

Frequently Asked Questions

City of Madison Edible Landscape Requests on City Owned Lands

Q: Is there a typical size of an edible landscape installation?

A: So far, the majority of the approved edible landscape installations have included 3-4 fruit and/or nut trees and/or 5 or fewer berry shrubs (ex: gooseberry, currants). The square footage of plantings will mostly depend on the size of the proposed site, and your ability to care for them. The policy does not limit the square footage, number of plantings, or height. However, there may be site specific restrictions that apply.

Q: How long does it take to get a permit?

A: It may take up to three months, depending on how complicated your application is.

Q: Can other people eat fruit from my trees?

A: Yes. Once you plant them, your edible landscapes become property of the City and anyone can harvest from them.

Q: Are there any plants that are prohibited from use in an edible landscape?

A: You cannot plant species prohibited by the [Noxious Weeds Ordinance of the Madison General Ordinance](#). Additionally, some species may not be appropriate for some sites. For example: fruit and nut bearing trees will generally not be approved for installation with close proximity to bike paths and parking areas and thorn-bearing shrubs will generally not be approved for installation within close proximity to playgrounds.

Q: Are there any city properties that are “off limits” or are all city parks and green spaces eligible for edible landscape installations?

A. All city parks and green spaces are eligible for edible landscapes applications but edible landscape requests for a particular city property could be turned down. City agencies may have future uses or construction already planned for a given property that appears to be unused. Planned improvements for a site, the extent of its current uses and size limitations, its former use (such as for a landfill) may all factor into a property being determined to be unsuitable for an edible landscape.

Q: If I move away or can't take care of my plantings for some reason, will the City take over maintenance?

A: No. Once you have a permit, you are responsible for maintaining the plantings, or finding someone else who can. If you abandon the planting, the City may remove it.

Q: Does my planting plan need to be drawn by a landscape architect?

A: No. It just needs to show the area where you want to plant, and which plants will go where. Please see approved examples of planting and maintenance plans on the City's Edible Landscapes webpage.

Q: What needs to be included in a management plan for an edible landscape?

A: There are several key items that must be included in an edible landscape management plan:

- Evidence that someone is committed to maintaining the edible landscape installation. The more people helping, the larger the planting can be.
- A multi-year plan for the maintenance and management of the plants. Example items to address include: what tasks will be performed immediately following installation and who will be responsible? What tasks will be added as the trees and/or shrubs, vines, etc. mature and become fruit-bearing? What is the plan for management of diseases and/or pests on the plants? How often are members of the maintenance team able to be at the site for routine checks on the plants and, later, for harvesting?
- Identification of a reliable water source. A water source is essential to any proposed edible landscape installation. Ideally the applicant or a member of the applicant's group can provide water from a hose connected to a home located near the planting. Applicants should be aware that "bucket only" methods of watering via bringing in water from an off-site location will limit the extent of the edible landscape planting that can be approved. If a water hose is run from an adjacent private property, an applicant must have written permission from the property owner.

Please see approved examples of planting and maintenance plans on the City's Edible Landscapes webpage.

Q: Are edible landscape applicants required to notify neighbors to the park before submitting an application?

A: Applicants must notify the neighborhood association(s) and the district's alder prior to submitting an application. You may also want to contact nearby residents so they know what is going on. Maybe they'll want to help with the project!

Q: How often do I have to visit my site?

A: As often as you need to in order to keep it well maintained, keep the plants healthy, and keep the site tidy.

Q: Can I use gardening and orchard management practices such as mulching, the use of cardboard to clear turfgrass, chicken wire fencing to prevent animal predation, and tree stakes to support and protect newly planted trees?

A: Maybe. City-owned sites differ significantly from private lawn and gardens in both their management and the expectation that many other individuals not associated with the project will come into contact with the plants. Some methods cannot be used due to conflicts with mowing maintenance and other uses (i.e. field sports) of the surrounding lawn areas.

Q: Can I put up a sign explaining my plantings?

A: Yes. You can put up a sign describing the planting, giving your contact information, and inviting the public to harvest from your edible landscape. Your sign needs to be approved by the City, and it can't advertise for a business.

Q: Can I build raised beds?

A: No, you can't install any permanent structures in your planting.