



Balgowlah Community Garden Inc.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Balgowlah Community Garden?

The garden is situated on a residential plot of land at 100 Griffiths Street, Balgowlah, NSW. The land is owned by Northern Beaches Council and leased to us direct.

The garden is designed to promote healthy exercise, community engagement, and increased consumption of fruit and vegetables. The day-to-day activities of the garden are overseen by a volunteer Management Committee comprised of garden members.

Is the garden organic?

Mostly. We encourage all members and bed owners to minimise the use of synthetic chemicals and pesticides, and to grow as “naturally” as possible. But we do not insist on the purchase of branded “Organic” soil, fertilisers, mulch etc.

Why do I need to join?

The garden and shed is locked with a combination lock. The passcode for the lock is only provided to paid-up members. This ensures two things (1) the assets and produce of the garden are kept safe from curious visitors, (2) we are able to ensure that members of the garden are properly inducted into the garden, including issues such as health and safety, opening hours, use of the community beds etc.

How do I join?

Email us at balgowlahcg@gmail.com, or click on “How to Apply” on our website www.balgowlahcg.com.

Can anyone join?

You must be a resident of the Northern Beaches to become a member. If you move out of the area you are allowed to remain a member until the membership renewal date. Children under 18 can join but only as part of a “Family” membership.

Can I have my own bed?

Yes. The garden is split roughly 50:50 into community plots and individual plots. For an annual fee it is possible to have your own bed in which you are free to grow whatever you like. However the number of available beds is limited and there may be a small waiting list for individual beds. While you are waiting you are welcome to join as an ordinary member, and join in the maintenance and harvesting of the community beds.

Can I choose which bed I want?

If there is a choice of beds available you can choose whichever one you want!

Is there a limit on members?

We need to ensure a fair balance between making the garden open and accessible to the local community, and not unfairly inconveniencing our neighbours. Although there is no current firm limit on membership, we will regularly monitor the number of users of the site to ensure we strike the right balance. To date we have never had to turn membership application away!

Why are there membership fees?

The main sources of income for the garden are from membership fees and occasional fund-raising activities such as Bunnings BBQs. These pay for the substantial ongoing costs in running the garden including electricity, insurance, web-hosting, chicken feed etc. as well as routine repairs and maintenance. All fees raised go directly to the maintenance of the Garden. We are non-profit making and we closely monitor both income and expenditure to ensure an approximate balance.

How are the membership fees calculated?

Membership fees run for the financial year 1 July to 30 June and are generally advised and collected in July each year. Membership fees are charged to adults only – per adult. The intent of this is that kids that join as part of a family (must join with adults) are not charged to become members. For an additional fee, you can lease your own bed in which you can grow whatever crops you like.

How are the Chickens maintained?

We have an on-line roster where any member can sign up and put their name down for chicken duty. This involves cleaning out the coop, filling the feeders up with food and water, and supplying other treats and cuddles to the chickens as necessary. You also get to keep the eggs.

What do I get for my membership fee?

You need to be a member to gain access to the garden, even if you have your own garden bed. All members (even if they have their own bed) have access to the community beds, kids bed, succulent garden, herb bed and fruit trees, and are encouraged to share in organised plantings, Working Bees, Chicken duty, Fund Raising Activities and harvesting. You are also entitled to use any shared equipment contained within the tool shed. We also plan to have regular events and an education program at which members can gain discounted or free access. For the most part, all consumables, including soil, sand, mulch, fertiliser etc. are also provided as part of your membership fee.

What facilities are there in the Garden?

We have a fully-stocked on-site shed and toilet, with rooftop rainwater tank and solar panel. The shed is fully equipped with tools, gloves, buckets, wheelbarrows etc. We also have extensive composting / recycling facilities, including compost bins and worm farms, the product of which is available to all members. Outdoor tables and chairs are placed at the Southern end of the site, and future plans include provision of a covered recreation and leisure area.

What do I get if I have my own bed?

For an additional annual cost you can have your own raised bed. Each bed has a timed drip irrigation system and is designed to be as low-maintenance as possible. Within this bed you can plant and harvest whatever you like, whenever you like. You will need to provide your own seeds/seedlings, but for the most part stakes, nets, ties, mulch, soil, sand etc. are available in the garden and you can use these free of charge. Basically if you can find it in the garden it is yours to use. The garden has numerous compost bins and worm farms on site and you are allowed and encouraged to both contribute to the bins and farms, and share the compost and worm tea.

Why do I have to pay a membership fee if I have my own bed?

If you have your own bed this is an additional benefit over and above the existing benefits of being a general member. As an individual bed holder you have all the rights and privileges of a non-bed holding member, including use of the community beds, shared tools, etc.

Can I plant what I like?

There is a crop rotation system, which is loosely enforced by the Management Committee. But in general, the policy is that if you want to plant something, and no-one objects, then you can go right ahead. If you have your own bed you are free to plant what you like in it.

When is the garden open?

The garden opening hours vary from time to time and are published on the web-site or on a sign outside the front gate. These hours are continually negotiated with Council and are designed to provide reasonable access to members and to minimise undue disturbance to our immediate neighbours.

How do I pay for membership?

After your membership has been accepted we will contact you with details on how to pay.

What if I change my mind?

If you decide you no longer want to maintain your own bed, send an email to the Membership Secretary at balgowlahcg@gmail.com, and he/she will advise you what the next steps are.

Can I sell the produce from the garden?

No. We are not a commercial venture in any sense, if you grow some edible produce we strongly advise you to eat it! We do, however, encourage the swapping of produce from various beds, and sharing of the harvest from the community beds, and will provide support where necessary to achieve this.

What is the future plan for the Garden?

The Garden has been fully operational and maturing since 2011. The Management Committee is always pleased to receive suggestions from members on how the garden should be improved, and from time activities take place to improve the amenities of the garden. The biggest plan on the agenda is for the provision of a covered area at the Southern end of the garden to provide both shelter from the elements, and a place to have a cup of tea after a Working Bee.

Can I purchase manure and/or mulch for my plot from the Garden?

Yes. Simply email balgolahcg@gmail.com and a member of the Management Committee will establish how much demand there is from all Garden members. If possible a bulk purchase will be made which reduces the cost to individual members.

Can friends or family who are not members visit the garden?

You are welcome to invite friends or family into the garden on an occasional basis. However, for insurance reasons, non-members are not allowed to participate in any gardening activities. If friends or family make regular visits to the garden, we encourage them to become members.

Why do we have two gates into the Garden?

The main pedestrian entrance for members and guests is on the Western side of the garden, through the playground. The Eastern gate is reserved for deliveries or those with mobility difficulties, including members or guests with walking sticks, wheelchairs, or babies in prams. The purpose of this is to direct all foot traffic, wherever possible, to the Western side of the garden, which minimises noise disturbance to the immediate neighbours of the garden.

What are the rules regarding use of tools and equipment in the shed?

All the tools and equipment in the shed are there for the general use of members. We only ask that you leave the tools clean and in good condition, return them to their proper place in the shed, and report any damage to the Management Committee on balgolahcg@gmail.com

Are there any restrictions on what I can put in the watering cans?

No, you can use the watering cans for whatever purpose you choose, including mixing up fertiliser – however please ensure that the cans are thoroughly rinsed out after use.

What can I put in the compost bins?

Any organic or vegetable matter can be placed in the bins. We prefer that weeds are not placed in the bins as these can spread around the garden when the compost is later used on beds. Meat or Dairy waste is definitely not allowed, nor Citrus or onions as the worms do not like these.

What can I put in the Worm Farms?

Please do not feed the worms. A program for feeding the worms will be managed, on a roster basis, by Garden members. Worms that are over or under-fed they can die very quickly.

What do I do if I have an accident in the garden?

There is a first aid kit in the shed and you can use this if required to treat any superficial injury. You should seek medical assistance for any major injury. All injuries and mishaps should be logged in the Incident Log, which is situated in the shed.

How do I make a complaint or a suggestion about the Garden?

There is a "Brickbats and Bouquets" book in the Shed for your use. This book is taken to every Management Committee meeting and the contents discussed and actioned. Alternatively send an email to balgolahcg@gmail.com.

Can I choose how much irrigation water goes to my bed?

The entire garden is on a timed drip-irrigation watering system. The hours of irrigation are varied according to weather conditions and seasons. However, each bed can be adjusted by turning the main tap on each bed. If you require more watering than is provided, you can water by hand.

Are we allowed to have a picnic in the garden?

Yes, you are allowed to take food and drink into the garden. However you are not allowed to take alcoholic drinks into the garden, and smoking is not allowed at any time.

Are pets allowed?

No, pets are not allowed in the garden. However there is some native wildlife in the garden including a one-eyed ginger cat called Hamish, our own Hens, and several blue-tongued lizards!

Herbicides and Pesticides

Please note that the garden does not promote the use of chemical herbicides and pesticides and prefers organic methods of gardening. This is for the benefit of all members and our wildlife.