



ADOPT-A-GARDEN FAQS

Getting Started

What is the Adopt-a-Garden Program?

The Adopt-a-Garden Program gives individuals, families, businesses, and community groups the opportunity to care for one of First Step's Healing Gardens. Volunteers help keep our grounds beautiful, welcoming, and healing for the survivors and families we serve.

Who can adopt a garden?

Anyone! We welcome:

- Individuals
- Families
- Neighborhood groups
- Businesses
- Civic organizations
- Schools
- Gardening clubs

Is there a cost to participate?

There is no fee to participate. Volunteers are responsible for providing their own plants, gardening tools, mulch, and other gardening supplies unless other arrangements have been made with First Step.

Do I need gardening experience?

Some gardening experience is preferred. While First Step staff can answer questions about the program, they are not gardening experts and may not be able to provide horticultural guidance.

How are gardens assigned?

You may choose your garden during an onsite tour or select one virtually from our available garden map and photos.

Can I switch gardens later?

Yes! If another garden becomes available and better suits your interests, we'll be happy to help you switch.



Garden Commitment & Care

How long is my commitment?

We ask participants to commit to caring for their garden throughout the growing season, approximately May through October.

How often am I expected to maintain my garden?

We are flexible and can accommodate weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly visits. However, most gardens require attention every 1-2 weeks during the growing season, depending on weather conditions and plant needs.

Please note that we require a consistent volunteer schedule. This helps our staff know when to expect volunteers onsite and ensures volunteer hours are accurately recorded through our Volunteer Calendar. Your designated Staff Liaison must know your scheduled visit in advance and be available during that time.

What are my garden responsibilities?

Garden adopters are responsible for helping keep their assigned garden healthy and attractive throughout the season. Responsibilities may include:

- Pulling weeds
- Watering as needed
- Planting flowers or plants (with prior approval)
- Removing dead plants
- Removing annual flowers at the end of the season
- Keeping the garden neat and attractive
- Reporting any concerns to their Staff Liaison

What if I'm going on vacation?

Just let your Staff Liaison know in advance so we know when your garden won't be maintained.

What happens if I can no longer maintain my garden?

Life happens! If you're no longer able to care for your garden, please notify your Staff Liaison as soon as possible so we can reassign it to another volunteer.



Plants & Garden Enhancements

Can I plant whatever I want?

Not necessarily. We ask that you submit a brief planting proposal before adding new plants. This helps ensure invasive species are not introduced and that plant selections are appropriate for the space.

If you plant annuals, they should be removed at the end of the season.

May I install mulch?

Yes. We ask that only natural brown mulch be used to maintain a consistent appearance throughout our campus.

Can I install landscape edging, rocks, or other permanent features?

Any permanent additions to your garden must receive prior approval from First Step before installation.

Can I decorate my garden or add garden art?

Yes! Garden art and decorations are welcome with prior approval from First Step. Please keep in mind that children frequently use our grounds, so decorations should be safe, weather-resistant, and appropriate for a family-friendly healing environment. Please also understand that decorations may occasionally become damaged, moved, or go missing.



Volunteer Information

What is a Staff Liaison?

A Staff Liaison is a First Step employee assigned to support you while volunteering onsite. They will:

- Welcome you upon arrival
- Verify your volunteer hours
- Answer questions
- Provide access to supplies or water
- Serve as your point of contact for concerns or emergencies

Will First Step provide water?

Yes. Water is available onsite. During your first visit, your Staff Liaison will show you where to access it. A hose key is required and can be checked out from your Staff Liaison.

What tools should I bring?

You're welcome to bring your own gardening tools. We also have a limited supply available, including:

- Gardening gloves
- Hand trowels and rakes
- Pruning shears
- Loppers
- Brooms
- Shovels
- Garden rakes

Are children allowed to participate?

Yes! Children are welcome when supervised by a parent, guardian, or approved adult at all times.

Are pets allowed?

No. Volunteer pets are not permitted onsite.



Privacy & Donations

Can I post photos of my garden on social media?

Absolutely! We'd love for you to share your hard work. **However, to protect the privacy and safety of the individuals we serve, please do not photograph or share images of survivors, children, staff, or other program participants.**

Can I solicit donations from local garden centers or businesses?

Yes! We love community partnerships. Please coordinate with First Step before requesting donations on our behalf so we can ensure donors are properly acknowledged. We will provide you with a donation form and a letter of support for your request.



Contact Us

Who do I contact if I have questions?

Email: communityservices@firststep-mi.org

Phone: 734-656-0757