



## Neighborhood Gardens Trust Orientation Document 2025

### Welcome!

The Neighborhood Gardens Trust (NGT) is a nonprofit organization that serves as Philadelphia's neighborhood garden protector. NGT secures community-managed green spaces to keep land in the hands of Philadelphians to grow food, flowers, and community. NGT has preserved a wide variety of active community gardens and shared open spaces throughout the city – from sitting gardens on tiny house size lots to large, multi-acre food producing gardens. This document is intended to give context and information about NGT for the leaders, members, volunteers, and partners to NGT-protected gardens and green spaces.

We deeply appreciate your involvement and hope you find the information below helpful to better understand NGT's role in partnership with your garden, and as a reference should questions or issues arise. Please make sure this resource is shared with every active participant at your garden.

Sincerely,

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### About the Neighborhood Gardens Trust

**Mission:** NGT acquires and preserves community gardens and shared open space to enhance the quality of life in Philadelphia neighborhoods.

**History:** Formerly known as the Neighborhood Gardens Association (NGA), NGT was established to support community gardens that were at-risk of being lost to development because the community gardeners who organized them did not have legal access to the land they were caring for. NGA worked intensively with gardeners and community groups between 1986 and 2011 to protect 30 gardens. In 2012, the organization formally affiliated with PHS for in-kind organizational support and completed a strategic business plan that set ambitious land preservation goals to meet the growing need that NGT saw for its support in Philadelphia. The board determined that NGT should retain a focus on land trust activities: acquisition and



preservation of community-managed open spaces. Formally renamed Neighborhood Gardens Trust to honor its history and to signal an organizational renaissance, in 2014 NGT publicly relaunched as the city's leading land trust. Since that time, NGT has preserved 23 additional gardens and is working to bring a total of 80 gardens into the Trust by the end of 2028.

**How we work with PHS:** NGT has a close partnership with Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS). The NGT team works closely with the PHS Community Gardens Team to provide support for physical improvements to gardens (such as: access to water, raised beds with nutrient rich soil, fencing, tool storage). The PHS Community Gardens Team provides horticulture education and leadership/organizational development programs. We encourage all NGT-protected gardens to join PHS' Community Gardens Program to ensure they have full access to these programs and services. PHS also provides NGT in-kind administrative support, such as shared office space, technology, and human resources.

### **NGT's Role at your Garden**

**Insurance:** NGT holds general liability and volunteer insurance for all properties we own or lease at no cost to the gardeners. This coverage protects the organization and the gardeners in your capacity as volunteers who maintain and steward NGT-held garden properties.

Gardens that host community events or other types of programs should consider obtaining their own general liability policy or event insurance for their own legal protection. If you have questions, please reach out to Marlana Moore, Land Preservation Manager, for more information.

**Garden Improvements:** NGT collaborates with protected gardens on fundraising for garden improvements. We work closely with PHS' Community Gardens Team to oversee all projects, from making repairs and capital improvements, like installation of raised beds, or water lines, to complete garden renovations.

If you have an idea for a project you would like to implement in your garden, please contact Marlana Moore, Land Preservation Manager, to discuss it further.

Gardeners are responsible for day-to-day maintenance, including: keeping the garden well-tended, storing and disposing of waste, keeping the sidewalks clear of litter, debris and weeds, and snow/ice removal in the winter.

**Tours and Visits:** NGT periodically conducts garden visits with potential donors, current funders, or governmental partners. We will contact your garden leaders if we plan to stop by.



During the spring, summer and fall NGT works with partners, such as the Sierra Club and The Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia to organize walking and bike tours for free or at a low cost. If a tour is planned to stop at your garden, we ask that one gardener be there to greet the tour and share a little bit about the garden (history, how it operates, what is growing, etc.)

If you have questions or would like more information, contact Chamor Thomas, Development & Communications Manager.

## When to Reach Out to NGT

**Garden Leadership & Contact Changes:** Please let us know when your garden has any changes in leadership or adds a new contact person.

**Safety Issues:** As property owners, we take our responsibility seriously to ensure a safe environment for the gardeners. If you notice an issue that affects the safety of the garden, or if you have any concerns that it may cause a safety issue in the future, please contact NGT as soon as you can. Recent examples include:

- Neighboring building walls with structural issues,
- Cracks or heaving in the sidewalk that could cause a tripping hazard,
- Tree limbs needing pruning,
- Trespassing or squatters in the garden, and
- Any other safety concerns

**Planned Improvements or Building Projects:** Please notify Sofi Courtney, Stewardship Manager, of any planned projects in the garden **BEFORE** they are started. As property owner, we are responsible for ensuring that our properties are consistent with relevant building and zoning codes so that we can maintain our exemptions from the PWD Stormwater Fee. Any planned structures **MUST** be approved by NGT before they can be built or installed.

**Construction/Development on Neighboring Properties:** Construction on a neighboring property to the garden almost always affects the garden, whether it is the new construction or repairs to the exterior of an existing building. NGT prefers to enter into a site access agreement with the neighboring property owners to ensure that their activity does not damage the garden. If your garden is damaged, NGT will seek to hold them accountable for the damage caused to the garden. Please contact Sofi Courtney, Stewardship Manager, with questions or for more information.

**Conflicts with Neighbors:** Please inform us of any conflicts with neighboring property owners, even if they are not related to construction.



**Organizational Issues:** If your garden is having a conflict which is interfering with the ability of the group to care for the garden, please reach out for support.

**NGT Website:** Every NGT preserved garden is listed on our website under [ngtrust.org/gardens](http://ngtrust.org/gardens). Please make sure we have a correct web address if applicable, phone number, email address and social media handle for your garden. Please inform Chamor Thomas, Development & Communications Manager with details and corrections.

**Events at the Garden:** Please inform Chamor Thomas, Development & Communications Manager of community events or programs hosted at the garden. If there is an outside group planning to use the garden, we have a special events waiver that they must complete.

**Keep in Touch:** We love to hear from our gardens throughout the year! We are especially interested in highlighting all the wonderful things happening at the gardens which help NGT make the case for why community gardens should be preserved and supported. Please share photos, news, and stories with us. If you would like NGT to attend a garden meeting or promote an event or workday, please reach out to Chamor Thomas, Development & Communications Manager.

## What NGT Requires of your Garden

**Values Statement:** We ask all our gardens to adhere to the Values Statement below in their conduct and operations.

As a community garden preserved by NGT,

We welcome all people to our garden and group, regardless of race, age, ability, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or nation of origin.

We treat all members of our garden with respect. We ensure all members of the garden feel welcome. We strive to ensure all voices are heard and respected and provide safe spaces for all opinions to be shared.

We treat all the visitors to the garden and all members of our larger community with respect, fairness, and a welcoming spirit.

Our garden follows open and transparent practices. We clearly communicate how members of the community can join or participate in the garden. The garden leadership keeps garden members informed of decisions and strives to represent the diverse users of the garden.



**Annual Garden Agreement:** At the start of every growing season NGT sends out the Annual Garden Agreement which outlines NGT and Garden roles and responsibilities including values, and requirements around maintenance, gardening practices, and garden uses. The Agreement is to be signed by the designated Garden Leader and the Garden Consent Form is to be signed by each new participating gardener (1 per household). If a gardener had previously signed the Garden Consent form, they do not need to sign it again. Please return these signed agreements by June 1 of every growing season.

**Annual Garden Survey: Every fall, NGT conducts an annual written and physical survey of every garden in accordance with our responsibilities as a land trust.**

- **Part One:** Online or paper filled out by garden leader distributed at the end of September. This survey will check in about how things are going in your garden and track changes from year to year.
- **Part Two:** Garden visit conducted by NGT staff during the fall or winter to check in on the garden's physical conditions.

**Combination Lock:** NGT asks that all gardens that are locked install combination key locks so that your gardens are easily accessible. Please provide us with the combination once installed or if it changes.

**Signage:** NGT is currently working with PHS to develop a comprehensive and consistent system of garden signage that will provide each garden's name, address, and contact information. These signs are intended to complement but not replace any unique and distinctive signs that gardens have or wish to post at their garden.

## NGT Garden Meetings

**Gardeners' Advisory Committee Meetings:** Garden leaders and other representatives are invited to attend these meetings, which are three times per year, to meet with other gardeners from throughout the city. This is a great opportunity to discuss garden-related issues, share successes, and seek advice. 2025 Zoom Meetings are planned on the following dates:

- Tuesday, March 25 at 7pm
- Monday, September 29 at 7pm
- Monday, November 10 at 7pm

NGT will convene several in-person garden-based gatherings for garden leaders, starting with a Workday and Lunch on Saturday, April 26, 2025.

**All Gardens Meeting:** Held in the beginning of the year, NGT requires all NGT Gardens to send a representative to this annual meeting to hear updates from NGT, learn useful information from fellow gardeners, and to gear up for the upcoming growing season.



**New Gardener Orientation:** Required for all new garden members to learn what it means to be involved at an NGT-protected community garden, the services NGT and PHS provide, and your role as a community gardener.

- Monday, April 28, 2025

## PHS Community Gardens Program

In 2019 PHS launched the PHS Community Gardens Program to further enhance and clarify the PHS/NGT partnership and the supports it offers community gardens. The Community Gardens Program provides a set of services including technical support, supplies and materials, capital improvements tailored to the experiences and need of community gardens at various stages of development—from emerging to established and mature gardens.

NGT strongly encourages all NGT gardens to register for this free program if your garden wants to receive support for physical garden improvements or to benefit from the help and resources of the PHS team in the future. Email [communitygardens@pennhort.org](mailto:communitygardens@pennhort.org) for more information.

## Connect with NGT on Online

You can find NGT on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. We post garden acquisition updates, stories from NGT gardeners, NGT events and tours, and share information from our partners. We also encourage you to share photos of your garden and tag us, @ngtrust.

### Give us a follow:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ngtrust>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ngtrust/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/neighborhoodgardenstrust>

To learn more about NGT's work and read stories about NGT gardens and recent acquisitions head to our [blog](#).

## Resources

- [A comprehensive list of gardening and city resources](#)
- [Join NGT's Google Group](#): A form for gardeners at NGT gardens to ask questions, share resources and provide updates.
- [Register for the PHS Community Garden Program](#)
- [Resources for donating produce](#)