas-powered tools or machinery
- PVC or plastic materials labeled #1, #3 (PVC), or #7
- Pressure-treated or chemically treated lumber
- Chemical fertilizers, herbicides, or pesticides
- Manure (raw or composted)
- Dyed or treated wood chips
- Insect lures, glue traps, rodent poison, or similar devices
- Bird netting or wildlife-entangling mesh
- Any structure, trellis, or plant support over 5 feet tall
- Drones or other flying devices
- Contractors or professional services without prior staff approval

RESTRICTED

PLANTS NOT PERMITTED

- All invasive species listed by the State of New Jersey
- Corn of any variety
- Castor bean (*Ricinus communis*)
- Cannabis (*Cannabis* spp.)
- Sunflowers (all varieties)
- Currants and gooseberries (*Ribes* spp.)
- Shiso / perilla (*Perilla frutescens*)

PLANTS PERMITTED IN CONTAINERS ONLY

- The following plants are allowed only in pots and must remain contained:
- Raspberries and blackberries
- Mint (all varieties)
- Tansy
- Jerusalem artichoke
- Garlic chives
- Horseradish
- Comfrey

PERENNIALS

- Only the following perennials are permitted in plots:
- Blueberries, strawberries, asparagus, rhubarb
- Culinary herbs and non-invasive flowers
- All other perennial crops are not allowed.

SOIL, COMPOST & MULCH

- Use organic materials only
- No manure
- Soil amendments must be OMRI-listed, USDA Organic, or staff-approved
- Bulk compost or soil deliveries must be scheduled with staff
- Organic mulch (straw, dried grass, leaves) is encouraged
- Homemade compost must be kept in a solid compost bin
- Failure to comply may result in removal of materials or maintenance notices.

MAINTENANCE SURVEYS

To maintain a safe and productive garden, Duke Farms conducts regular maintenance surveys during the growing season.

Surveys occur weekly from April 15 through October 31 and assess plot condition, safety, and compliance with garden standards.

What Is Evaluated

- Weed coverage and height, including weeds going to seed
- Rotting or unharvested produce
- Pest issues not being addressed
- Encroachment into pathways or neighboring plots
- Prohibited materials or structures

Maintenance Notice Process

Notices are cumulative and do not need to be consecutive.

- 1st–3rd Notice: An email will describe the issue. Gardeners have one week to correct it.
- 4th Notice: Final warning. The plot must be brought into and maintained at standard for the remainder of the season.
- 5th Notice: Duke Farms reclaims the plot. Gardeners will be notified by email and have one week to remove personal belongings. Items left after one week become Duke Farms property.

Personal Hardship

Gardeners experiencing illness, injury, or other hardship should contact staff as early as possible to discuss available support options.

Code of Conduct

All gardeners are expected to follow the Community Garden Code of Conduct. Violations may result in written warnings or immediate expulsion from the garden, depending on the severity of the behavior.

OPERATION, SAFETY & CONDUCT

Following these guidelines ensures the safety, well-being, and enjoyment of gardeners and visitors.

Hours of Operation

- The Community Garden is open year-round, sunrise to sunset
- During extreme heat or hazardous conditions, the garden may close temporarily. Gardeners will be notified of closures when possible

Safety

- Drive slowly and follow posted speed limits
- Hangtags are required on Saturdays
- Watch for pedestrians at all times
- Bring personal tools; shared equipment must be returned promptly
- Water from spigots is non-potable

Guests & Conduct

- Gardeners are responsible for supervising guests and children at all times
- Remain on designated pathways; cutting through plots is considered trespassing
- Radios, pets (except service animals), alcohol, tobacco, and illegal substances are prohibited

Please report safety concerns or inappropriate behavior to garden staff.

SECURITY

Duke Farms is committed to maintaining a community garden that is safe, welcoming, and respectful for all participants, visitors, and staff.

Zero-Tolerance Policies

The following behaviors are not permitted and may result in immediate loss of garden privileges:

- Harassment, discrimination, or threatening behavior
- Theft or unauthorized entry into another gardener's plot
- Intentional harm to wildlife or damage to garden infrastructure

Each garden plot is considered private. Rotting produce, weediness, or perceived neglect are not grounds for entering another plot without permission.

Garden Security

- Garden gates are locked to prevent unauthorized access
- Access codes are issued annually and must not be shared
- Gates must remain closed at all times to deter wildlife and theft

Suspicious activity, broken locks, or safety concerns should be reported to garden staff. Theft, vandalism, or damage should be reported directly to Duke Farms Security.

Security (24/7): 908-243-3600

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer participation supports garden operations, education, and the Community Garden's food donation efforts. Gardeners may fulfill required volunteer hours through a variety of opportunities offered throughout the season.

Volunteer Meet-Up Days

Volunteer Meet-Up Days provide structured opportunities to work on shared garden projects and connect with other gardeners.

- Offered May through October
- Tasks vary by season and garden need

Gardeners must RSVP to receive project details.

Giving Garden

The Community Garden has a Giving Garden that grows produce specifically for donation to local food banks.

Volunteer opportunities may include:

- Planting and maintenance
- Harvesting
- Sorting and preparing produce for donation

Failure to attend a scheduled volunteer shift without notice may result in a maintenance notice.

Get More Involved

Experienced gardeners interested in deeper involvement may apply to serve in leadership or coordination roles, including:

- Garden Mentor
- Giving Garden Coordinator
- Donation Coordinator

These roles support gardeners, oversee shared spaces or programs, and help strengthen the Community Garden.

To express interest or request more information, email cg@dukefarms.org

INDEPENDENT VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Independent volunteer activities allow gardeners to complete volunteer hours outside of scheduled events while supporting shared garden spaces.

Approved Independent Activities

- Weeding and maintaining perimeter pathways
- Maintaining common areas such as entrances, picnic areas, and compost zones
- Trash and debris collection
- Organizing clamshells and supplies in the donation area
- Supporting compost operations

Assigned plot maintenance and required pathway care do not qualify for volunteer credit.

Documentation

Independent volunteer work must be documented as instructed, including before-and-after photos when required, and logged in the online Gardener Profile.

Only approved activities will receive volunteer credit.

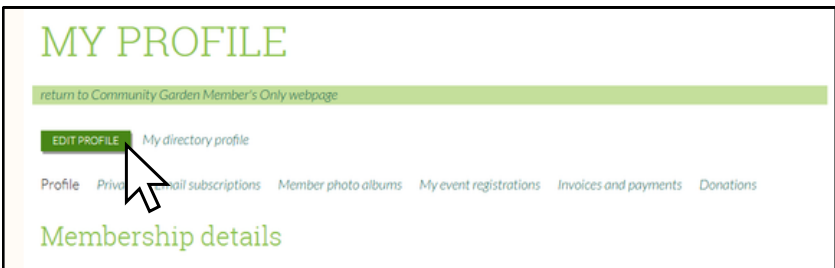
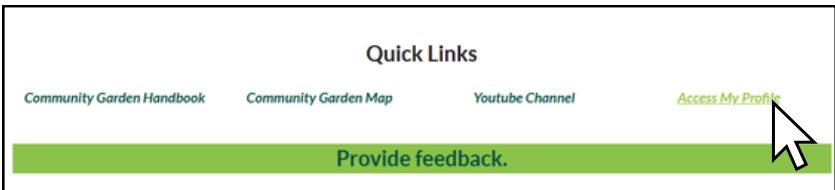
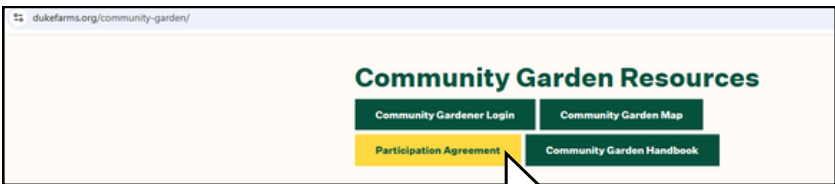
LOGGING VOLUNTEER HOURS AND EDUCATION

All volunteer hours and continuing education requirements must be recorded on Gardener Profile to receive credit.

How to Log Your Hours

1. Click Access My Profile
2. Select Edit Profile
3. Scroll to the Requirements section
4. Enter volunteer hours and/or education details
5. Click Save

Entries should include dates, activities, and total time spent. Unlogged hours or courses will not be counted toward annual requirements.



PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

Gardeners are required to fulfill the following obligations annually in order to participate in the Duke Farms Community Garden.

COMMUNICATION

Gardeners must maintain a valid email address, which will serve as the primary form of communication between garden staff and gardeners.

Gardeners are also required to join the Duke Farms Community Garden Slack channel for emergency alerts, updates, and general communication.

Any changes to the email address associated with a gardener's account must be reported within three (3) business days.

MAINTENANCE

Garden plots must be food-centric, with at least 50% planted in fruits and/or vegetables. Gardeners are required to comply with all maintenance expectations outlined in the Duke Farms Community Garden Handbook.

Maintenance surveys are conducted weekly between April 15 and October 31. If a gardener receives a maintenance notice, the issue must be addressed within one (1) week of notification.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Gardeners must complete one (1) environmental or gardening-related course annually through Duke Farms or another suitable provider. The course title must be recorded in the Gardener Profile to receive credit. All gardeners are required to attend Reorientation.

First-year gardeners must complete three (3) courses total:

- New Gardener Orientation
- Introduction to Organic Gardening (online)
- One elective environmental or gardening-related course

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENT

Gardeners must complete four (4) hours of volunteer time at Duke Farms for their first garden plot, plus one (1) additional hour for each additional plot. Volunteer hours must be recorded in the Gardener Profile to receive credit.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Gardeners are expected to behave courteously and respectfully at all times. All gardeners are required to review and comply with the safety, security, and conduct expectations outlined in the Duke Farms Community Garden Handbook. Violations of the Code of Conduct may result in written warnings or expulsion from the Community Garden, depending on the severity of the behavior.

ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY

Duke Farms maintains a zero-tolerance policy for the following behaviors. Any violation may result in immediate expulsion from the Community Garden at the discretion of garden staff.

Harassment

Duke Farms is committed to maintaining a community free of unlawful discrimination and harassment. Inappropriate verbal, written, or physical actions are considered harassment.

Harming Wildlife

Duke Farms is a center for environmental stewardship, and the conservation of wildlife is of the utmost importance.

Theft

Each garden plot is considered private property. Rotting produce or weediness does not grant permission to enter another gardener's plot without explicit consent.



Duke Farms



dukefarms.org/cg

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Duke Farms is a center of the
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