

## **Holy Cross Germantown Hospital Community Garden Agreement of Use**

All Applicants must review this agreement fully before applying for the Spring 2026 Season.

The Community Garden & Greenhouse at Holy Cross Germantown Hospital (“the Garden”) is a shared space for food production, learning, and community connection. To ensure a supportive, safe, and productive environment for all participants, all gardeners must read and agree to these terms and submit a signed agreement form after being accepted to receive access.

### **Program Overview**

The Holy Cross Health’s Community Greenhouse and Garden program is part of our Food Security Initiatives (FSI). The program supports Montgomery County residents experiencing food insecurity in growing and accessing fresh produce, building garden and food literacy skills, and strengthening community connections.

\*Individual-assigned and cooperative garden plots are reserved for individuals and/or households experiencing food insecurity. Legal status is not asked or required to participate. Eligibility is confirmed through the application form, and no sensitive personal information is required.\*

In addition to individual plots, some garden beds are managed by Holy Cross program staff to grow produce specifically for donation of community members and local partners, with the assistance of volunteers. All are welcome to become a Holy Cross volunteer to work in these shared beds to support food distribution efforts, learn new skills, and contribute to a healthier community.

Program participants receive access to growing space, greenhouse use, tools and materials, and ongoing education, workshops, and events on gardening, sustainability, and food literacy—working together to increase access to fresh, locally grown produce in a welcoming and inclusive environment.

### **Garden Plot Types & Participation Expectations**

#### **A. Individual Plots (1 gardener/plot): 10’ x 10’ plot OR accessible standing table plot (~2’5” x 4’)**

Designed for gardeners who can visit the plot **at least once per week**, and who are able to plant **the whole plot size** throughout the season.

- Gardeners are responsible for maintaining their own plot, including planting, weeding, harvesting, basic upkeep, and cleaning up at the end of the season.

#### **B. Cooperative Plots (2–4 gardeners/plot): 10’ x 10’ plot**

Designed for participants with less consistent availability, and/or those who plan to grow less than one full plot of crops.

- The cooperative group will collectively ensure weekly visits, dividing visits and garden responsibilities between all cooperative participants as needed.
- All members share responsibilities and decision-making equally unless otherwise agreed upon within the group.
  - Cooperative members can decide to either split the bed into multiple individual plots or share responsibilities and harvests from the whole plot.
  - This is an opportunity to collaborate and to maximize your harvest by working together instead of by yourself.

### **C. Holy Cross Managed Plots**

Maintained and managed by FSI Program Coordinator, Holy Cross staff, and Volunteers to grow produce for:

- Community donations and giveaways; all produce will be shared with community members at designated times.

\*Individual and Cooperative community gardeners are also welcome to receive produce from these beds at the designated distribution times.

### **General information about plot assignments:**

You must apply for a garden plot each season. We will try our best to assign you your preferred number and type of plot, but it is not guaranteed and depends on what is available. Applicants will likely receive one full/individual or one shared/cooperative plot assignment. Applications for plots will be opened in mid-January until the end of February of each year. Once the application closes and plots are remaining, the FSI PC will offer accepted gardeners an opportunity to apply for additional plot space if available. Accepted gardeners may also be able to apply for more plot space, if it becomes available. Please note that previous season plot assignments do not guarantee the same use for the next season. Sometimes plot assignments might change, so you must apply each season, even if you are assigned the same plot as previously.

### **Application form:**

When you fill out your application for the 2026 season, please clarify if you would like to apply for an individual plot, a cooperative plot, or are open to different options depending on what is available. If you apply for a Cooperative plot and know who you would like to share a plot with, please note their name/s, but each person must submit their own application.

### **Mandatory Spring 2026 Orientation & Training**

All Community Gardeners must attend a mandatory (and fun!) community-based training session in Spring 2026. This will be an opportunity to review rules and expectations collectively, so everyone is on the same page and set up for success, and to meet the other gardeners.

### **Training will cover:**

- Tour of garden and overview of program

- Tool use and safety
- Materials for you to use, including seeds and soil mix
- Planting guidelines, including what plants can and cannot be planted
- Water-use guidelines and instructions
- Greenhouse set up and designated purposes
- Composting systems for you to use
- Events and education opportunities
- Communication expectations
- Sign-in requirements
- How to request support

\*\*Community Gardeners will only receive access codes to the garden gate, greenhouse, and tool shed after completing the training.

## Planting Guidelines for Community Garden Plots

The Community Garden prioritizes growing food crops for personal use and for community food distribution. Gardeners may also grow pollinator-supportive plants and cut flowers, if they follow the guidelines below.

Holy Cross staff-managed plantings will also provide harvests that are shared with program participants and the broader community and may include larger shrubs and trees that individual and cooperative gardeners cannot grow in their plots.

## Allowed Plants

### Annual Plants (Preferred)

Gardeners are strongly encouraged to focus on annual food crops. Annual plants complete their full life cycle in one season/year and include many crops ideal for food production. Just like annual vegetables, annual flowers also complete their life cycle in one season.

Annual Examples: tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, squash, lettuce, melon, leafy greens, beans, basil, sunflowers, zinnias, marigolds, and more

### Perennial Plants (Allowed with Limits)

Perennials live for multiple years and are long term plants. Perennials produce new growth during the active growing season, typically in the spring and summer when temperatures and exposure to daylight are both increasing, and then the plants become dormant in the off season and stop producing new growth, typically in the fall and winter when temperatures and exposure to daylight are decreasing. Perennials may be grown only if the gardener can remove them when they change plots or end up participating in the garden program. Certain aggressively growing perennials such as mint require being planted in a pot rather than directly in the ground to prevent permanent establishment.

- Perennials may be overwintered in a plot only if the gardener is returning for the next season. Otherwise, the left behind plants will be removed or utilized by HC staff.

- Perennials must be dug out and removed if a gardener does not renew, or if plots are reassigned. HC staff will do their best to assign gardeners the same plot they had the prior season, but it cannot be guaranteed, and gardeners must be able to move their plants if assigned a different plot, or if otherwise needed.
- To prevent spread and simplify plot cleanup, gardeners are encouraged to grow perennials in pots or containers:
  - Perennial plants that have a height or width at, or more than, 2' at maturity must be planted in a large pot and not directly in the ground, or else they risk being damaged when transplanted and/or overtaking the plot.
  - Many perennial herbs also help deter pests, so potted plants can be strategically placed near other plants prone to pest damage throughout the season.
  - **Aggressive perennial plants like mint and lemon balm are prohibited to be grown directly in raised beds or gardening tables and MUST be grown in pots/containers.** Plants such as these, even if intentionally grown, are considered aggressive because they spread by runners/rhizomes and that easily reseed each season (sprout from seeds left from previous planting), meaning they spread very easily and often compete with other crops once well established, so they should be potted. Roots should not be able to permeate the container into the beds. Some of these plants will also be planted in Holy Cross-managed plots for shared access.

Perennial examples: most herbs like ~~mint~~, thyme, oregano, sage, lavender, perennial vegetables like asparagus, rhubarb, perennial flowers like coneflower/Echinacea, most strawberry varieties

### **Pollinator-friendly Plants (Allowed)**

While plots should be used primarily for growing food, we encourage and support gardeners to also grow flowering annuals and perennials that attract pollinators, which are beneficial to the garden and support pollination for many crops, and help provide a diverse, resilient ecosystem. These plants are also beautiful! All annual plants should be removed and composted at the end of the season, but perennial plants are allowed to stay in plots as long as they follow all the guidelines noted above.

### **Prohibited or Restricted Plants:**

#### **Trees and Large/Woody Shrubs (Not allowed)**

- Gardeners may not plant fruit trees, shrubs, or woody perennial crops in plots. These plants establish deep, wide root systems that require a more permanent location to develop and establish into and are too difficult or risky to transplant as the plant matures. These plants will instead be planted and maintained by staff in more permanent, Holy-Cross managed areas for shared use.
- This includes dwarf fruit trees, berry bushes (blueberries), cane fruits (raspberries, blackberries), and large decorative shrubs (hollies, hydrangeas, boxwoods).

- All gardeners must leave their plots in a condition where they can be fully utilized by the next gardener when they are done using it.

### **Invasive, Noxious, and Aggressive Plants (Not allowed)**

No invasive or noxious species may be grown in the garden. Gardeners must remove invasive or aggressive weeds promptly to prevent spreading.

Invasive, noxious, and aggressive weeds or plants should be removed from the garden to prevent them from spreading to other plots.

- For information about invasive plants, see [Montgomery Parks Weed Warrior Program](#).
- For information about noxious weeds, see [Noxious Weeds in Maryland](#).
- For information about aggressive weeds, see UMD Extension's resources for [weed identification](#) and [weed management](#).

Examples of noxious and invasive plants include (but are not limited to): Bermuda grass, bamboo, creeping jenny, garlic mustard

### **Controlled Substances (Not allowed)**

The cultivation of controlled substances including cannabis is strictly prohibited in all plots, containers, or greenhouse spaces. Growing controlled substances results in removal from the program.

### **All Community Gardeners:**

- Are encouraged to grow a variety of annual food and flower crops, and some perennial food and flower crops within the guidelines above (potting requirements for larger plants and aggressive growing plants). Larger shrubs and trees are not permitted.
- Must remove all perennials, structures, vines, or deep-rooted plants at the end of participation, or when switching plots.
- Will prevent any plant from encroaching into paths or neighboring plots.
- Will manage weeds promptly and regularly and prevent the spread of aggressive species. Weeds should be removed consistently throughout the season.
- Will use the greenhouse for seed starting and transplanting crops related to food production/planting in plots, not for maintaining or overwintering plants unrelated to food production/planting in plots.

### **Greenhouse Access & Use Guidelines**

The greenhouse is a shared resource intended for seed starting, propagation, and season extension for Holy Cross to grow year-round produce for donation. The greenhouse space will be used by both community gardeners and by Holy Cross staff and volunteers for multiple purposes.

### **Greenhouse Access:**

- Entry requires a lock code issued after training. The door should always be locked before you leave.

- Gardeners agree not to share the code with anyone who is not a registered garden member. If you plan to share your code with family or friends to assist you with your plot, you must notify HC Staff beforehand so they can sign an agreement form.

### **Use of greenhouse:**

- Each gardener (or cooperative group) will receive an equal amount of table space for seed trays or plants, as clearly marked on the tables and to be confirmed at training.
- You are responsible for labelling your materials and keeping your space clean. All plants should be clearly labeled, so we know who is growing what. You can either label a tray and put plants on it, or label individual plants as needed.
- Respect others designated garden and greenhouse space, plants, and materials. No one is permitted to touch these without permission.
- All plant debris must be placed in the designated compost system, not in trash bins or left outside the greenhouse.
- Return all tools and materials to designated storage space when not in use.
- Report any safety or facility concerns to staff promptly.

### **Type of Plants in Greenhouse:**

- Growing long-term or year-round plants is not permitted by individual and cooperative gardeners. Plants should be “started” here, to be moved into their growing space outside of the greenhouse when ready.
- Maintaining and overwintering tropical, ornamental, or houseplants unrelated to food production inside the greenhouse is not permitted.

Plants should remain in the greenhouse only long enough to germinate, grow seedlings, and harden off before transplanting outdoors. Any seedlings that do not germinate or do not survive need to be composted and removed as soon as possible.

If you have questions about what types of plants can be grown in plots or kept in the greenhouse, contact the Food Security Initiatives Program Coordinator at [avery.cross@holycrosshealth.org](mailto:avery.cross@holycrosshealth.org)

### **Provided Resources and Materials for Gardeners**

As a Community Gardener, you will have access to the following for shared use:

- Garden tools & hand tools, gloves, all stored in tool shed on site
- Seed packets, and seed starting-materials such as trays, containers, and potting soil
- Wheelbarrows and wagon for moving heavy and bulk materials
- Buckets, bins, baskets, for harvesting and collecting weeds/materials
- Compost (applied to all garden beds in early spring before planting)
- Soil amendments, fertilizers, and organic pest management materials

\*All HC materials must remain on the property and be returned clean and in good condition after use. Improper use and storage will not be tolerated. Shared materials not actively being used should be ready for use by any other gardener at a given time.

Donated seed packets will be shared among community gardeners and kept on site. Community gardeners should only take seeds they are actively using for seed starting and must leave remaining seeds available on site for other gardeners to use, sealed and stored properly. Bags and tape will be provided for closing and storing open seed packets. You are not to store shared seeds separately for personal use unless given permission by HC staff.

## Composting & Waste Management

We maintain multiple active composting systems for sustainable disposal and for improving soil health, including: 3 bin system black bins for plant debris, and vermicompost (worm bin) and tumbler for food waste. Community Gardeners agree to:

- Place plant debris, weed material, and crop food waste in designated compost bins only. Training will cover where to place what types of materials.
- Learn the difference between compostable and non-compostable materials during orientation.
- Avoid leaving piles of debris in walkways, beside beds, or anywhere else.

## Watering Guidelines

- All plots will be irrigated by an automatic watering timer that runs on a seasonal schedule, managed by the Holy Cross FSI Program Coordinator.
- Additional watering is not typically required; however, guidelines for supplemental watering by hose and watering cans will be reviewed during orientation.
- Gardeners agree not to modify irrigation equipment without staff approval.
- Outdoor hose access will be provided after the last frost date until the first frost date of the season (generally April- November).
- Indoor water access by hose will be provided year-round.

## General Conduct & Community Standards

All Community Gardeners agree to:

- Be respectful, welcoming, and supportive of all garden participants. This is a shared community space.
- Only tend to your assigned plot/s- You should not harvest, maintain, or otherwise touch any other plots unless given explicit permission by the gardener who is assigned to a given plot.
- Maintain their plot in reasonably tidy condition (weeded, harvested, and free of hazards) throughout the growing season: generally, April-November
- Communicate with any extended absences and support needs in advance.
- Grow only approved plants (guidance provided at training).
- Provide up to date contact information and respond to garden communications in a timely manner.
- Sign-in each time they visit the garden and/or greenhouse (instructions will be provided on how to do this)

## Safety & Liability

- Gardeners participate at their own risk and agree to use tools and equipment safely and within guidelines and training provided.
- Children must be always supervised while on site.
- Holy Cross staff reserve the right to reassign plots if gardeners do not comply with the agreement after reasonable communication and support.
- In the case of an emergency, gardeners should call 911.
- First aid kits are available on site for non-emergency injuries.

## Contact Information Requirements & Support

Reliable communication is essential for safety, scheduling and seasonal updates, access to produce distribution and event announcements, and sharing essential program information.

### All Community Gardeners agree to:

- Provide an email address for your primary contact information for official communications. We also request that you provide a phone number for your secondary contact information, but it is not required.
- Check email at least weekly to stay up to date on program communications.
- If you do not currently have an email address, Holy Cross will offer optional support sessions to help you set up and learn to use one.
- Gardeners who are unable to maintain an email account may request an exception and instead provide:
  - A reliable phone number (cell or landline), OR
  - Another consistent communication method discussed with staff (examples: a family member's number or email address, a neighbor's phone, or scheduled in-person check-ins).

We aim to support all gardeners equitably. If access to a computer or phone is a barrier, staff will work with you to develop the most dependable and comfortable communication method possible. You must have an established communication plan before starting for the season; it is important that HC staff are able to get in contact with you in a timely manner.

## Volunteers

Volunteers play an important role in garden support and Holy Cross food donation efforts. Volunteers assist Holy Cross staff with caring for Holy Cross-managed plots, harvesting and preparing produce for community donation, assisting with donations and events, and supporting garden operational tasks. Holy Cross volunteers will be on site during scheduled volunteer shifts supervised by the FSI Program Coordinator or other Holy Cross staff.

### Can Community Gardeners Volunteer?

Yes! While not required, community gardeners are welcome and encouraged to apply if they want to:

- Help grow produce for distribution and sharing beyond personal use
- Assist with produce giveaways and donations to our local community members
- Support community-based education and events
- Offer maintenance and operational support for the shared space
- Learn more about and practice diverse garden and food assistance tasks

### **How to Become a Volunteer**

Holy Cross has a formal volunteer onboarding process. If you are interested in volunteering, please follow the instructions below. These instructions are also on the flyer attached at the end of the application:

- **HCH website's instructions for becoming a volunteer:** [Volunteer Applications | Holy Cross Health](#)
- **For questions about volunteering or internships through Volunteer Services, please contact:**

**Sarah Walker**

Manager, Volunteer Services

Tel: 301-754-7306

Email: [sarah.walker001@holycrosshealth.org](mailto:sarah.walker001@holycrosshealth.org)

\*feel free to CC Avery at [avery.cross@holycrosshealth.org](mailto:avery.cross@holycrosshealth.org)

Staff will also share this information at orientation and can assist anyone who needs help completing the application.

### **Events & Education Opportunities**

Holy Cross will offer free, public, community-wide educational programs throughout the growing season. These events are designed to support gardeners of all experience levels and help build a strong, connected gardening community. A schedule of events for the year will be produced in January and shared at the start of the season and updated as needed. You do not have to be an HC community gardener or an HC volunteer to participate in events.

### **About the Events**

- Events are open to all gardeners and to the public, at no cost.
- Topics may include:
  - Seasonal garden tasks (seed starting, planting, trellis support, harvesting, etc.)
  - Organic pest management
  - Nutrition and healthy eating
  - Composting and soil health
  - Seed starting and greenhouse use
  - Wellness and community-building activities
  - Container growing and growing in a small space

- Sessions are hands-on and offer chances to ask questions, learn new skills, and meet other gardeners and community members.
- Participation is encouraged but not required.
- Attending events can help new or uncertain gardeners feel more confident about their garden practices and plots.
- These events also strengthen community relationships, an important goal of the Community Garden.

**Summary of steps to become a community gardener:**

1. Read this agreement fully, decide on what type of plot to apply for
2. Submit online application form linked below:
  - a. English form link: [2026 Holy Cross Hospital Germantown Garden and Greenhouse Application \(ENG\) – Fill out form](#)
  - b. Spanish form: [2026 Holy Cross Hospital Germantown Garden and Greenhouse Application \(Español\) – Fill out form](#)
3. HC staff will confirm your plot assignment with you over email, phone, or in person.
4. Once given your plot assignment, sign and complete Agreement acknowledgement below
5. Attend mandatory training in Spring and receive access codes to garden \*\*\*Attending a training in person before starting is required for use.

**Agreement Acknowledgment**

By applying for a plot, you acknowledge that you have read, understood, and agree to comply with the Community Garden & Greenhouse Agreement of Use. You understand that independent access will not be granted until the mandatory Spring 2026 training is completed.

**Plot type:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Plot number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_