How to Start Your Own Urban Garden in Detroit

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Step One: Acquiring Land owned by the City

The first step in starting your own urban garden is to find the appropriate space in which to grow your desired crops. There are two different approaches to acquiring land for use in an urban garden in the City of Detroit: leasing the land or purchasing a particular plot. While each approach has unique strengths, there may be downsides to selecting a certain option, so it is important to fully understand how to acquire land in order to make the best decision for your garden.

Land Leasing:

Pros:
- The upfront cost is generally cheaper than the costs associated with purchasing a plot
- Not responsible for taxes on the property
- Get to help control vacant lots in your neighborhood without the taxes and financial burdens of ownership
- Leases for urban gardens are generally less than three years so you are able to try gardening on a short-term period to see if it is something you are interested in without making the long-term commitment of purchasing property.

Cons:
- Leases are not guaranteed renewal; you may have to be changing plots of land on a yearly basis. This can become a problem if you have heavily invested into making the soil usable or in erecting permanent structures on the property that cannot be moved.
- Some leases do not allow gardening structures such as raised bed gardens, hoop houses, fences, decorations, etc.
- Leasing programs run by the City of Detroit might be discontinued due to lack of funds and your plot will no longer be available for gardening purchases.
Leasing Options

*Adopt-A-Lot Program*

**Cost:** The cost of the Adopt-A-Lot program is free

**Details:** Any vacant plot that is owned by the City of Detroit can be leased under the Adopt-A-Lot program. To participate in the program, applicants must complete the attached application and properly submit the completed paperwork as directed. The city will then process the request and respond within ten days. All permits issued by the City of Detroit end on December 31st of the year, and an applicant must re-apply on a yearly basis to continue maintaining the plot. No permanent structures (such as raised bed gardens, greenhouses, fences, etc.) may be erected on the plot, but temporary garden fixtures (hoop houses, garden decorations, etc.) are allowed.

Additional information and application is available at the website www.detroitmi.gov, under the Planning and Development Department tab.

*Garden For Growth Program*

**Cost:** The cost of purchasing a plot through the Garden For Growth program is $25 for a one-year lease and $75 for a three-year lease

**Details:** Run through Michigan Land Bank, Garden for Growth allows urban gardeners to lease plots of vacant land for one or three year terms. Individuals or legally formed entities are eligible to apply for plots of land through Garden for Growth (note: neighborhood co-ops can not apply if they are not legally formed, but one member of the co-op could apply in their individual capacity if they so wish). In order to apply, and applicant must complete the attached application and properly submit it to the Michigan Land Bank as directed on the form. The Michigan Land Bank will then review the application and respond to the inquiry within 14 days. If the applicant is approved, they will submit the check or money order and then the lease for the plot will be executed by the State of Michigan.

More information can be found at [www.michigan.gov/treasury](http://www.michigan.gov/treasury)

**Land Purchasing**

**Pros:**
- Can erect any type of structure on the land as long as it meets the zoning regulations
- Can make long term investments in the soil quality, water system, etc., with the reassurance that this plot will be in your control indefinitely
- After the purchase is approved, there is no need to worry about filing yearly paperwork to comply with leasing regulations or leasing extension deadlines

**Cons:**
- Must pay property taxes
- If the land ends up being undesirable for gardening, leaving the plot would require selling or leasing to another buyer instead of the just not renewing your lease like a lessor would be able to do.

**Land Purchasing Programs:**

**White Picket Fence Program**

**Cost:** The cost of purchasing land through the White Picket Fence Program is $200, however each approved buyer receives a $200 gift card to use for purchasing gardening supplies

**Details:** The White Picket Fence program only has plots available in Southwest Detroit and the North End (Woodward to 1-75 and Grand to Arden Park). This program allows property owners to purchase adjacent vacant plots for $200. *Only owners of the adjacent property to the vacant plots are eligible for this program.*

To find out what plots are available in your neighborhood and for further information on The White Picket Fence Program contact Greg Holman of the City of Detroit’s Planning and Development Department by telephone, at (313) 628-0076 or via email, at gholman@detroitmi.gov

**Buying City-Owned Surplus Land**

**Cost:** The cost of purchasing a city-owner surplus land is the fair market value of that particular plot.

**Details:** Must fill out the attached application for City of Detroit’s Planning and Development Department and submit it according to the directions on the paperwork. If your application is accepted, Detroit City Council will determine the fair market value of the land and will present you with an offer to purchase. If you accept the offer, the City Council must approve the transaction. Once approved, you can close on the property and receive a quitclaim deed.

For more information about how to purchase City-Owned surplus land, contact the City of Detroit’s Planning and Development Department at (313) 224-6380. You may also visit the City of Detroit’s Planning and Development Department from 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at its office located at 65 Cadillac Square, suite 2300, Detroit Michigan 48226.
Garden for Growth Program Application to Lease

Thank you for your interest in leasing and gardening property owned by the State of Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority (Authority). The mission of the Authority is to return blighted, tax reverted properties to productive and economically viable use. The Authority will work cooperatively with local units of government and the private sector to create opportunities for economic growth within the manufacturing, industrial, commercial, retail, housing and public use arenas. This application process will assist individuals and organizations that are interested in leasing or otherwise acquiring properties owned by the Authority.

The Application Process:

1. Submit a completed application, and documentation of non-profit or organizational status if applicable, to the Authority at:

   Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority
   Garden for Growth Program
   7150 Harris Drive
   Lansing, Michigan 48909

2. Upon receipt of your completed application and required documentation, the Authority will evaluate your application.

3. You will be notified if your application is denied or approved. If approved, you will be sent a letter of approval and proposed lease to sign and return within 14 days, as well as an invoice for $25 for a one year lease term or $75 for a three year lease term.

4. Send the signed lease and payment to the Authority as indicated on the invoice. All payments must be made in the form of a Cashier’s Check or Money Order made payable to the STATE of MICHIGAN.

5. Once the Authority has received the payment in full, the Authority will execute the Lease, and mail you a copy of the Lease and a receipt.

Again, thank you for your interest in the Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority. If you have any further questions, please contact us at (517) 636-5149.
GARDEN for GROWTH Application

Properties included in the Garden for Growth Program must meet the following criteria:
(a) The property shall be a vacant lot and shall not be qualified for the Adjacent Lot Program.
(b) According to local zoning/building codes, the property is not buildable or able to be developed independently.
(c) In the opinion of the Authority, the parcel is not part of a proposed plan or development requiring land assembly.

The Authority in its sole discretion may choose to include or not include any given parcel of property in the Garden for Growth Program. The property shall be leased and maintained for the purpose of gardening or urban farming.

Gardening Lease cost: $25 for one year or $75 for three years.
Lessee will have option to renew the lease at the end of their lease term.

Applicant Information

Applicant’s Name _______________________________________________________________________________________
Applicant’s Address ____________________City_________________County_______________State_______Zip__________
Phone___________________Fax_________________Cell_________________Email Address _________________________
If Applicable, Co-Applicant’s Name ________________________________________________________________

Property Information

Property Address Applying for (include parcel identification/ward/item number) _____________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________
Please describe your plan of use for the requested lot: __________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Necessary Attachments

Please include the following with your application:
☐ Proof of paid real estate taxes (copy of current paid city tax bill AND copy of current paid county tax bill)
☐ Proof of identity (copy of Michigan Drivers License or State ID)
☐ Proof of organizational or non-profit status, if applicable
☐ Current photo of requested property

Applicant Certification

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT:
1. I am not in default of property taxes payable to any governmental taxing unit. I understand that the Authority will verify my tax status.
2. I understand that the property shall be maintained and used for gardening or urban farming.
3. All of the copies of the materials submitted with this application are complete, accurate and current.
4. I further understand and agree that I must maintain the property, in accordance with all land use, zoning, and property maintenance laws and ordinances.
5. I also certify that I will pay all costs and fees associated with maintenance, gardening and farming of the property.

By signing below, I/we certify that I/we have read, understand, and agree to be bound by all terms of this entire application. I/We further certify that all of the statements set forth in this application are true.

Applicant’s Signature______________________________________________Date:________________
Co-Applicant’s Signature___________________________________________Date:________________
Legal Disclaimer

The State of Michigan, its departments, the Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority (Authority), its officers, employees, contractors, and agents, make no warranty or representation as to the status or condition of title on any of the properties conveyed by the Authority.

The State of Michigan, its departments, the Authority, its officers, employees, contractors, and agents, make no warranty or representation as to the presence or absence of any hazardous substance or hazardous waste on any of the properties conveyed by the Authority. All properties are leased “as is.” The State of Michigan, its departments, the Authority, its officers, employees, contractors, and agents, make no warranty or representation as to the environmental condition of any of the properties or of any structures or improvements located on any of the properties. The applicant assumes all responsibility to investigate, and if necessary remediate, the environmental condition of the properties. The applicant is encouraged to obtain technical advice in order to investigate, and if necessary remediate, the environmental condition of the properties.

The State of Michigan, its departments, the Authority, its officers, employees, contractors, and agents, make no warranty or representation as to the physical condition of any of the properties or of any structures or improvements located on any of the properties conveyed by the Authority. The applicant assumes all responsibility to investigate, and if necessary repair the physical condition of the properties or of any structures or improvements located on any of the properties. The applicant is encouraged to obtain technical advice in order to investigate, and if necessary repair, the physical condition of any of the properties or of any structures or improvements located on any of the properties.

The State of Michigan, its departments, the Authority, its officers, employees, contractors, and agents, comply with Elliot-Larson Civil Rights Act, 1976 PA 453, the Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act, 1976 PA 220 and all other federal, state and local fair employment practices and equal opportunity laws and do not discriminate based on religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, or physical or mental disability, or marital status.

The applicant will receive a “Lease” from the Michigan Land Bank Fast Track Authority. The property will be conveyed, “As Is” – with no title insurance. The purchaser will assume responsibility for the property and its maintenance.

I/We understand that the Authority will offer the property(s) “AS IS” with no warranty of the title whatsoever. I/We understand that the property(s) may have substantial physical, environmental, and/or title defects. I/We understand that I/we am/are assuming the risk for any defects in the property(s). No one from or on behalf of the State of Michigan, its departments, the Authority, its officers, employees, contractors, or agents, has made any statements, promises, representations, or warranties, expressed or implied, as to the condition of the property(s) or title to the property(s). I/We acknowledge that I/we am proceeding at my/our own risk. I/We hereby release, waive, discharge, and covenant to hold harmless the State of Michigan, its departments, the Authority, its officers, employees, contractors, and agents from all liability regarding the condition of the property(s), whether environmental, physical, legal (title), or otherwise.

By signing below, I/we certify that I/we have read, understand, and agree to be bound by all terms of this entire application. I/We further certify that all of the statements set forth in this application are true.

Applicant Signature______________________________________________Date___________________

Co-Applicant Signature___________________________________________Date___________________
CITY OF DETROIT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
SURPLUS PROPERTY SALE PROPOSAL

PROPERTY ADDRESS _______________________

PUBLIC BID SALE
FIRST COME SALE

DATE______________ APPLICANT/CONTACT PERSON__________________________________________

FULL NAME (As to be stated on Deed)__________________________________________________________

HOME ADDRESS (or) PRINCIPAL OFFICE (No P.O. Box)________________________________________

CITY________________________________________ STATE________ ZIP________

PHONE (Day) (        ) ____________________________

CORPORATION
LIMITED PARTNERSHIP GENDER: MALE FEMALE
LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY HUSBAND and WIFE
PARTNERSHIP (Please check one of the options below)
JOINT TENANTS
SOLE PROPRIETORSHIP TENANTS IN COMMON

TOTAL BID AMOUNT: (Expressed in whole dollar amounts)

10% REQUIRED DEPOSIT AMOUNT: (Cashier’s check or money orders only)

PROPOSED USE:________________________________________________________________________

TERMS OF PURCHASE: CASH “AS IS” SUBJECT TO REHABILITATION & ZONING COMPLIANCE

If offer is accepted by the Planning & Development Department and approved by the City Council, a Quit Claim Deed will be issued. However, if Purchaser fails to complete the transaction as specified herein, the sale will be cancelled and the deposit shall be forfeited.

I hereby certify that I have been furnished and have read the announcement of sale for the above referenced property and submit this proposal in accordance with all the provisions of said announcement.

Signature_______________________________________________________________

Revised August 2008