

Sheridan College

Community Garden Handbook



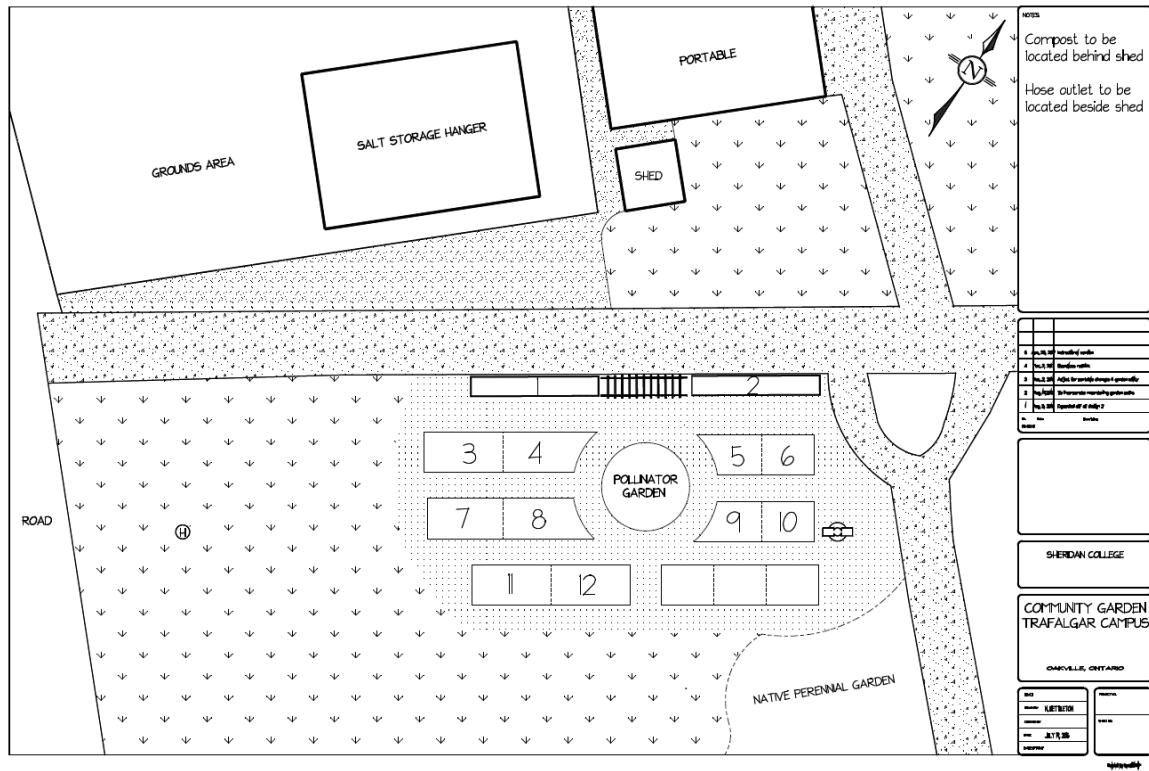
Introduction

Sheridan's Community Garden is a grassroots initiative that began during the winter of 2016. Initially built in May 2016, the garden is located at Trafalgar Campus in Oakville, Ontario, between A-Wing and the Athletics Centre. A more permanent garden will be constructed in May 2017. Aimed at providing an applied outdoor learning experience, the Community Garden provides participants with the opportunity to learn how to grow and harvest local, organic, in-season food for personal consumption. The Community Garden is designed to help foster collaboration and community involvement by providing participants the opportunity to teach, learn and mentor each other in groups.

Students, staff, and community members, of experience levels from first time planters to dedicated gardeners, are all welcome to participate in the Community Garden activity.

Sheridan's Community Garden has received funding from the 2016 President's Creative Challenge for Wellness, and a grant from TD Friends of the Environment. The Garden is overseen by the Sheridan Community Garden Committee that consists of Jessica Carey (currently on maternity leave), Jessica Derreck (currently on maternity leave), Nathan Nettleton, Anna Pautler, Matthew Sanche, Andrew Staples and Michelle Szabo. For more information please contact the Community Garden Committee by emailing CommunityGarden@sheridancollege.ca.

Community Garden Map



The Community Garden is located between the A-Wing and Athletics Centre at the Trafalgar Campus. It will be located near the Native Perennial Garden. Water/hose will be located near the storage shed. A Compost bin/station will be located behind the storage shed. The garden will be surrounded by wood chip/mulch to help suppress weeds and to help cope with muddy conditions.

Each group will be assigned one garden plot. Plots 1 & 2 are accessible beds. Plots 3-12 are farm beds. In the middle of the layout a circular pollinator patch will be built to encourage pollinators (bees, butterflies, insects) to the location.

Purpose of the Sheridan Community Garden

Promote Health: Gardening involves outdoor activities (shoveling, walking, watering, weeding, etc.) which is beneficial to physical and mental well-being. By accessing nature and observing green vegetation, gardening can be relaxing for the body and soul. The fresh air and exercise are good for you!

Learning Opportunities: Participants will be able to gain experiential learning by working with a group to better understand and appreciate sustainable small-scale food practices. Participants are encouraged to share, teach and learn from each other as well as to do their own research about best gardening practices. This guidebook will serve as a reference to help new gardeners get started.

Social Opportunities: The Community Garden provides a place where people can share and exchange their produce and ideas. More experienced gardeners can teach those just starting out. The Community Garden is a social place to create new friendships while learning and growing food together.

Food Security: By providing space to grow fresh food for personal consumption, along with teaching safe growing practices and cultivation techniques, the Community Garden provides an emphasis on localized food systems.

Economical: Organic food is usually costly. Planting your own vegetables and fruit will help save money. All of the seeds we have can be provided for free to participants. We also have most of the tools you will require for the job, all free to use.

Opportunity and Convenience: Some community members love to garden but have little or no access to land. The Community Garden offers a place to grow your own food.

Getting Started

Get approval: In order to get a gardening plot, you first need to submit the application. Once your application is approved, you will be assigned a plot. Since all of the plots are shared group plots, you may indicate the name(s) of people you would like to share with. Each person has to submit their own application and you can each put down each other's names on your applications. If you don't have a gardening group, then you will be added to a group. It's a great way to meet new people!

Be prepared: All applicants are required to read this guide and adhere to any policies regarding the Community Garden before getting their plots. Hopefully, all the answers to the questions can be found on the FAQ section of the website and this document. If you have outstanding questions, you may email CommunityGarden@sheridancollege.ca.

Time commitment: We anticipate an initial planting time of one to two hours per allotment, and suggest that regular maintenance take place five to seven days per week. Ten to fifteen minutes at each visit will be sufficient time to take care of weeding, watering, tying up crops, pruning, and harvesting.

IMPORTANT: Please be aware that failing to tend to your plants may result to you losing your allotment in the garden. Abandoned plots will be taken back and assigned to other applicants on the waiting list.

What if I've never gardened before?

The purpose of the garden is to learn and teach others about gardening, so beginner gardeners are encouraged to get involved! There will be opportunities to learn from educational information sessions over the growing season to provide knowledge and techniques on gardening to participants. A number of online video tutorials and other information will also be provided for you to watch and read on your own time. For more information please see the *FAQ's* section of the Handbook.

Plot types

The Community Garden has two types of plot types for use this Spring/Summer growing season:

1. Raised bed: A raised bed filled with soil used to plant vegetables or fruit. These accessible beds will be elevated 1-2 feet above ground level to allow for easier access for those in need.
2. Farm bed: A mounded area of soil, approximately 6", over top of pre-existing soil with which deeper rooting plants can further root into. These will be split up into plots of similar sizes that can be accessed from multiple sides.

Growing and Maintaining Your Plot

You can grow any vegetables, fruits, herbs and other edible native plants that are adapted to the environment here. Those plants will require fewer fertilizer, pesticides, and maintenance, therefore to keep sustainability as well as increase efficiency. We have a variety of seeds available for free (see Seeds Available), but you are also welcome to purchase or bring your own seeds/plants, as long as they're approved by the garden committee.

Sustainable, ecological gardening methods are highly recommended, such as using mulch, companion planting, organic fertilizers, and efficient watering, which minimize disease, pests, and weeds. Invasive species and illegal plants are not permitted.

In order to keep the garden sustainable and organic, the use of synthetic-based fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides or fungicides in the garden is not allowed. You may use natural fertilizers such as compost, matured or composted animal manure, eggshells, blood meal etc. For more details please see *Frequently Asked Questions - What types of fertilizers and pesticides can I use?*

End of the Season Protocol

At the end of the growing season, your group will be responsible for harvesting any remaining produce and returning the plot to its original pre-season condition. This includes removing all signage, cages, growing supports and other items your group has installed in your garden. Any items that you wish to donate or are in condition to be reused next year can be stored in the on-site shed. You are required to pull all remaining plants/weeds and move them to the compost bin on site. If you have planted a perennial, and are planning on signing up for a garden in 2018, understand that you may not be assigned to the same plot next growing season. You are welcome to take any of your plants home with you.

Signage and other garden installations

All plots need be marked with your group team name. This allows all participants and other community members to know who is responsible for each plot. It also provides a way for participants to contact and ask questions about what is growing in neighbouring plots. Other garden decorations, scarecrows, cages, lattices etc. are permitted as long as they do not interfere with other garden plots. Groups are encouraged to mark their plants with plant markers for easier identification.

Seeds Available

The Community Garden seed bank currently consists of: tomatoes, eggplants, okra, basil, beets, radishes, lettuce, carrots, tomatillos, red bell peppers, cayenne peppers and super-hot peppers. Supplies of each seed are limited and cannot be guaranteed. If you have seeds/seedlings you would like to donate, please connect with CommunityGarden@sheridancollege.ca.

Tools, Water and Community Supplies

The on-site shed and water station is shared space among all Community Garden Participants. A limited number of shared resources and tools will be available for participant use. Once you have used an item from the shed, or used the hose for watering (see FAQs for more watering details), you are required to return the tools/hose to where you found it, in an organized and neat fashion.

All tools in the shed will be considered shared and available to all participants. If you bring your own tools, and leave them in the shed, this means you acknowledge other participants can also use your tools. If you would like your tools returned to you at the end of the season, please label your tools so you know which are yours. **Sheridan College and the Sheridan Garden Committee cannot take responsibility for any tools/supplies left in the shed.**

Personal items such as water bottles, gloves, sun glasses, sun hats etc. should not be stored in the shed. The shed is for larger, community-use items only. Any unclaimed items will be brought to Sheridan's lost and found located at Security.

First Aid/Safety

Please ensure you take precautions while participating in the Community Garden. Ensure that you wear sunscreen/sun protection if exposed outside for extended periods of time. You are also encouraged to stay hydrated and to take frequent breaks, especially on hot and sunny days. It is recommended that you wear closed-toe shoes, gloves and other protective clothing to minimize risk of injury. If you have any severe allergies (e.g. bees, bug bites etc.) please take appropriate precautions.

Any injury/accident that occurs while participating in the Community Garden Project needs to be reported to Sheridan Security (905-845-9430 ext. 4044). A First Aid kit is available in the Athletics Centre.

Responsibilities of Participants

As participants of the Sheridan Community Garden, you are responsible to adhere to the guidelines and rules as laid out in this handbook. All participants will be required to submit a completed and signed Sheridan College Community Garden Member Agreement and the Community Garden Waiver form prior in partaking in any gardening activity. Please submit these documents to CommunityGarden@sheridancollege.ca.

For More Information

The Community Garden Committee strives to help support you with your garden plot. The Committee consists of staff/faculty from interdisciplinary backgrounds and we might be able to connect you with appropriate resources and supports. If you have further questions or suggestions on how to improve the Community Garden, please contact CommunityGarden@sheridancollege.ca.

Frequently Asked Questions

How to use the FAQ's

This section is designed to help answer some common questions you might have. Included in the answers are several embedded links that will take you to external resources to help provide you with more resources.

How do we get started?

Before planting day, discuss with your group what you'd like to plant. Consult whether the species needs to be started from seed or can be sowed directly into the soil (see Figure 1). Once you have an idea of what you would like to plant, you will need to come up with a general design of your garden. Remember vegetable plants love sun! If you want to plant something tall (e.g. corn or sunflowers), be aware that this may shade out your plants or another group's plot. If your plant is aggressive and needs lots of space (eg. squash, cucumber, pumpkins) make sure your plant isn't going to invade your neighbours plot.

It is also important to design your garden with appropriate pathways to ensure you can reach what you need. Be creative!

What can I plant? What should I know about starting a garden?

Currently available:

- The Garden Committee has started the following seedlings that should be available in limited quantities to groups: tomatoes, tomatillos, pickling cucumbers, dill, cayenne peppers, cayenne and super hot peppers, and bell peppers
- Seeds that are available in limited quantities include: tomatoes, eggplants, okra, basil, beets, radishes, lettuce, carrots, tomatillos, red bell peppers, cayenne peppers and super-hot peppers.
- You are welcome and encouraged to buy your own seeds or seedlings and bring them to your plot. Seeds/seedlings can be bought at most garden centres and nurseries.

Companion Planting:

A good strategy to help improve health and quality of your plants is to utilize companion planting when designing your garden. Companion planting is pairing two or more different species in close proximity in order to help with pest control and plant growth. A useful guide on how to utilize companion planting can be found online here: <http://www.vegetablegardeninglife.com/companion-planting-charts.html>

Spacing your plants:

You might be most used to seeing gardens planted like farms: in low continuous rows. This is an effective way to grow and harvest food on a large scale, however small-scale gardening can be made most effective by utilizing the square-foot garden technique. This technique was popularized by Mel Bartholomew in 1981. This successful and popular technique has inspired numerous [garden plans](#) that are available for you to use. Keep in mind, your plot size might not fit these plans exactly, so you might need to modify them. To see how many of each plant you can fit into a square foot, check on this handy [infographic](#).

Vertical Gardening:

A lot of plants can be grown vertically by climbing up poles, lattice and other structures. This helps to maximize your use of space. If you are planning on growing beans, peas, cucumbers or other vine-like plants, make sure you get some structures to support them and guide their growth. A limited number of lattices will be made available for some groups. More information about how to grow things vertically can be found here: <https://www.growveg.com/guides/supports-for-climbing-beans-and-peas/>

Support Structures/Cages

Some plants need extra help to stay upright. Plants such as tomatoes, eggplant and peppers will thrive if they are grown with the support of a tomato cage, or gently tied to bamboo or wooden stakes. A limited number of cages/stakes are available in the shed, however if your group intends on growing a lot of these plants, you might want to invest in cages/stakes from your local nursery or garden centre.

| Crop | Start in pot? | Planting Date | Approx. Spacing Required (") | Notes |
|--|---------------|-------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Detroit dark red beet | | By May 24 weekend | 12-18 | |
| Early wonder beet | | By May 24 weekend | 12-18 | |
| Ruby queen beet | | By May 24 weekend | 12-18 | |
| Winter Squash | Yes | Mid-April | 24-36 | |
| Heirloom buttercup squash | Yes | Mid-April | 24-36 | |
| Cantaloupe | Yes | Mid-April | 24-36 | |
| Pickling cucumbers | Yes | Mid-April | 48+ | Needs lattice |
| Dill herb | Yes | Mid-April | | |
| Kale – Vates Blue Curled variety | | By May 24 weekend | 18-24 | |
| Bunching green onion | | By May 24 weekend | 6 | |
| Tomatillo | Yes | Mid-April | 24 | Needs cages |
| Melanzana eggplant (Chinese long eggplant) | Yes | End of March | 18-24 | Needs cages or lattice |
| Chinese long eggplant | Yes | End of March | 18-24 | Needs cages or lattice |
| Indian round eggplant | Yes | End of March | 18-24 | Needs cages or lattice |
| Thai green eggplant | Yes | End of March | 18-24 | Needs cages or lattice |
| Choy sum | | By May 24 weekend | 12 | |
| Cayenne pepper | Yes | End of March | 12-18 | |
| Hybrid super hot pepper | Yes | End of March | 12-18 | |
| Bitter melon | Yes | Mid-April | 36 | Needs trellis |
| Hybrid Sparkler okra | Yes | End of March | 36 | |
| Annie Oakley okra | Yes | End of March | 36 | |
| Watermelon radish | | By May 24 weekend | 12-18 | |
| Italian pole beans | | By May 24 weekend | 18-30 | |
| Bosnia pole beans | | By May 24 weekend | 18-30 | |
| Bush beans | | By May 24 weekend | 18-30 | |
| Half yard long beans | | By May 24 weekend | 18-30 | |
| Bell peppers | Yes | End of March | 18 | |
| Carrots | | | 12-18 | |
| Tomatoes | | | 24-36 | Needs cages |
| Lettuce, Buttercrunch | | | 12-18 | |
| Tomatoes (cherry) | Yes | | 24-36 | Needs cages |
| Peppers (allsorts sweet) | | | 18-24 | |
| Chives | | | | |
| Coriander | | | | |
| Basil | | | | |
| Rosemary | | | | |

Figure 1 - Setting up your garden: available seeds.

How do I take care of my plants?

This can be a stressful, confusing question for a first time gardener! Once your plants begin to grow, depending on the growth habit, your goals for the plant and how you wish to approach gardening, there is almost endless information that could be applied for plant care. Please be assured that at the most simple levels, plants are going to do everything they can to grow and care for themselves; it is the gardener's task to facilitate their needs as best possible and try to prevent/resolve problems as they present themselves.

Two of the goals of Sheridan's community garden is to experientially learn to care for plants as they grow and to exchange ideas and methods of plant care! So we encourage you to seek out others in the community who have had gardens before to glean wisdom from them and to be intentional and observant through your whole gardening experience that you will have learned much through successes and failures (hopefully mostly successes!) by the end of your first year.

Researching the plants you intend to grow in addition to collaborating with experienced gardens will lay a foundational knowledge for plant care. Perhaps ask for recommended online resources, resources from the library, books, or information that others may possess or know of. As the season persists and plants grow, your experience will begin to mature your plant care skills!

For more information on growing in Ontario please see:

<https://seasonalontariofood.blogspot.ca/2011/02/what-to-grow-in-small-basic-garden.html>

Where do I find the water source and hose?

Watering may be easier done with 2 or more group members.

The water supply will be located close to the garden shed. Uncoil the hose in sections and bring it out to the garden. Don't drag the hose by the end. Instead, grab a section of the hose and drag it out, drag another section and drag it out. Continue until you've reached your plot. **Take extra care to not drag the hose, especially through any plots or over any plants!!!**

When your watering is complete, return the hose one section at a time to the hose reel. Make sure to turn off the water after each use.

How often and how much do I water?

The amount of watering depends on the weather! For example, if we are having a very hot and dry spring and summer, then you may need to water daily. Most plants have instructions on how much water they require. We recommend you water first thing in the morning or late afternoon to prevent wasting water through water evaporation and burning the plants. When watering, try to avoid watering the foliage as this creates

opportunity for leaf disease especially when moisture may persist longer on a leaf such as through the night or on an overcast humid day.

Keep an eye on the weather and adjust your watering appropriately. For example, if the day's forecast indicates that rain is coming, you may be able to skip watering that day. However, always check that it actually rained and that your plants received sufficient water, rather than relying on nature. Forecasts often change! If your group members are not able to come water over the weekend and there is no rain in the forecast for the weekend, you may want to give your plot a very good watering on Friday end of day and first thing Monday morning.

Please see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olr0Np7PvGk> (this video plugs gardening software @2:09 but has a lot of good information throughout the video).

What is a weed and what do I do with it?

In gardening, weeds are very subjective because they are defined as unwanted plants. For some people, dandelions are weeds, yet for others dandelions are grown because you can eat the leaves, make tea with the flower and make wine with the roots. Labelling your plants and having a design to know what you planted where, will make it much easier to identify what is pulled out as a weed, and what is not.

When pulling weeds, it is important to get the entire plant including the root system. If you take out the surface part of the plant, but do not remove the roots, then the plant will continue to grow. **Do not use any weed herbicides in the community garden.** All weeding needs to be done by hand.

Once you have plucked out your weeds, you can take them to the on-site composter. Please do not leave weeds in the pathways or in other garden plots.

How do I harvest and what can I do with my produce?

Usually, the best time to harvest is when the plants themselves are not in a water deficit state such as in the morning or on an overcast day. **It is important to know what part of the plant you can/cannot eat.** Certain parts of the plant may not be safe for human consumption, so please make sure you double check with an experienced gardener or online before eating. There are three main harvested parts of plants: leaves (eg. Kale), fruits (eg. Tomatoes) and roots (eg.. Potatoes).

Leaves: there are two types of harvest: whole plant foliage harvest and continuous harvest.

- **Whole plant:** (eg. a head of lettuce) If harvesting all the leaves at one time, it is often best to pluck the whole plant out of the ground and then wash it off and separate leaves to use before a meal. By retaining the root system until such a time, less water loss occurs in the leaf itself, which keeps it fresher.

- **Continuously harvesting leaves:** (ex. Kale) Harvest the lowest/oldest leaves and work towards new ones. Using scissors or something sharp makes for a clean cut giving less opportunity for disease to enter an injury. This also keeps from injuring the stem of the plant allowing for the remaining leaf stem to naturally abscise.

Fruits: When harvesting fruits/vegetables off of a plant, look to see how strongly attached the fruit/vegetable is to the plant and consider what the future is for the plant. If the plant is to remain and continue to produce more through the growing season, gently harvesting fruits/vegetables is of most importance to avoid injuring the plant itself. Some plants allow for easy harvest by pinching or twisting fruit/vegetable stems. However, if this will cause a lot of pull, twisting, and bending of the main plant stem, it may be best to cut off the fruit/vegetable with something sharp. This also makes for a cleaner cut on the plant, which reduces the chances of disease infection. Be mindful not to nick your plant (or yourself!) with the sharp tool when sifting through your plants in search of harvestable vegetables/fruits!

Roots: When harvesting roots, most often one does not need to be as careful with the aerial (above ground) portion of the plant because it is being wholly removed. When removing roots, it is best to loosen soil around the root using a tool such as a pitchfork or hand trowel to ensure it does not break when pulled out. Often plants that will be root harvested are planted in raised soil rows for easier access and looser soil to expand in. Because we are only using mounded or raised beds with a loam type soil, accessing/loosening soil around plants such as carrots should be fairly easy. Remember, you can also eat the top leaves of some root vegetables (such as beets). However, some plants, such as rhubarb, have edible stalks, but the leaves are poisonous. Make sure you double check what is edible!

To specifically see a type of harvest, we recommend searching the specific crop on a site such as YouTube. For example, in the search window type “[How to harvest cucumbers.](#)”

After you harvest your veggies (hurray!) you can do anything you wish with your bounty. It’s up to your group to decide how you share and distribute your produce. You may also donate some or all of your produce to a food bank such as the Student Union food bank.

What if I’ve never gardened before?

This Handbook includes resources to websites where you can find answers to your gardening questions. Also, since it’s a Community Garden, we encourage everyone to learn from each other and hope that the more experienced gardeners can help out those

just starting out. If you have specific questions about what to do, ask other Community Garden members, find your answers on YouTube or various garden websites, or connect with the Community Garden Committee to get some additional advice.

What is the time commitment for the garden?

Time commitment will vary on what you are growing, and on the weather (rain). Designing and planting your garden will take the most time commitment. If you have a design on paper, it will make the sowing and planting much easier.

Once your garden is planted you can expect to spend around ten to fifteen minutes at each visit will be sufficient time to take care of weeding, watering, tying up crops, pruning, and harvesting.

It is recommended that at least one member of your group is checking on the garden between 5-7 days a week. Creating a weekly schedule of responsibilities would be an effective way to ensure that the garden is being looked after each day.

What happens if I'm no longer interested in participating in the Community Garden or leave Sheridan? What happens if the group is no longer interested or the plot is abandoned?

If you're no longer interested or leave Sheridan, let your group members know. The group may decide to recruit another group member to replace you.

If the whole group is no longer interested, please let the Community Garden Committee know and we will offer the plot to other interested parties.

If it comes to the Community Garden committee's attention that you're not taking proper care of your plot (e.g. weeds growing, not watering, dying plants), your group will be contacted to discuss the situation and to implement a strategy for plot restoration. If we do not hear a response within 5 business days or if the situation is not properly rectified, you will be evicted from your plot and it will be offered to another group.

What happens if weeds or other people's plants encroach on my plot?

It's your group's responsibility to weed your plot. If another group's plants start encroaching on your plot (e.g. viney plots), notify your neighbour (this is why having plot signage is important). If no resolution is settled, contact the Community Garden committee.

What types of fertilizers and pesticides can I use?

Herbicides and other chemicals to eliminate weeds are not permitted in the garden as they can contaminate and ruin the soil.

Remember, growing your own vegetables and fruit may not result in grocery store quality produce. In fact, a lot of produce from farms are deemed too “ugly” and thrown out, even though they are perfectly acceptable to eat!

Please do not use any of these options without the consensus of the group and do not apply to other group’s neighbouring plants without their consent! **Please avoid any type of pest application if bees are present!** If you would like to use some type of botanical home-made remedy, please contact the Garden Committee for review and approval of use.

Natural fertilizers only such as:

- Bloodmeal
- Bonemeal
- Compost (matured)
- Compost Tea
- Earthworm Castings
- Matured manure
- Various plant/animal derived ‘meals’

Only natural pesticides such as:

- Baking Soda
- Citrus Oils
- Compost Teas
- Diatomaceous Earth (*not pool grade*)
- Garlic Oil
- Hot Pepper Dust
- Insecticidal Soap
- Neem
- Starch Spray

Who to contact when...?

If you have any other questions that were not covered here, email the Community Garden Committee at CommunityGarden@sheridancollege.ca.