

Grace Covenant Community Garden Best Garden Practices

‘Sharing a growing experience & ensuring a productive, bountiful garden.’

Workday Practices and Procedures

- Help the Team Leader remove equipment from the sheds.
- Ask the Team Leader for direction on tasks for the day or refer to their printed list.
- Perform tasks in order as directed by the Team Leader or the printed list. Some days it will be essential to weed first, other days it will be essential to harvest first.
- It is essential to follow specific harvest instructions for each crop on each work day because certain partners prefer to receive certain vegetables and in certain amounts. When in doubt, ask the Team Leader or Garden Manager.
- If harvesting that day, produce will be delivered in the large blue crates. Discuss with the Team Leader to determine who will be performing the delivery that day.
- Produce should be handled with care so as not to damage before delivery. Crates should be stacked so that the produce is not crushed. Harvested produce should be kept in the shade until delivery.
- It is recommended that one or two people be responsible for weighing produce as the harvest comes in.
- All produce harvested must be weighed and recorded before delivery. Harvest numbers must be given to the Team Leader.
- Volunteers are welcome to take produce for their table after it has been weighed. It is the responsibility of the Team Leader and the deliverer to make sure all volunteers have a chance to “shop” before the produce is delivered to the partner.
- Volunteers can harvest on their own for their own tables: Kale, Chard, Okra, Eggplant, Beets (our partners do not prefer these crops so we do not harvest these for them)
- Once all tasks on the list have been completed, all team members should help clean and put away equipment before they leave. Ensure who will be responsible for locking the sheds at the end of the day. Keep the sheds well organized, and do not just leave equipment in the wheel barrows.

Weeding Practices

- Weeding in our garden includes weeding the edges of the beds, in between the vegetable rows, and weeding on the ends where the irrigation line is set up. Some of this requires hand weeding or trowel weeding.
- Weeds can be left in the rows to die and compost in the soil or tossed in the grass to be mowed later. Some invasive weeds like Bermuda grass should be tossed in the grass away from the garden beds.

- Weeds that should be hand pulled or dug with a trowel: Large weeds with large root systems, any weed within 1-2 inches of the vegetable plant stem (hand pulled), succulent weeds like purslane, ground cover type weeds that “crawl”, invasive grasses like [Bermuda grass](#) that have creeping roots (all of the roots must be removed). Bermuda grass is often found on the edges and ends of the beds.
- For row weeding, most gardeners will want to use a stirrup hoe. Stirrup hoes should be used in between rows of vegetables when weeds are small and vegetable plants are taller than 3 inches. [Stirrup Hoe Video](#)
- The stirrup hoe is used to sever or cut the weeds from their roots one half (1/2) an inch below the surface of the soil. A stirrup hoe should not be used deeper than ½ inch or within 1-2 inches of the stem of the plant.
- Weeds within 1-2 inches of the stem of the plant should be hand pulled.
- Avoid hacking and chop cuts. Only use a fluid, push-pull motion. Avoid deep cuts near the crop plant as this will cut the lateral roots of the plant.
- Care must be taken to avoid cutting the irrigation tape. If a weed is near the irrigation tape, gently move the irrigation tape out of the way with your hoe and then continue your hoeing motion.

Composting Practices

- Weeds do not need to go in the compost. Only crop plants

Harvesting Practices

Kale, Collards, Swiss Chard:

[Video 1](#)

[Video 2](#)

- Always harvest the lower leaves of the main stalk first; continue harvesting from the outside of the plant inward and up. If you find damaged or “bad” leaves, please break the leaf away from the plant and drop it in the row.
- Firmly grasp the stem of the leaf with one hand using your thumb and pointer finger where it joins the main stalk of the plant and snap the base of the stem downward so that the leaf stem breaks flush away from the main stalk. Do not cut with a knife, this will cause the plant to grow suckers and the leaves will become very small. Do not leave a stem stub on the main stalk. Clean off any stubs left by others.
- Leave a few medium-sized leaves so that the plant can still photosynthesize.
- As much as possible, assemble leaves in the crates in bundles with the stalks all together. Rubber bands are not necessary.
- Sometimes it is not possible to snap Swiss Chard off the main stem. If this happens, cut leaves with a knife and leave as little stub as possible.

Spinach

[Video 1](#)

- Use your thumb and index finger to snap leaves off as close to the base of the stem as possible. It is ok to leave a stem stub, but a clean cut is best. Scissors can be used.
- Harvest all leaves on the outside and bottom of the plant, moving inward until you harvest everything except for a few very small leaves in the center of the plant. Spinach grows very fast in the spring and we must keep it from bolting. Only leaving a few very small leaves in the center keeps it from bolting.