

Best Garden Practices

'Sharing a growing experience & ensuring a productive, bountiful garden.'

- **Check the rows** if you arrive early. Let your team coordinator know about any problems (insects, wilt, weeds, etc.). Open the shed and gather tools and boxes for harvesting.
- **The coordinator** will discuss tasks for the day and evaluate any issues noted. Occasionally, tasks may vary; harvesting a vegetable for the first time, building a trellis, suckering the tomatoes, deadheading flowers, or cleaning out the shed. Your team coordinator is the “go to” resource for how to follow best garden practices on new tasks.
- **Plant** any new plants or seeds. Mark seeds with wire flags and write the name of the crop on the flag.
- **Weed the rows.** See **Weeding 101** below. The amazing “stirrup” hoe which can be purchased at Ace Hardware is often the best tool for weeding as it cuts off the weed just below the ground and doesn’t disturb the veggie plant or the soil around it. Weeding is best done before someone mows between the rows as any garden clutter can be taken care of by the mowing.
- **Mow the grass** between rows and approximately 5 feet around the outer edge of the garden. Mowing needs to be done once a week in late spring, summer and early fall.
- **Harvest and box vegetables** for team donations and your table. Check with your coordinator for proper harvesting methods. How produce is harvested is **IMPORTANT** to help ensure further production and health of the plant.

Plant	Harvesting Instructions
Swiss chard, kale and collards	<i>Harvest with your hand, not a knife.</i>
When harvesting greens, break stem flush from main stalk, lower leaves first, remove damaged leaves	
Lettuces	Harvest with knife, not hands
When harvesting lettuce, cut outside leaves 1” above stalk	

- **Harvesting greens.** Firmly grasp with one hand using your thumb and pointer finger the leaf stem where it joins the main stalk of the plant and bend the leaf downward, so that the *leaf stem breaks flush with the main stalk. Do not cut with a knife, this will cause the plant to grow suckers and the leaves will become very small.*
- **Always harvest** the lower leaves of the **greens** first, continuing harvesting from the outside of the plant inward. If you find damaged or “bad” leaves, please break the leaf away from the plant and drop in the row. Use rubber bands to bind the greens for easy in packing and to protect from excessive damage. Rubber bands are in the garden shed.
- When **harvesting leaf lettuce**, cut off the individual leaves about ½ inch up from the stalk, but leave the plant whole so that it continued to propagate more lettuce. Be sure to pick from the outside leaves in, as these are the oldest and it allows the inner leaves to develop more.
- **Collect waxed boxes** from your green grocer (Earth Fare, Fresh Market, Ingles), *break down** and store in the garden shed. *Your team coordinator will show how to break down and put back together boxes so they can be stored easily in the shed. Waxed boxes work best as they can handle the harvested produce which is often wet from the morning dew.

- **Pick up** trash and return garden tools to shed, etc. Trash can be put in the church dumpster which is at the end of the GCPC parking area on the opposite side of the church.
- **Lost and Found** box is in the garden shed – lost gloves, trowels, water bottles, etc. can be found there. Please help keep the garden shed in “order” and help correct other folk’s disorder.
- **Finally, lock the shed** at the end of your garden day.

Weeding 101—Vegetable Crops

- **Know what you are weeding.** Some plants are grown in rows, some are broadcasted. **The goal** is to kill the weed and let the weed material compost in place.
- **Row crops.** Weed on hot, sunny days when the vegetable plants are taller than 3 inches. Sever or cut the weed from its roots, one half (1/2) an inch below the surface of the soil. Only pull weeds that are two (2) inches from the stem of the vegetable. Use a **stirrup hoe**.
- **Avoid chop cuts** (like chopping with a hoe) or deep cuts near the crop plant as this will cut the lateral roots of the plant.
- **Pull soil toward and around** the stems of spring plants like broccoli, kale, and collards as this helps support the plants. Specific needs of other crops will be discussed later.
- **Shallow weeding** helps keep the soil friable (crumbly) so that the soil’s surface remains loose and the infiltration of water into the soil remains adequate.
- **Seed bank.** Soil is loaded with seeds. Seeds that have been deposited/stored in the soil, especially hard coated seeds, last for decades or longer, waiting for their opportunity to germinate. Each time the soil is tilled new seeds come near the surface and seed germination begins. Once plants begin to mature weeding is generally unnecessary as most weed seeds require strong light to germinate.
- **The only exception** to these instructions is with **succulent weeds**—they should be removed from the garden as they can sprout and grow from their leaves or stems as they lie on top of the soil - Purslane is a common example.