



Opening your garden with Open Gardens Canberra



Serendipity, opened Spring 2023

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Welcome

Thank you again for opening your garden under the banner of Open Gardens Canberra (OGC).

This Guide is intended to answer most of the questions you are likely to have about Open Gardens Canberra and about opening your garden. The Guide sets out:

- what you need to do to prepare for your open days
- what Open Gardens Canberra will do for your open days.

If you have any other questions, please contact your Garden Selector. S/he will be your initial point of contact with Open Gardens Canberra. Once the program for each season is settled, a member of the OGC Committee will be your Garden Coordinator and will coordinate all activities leading up to the open garden.

We want you to feel relaxed about your garden opening. You and your garden will be a source of inspiration, motivation and learning for hundreds of visitors. Your role on your open days is simply to chat with visitors about your garden. Looking at your garden and talking with you are the two most important things garden visitors want.

1. What you need to do to prepare for your open days

The Garden Opening Checklist at the end sets out a timetable of the main actions you will need to do in the lead-up to your garden opening. Here we provide more information about those actions.

Preparing your garden

You know your garden better than anyone else. When you commit to opening your garden under our banner, we expect you will want to present your garden at its absolute best. This doesn't mean your garden has to be totally perfect with not a leaf out of place!

You may need to postpone or bring forward some of your usual garden maintenance, for example, to avoid a just-heavily-pruned look. However, garden visitors are also garden lovers. They will understand if your bulbs have finished and the tops are messy, or if you have left the pods on some ornamental peas because you want to collect the seed.

Be mindful of the safety of your visitors. Ensure that any potentially dangerous areas of the garden are roped off and that all garden tools and equipment are safely stored. Trim any overhead branches and ensure pathways are stable and unobstructed. If you have ponds or other exposed water, or hazards such as beehives, ask your Garden Coordinator for some warning signs.

Preparing your Garden Notes

Your visitors really value garden notes. They add human interest to the garden, and they help answer a lot of basic questions visitors will have.

Garden Notes should be no more than one double-sided A4 page. A template for the notes is available from the [Opening your garden](#) page on the website. You might consider having some laminated copies at the entrance table, to be used and returned, as well as paper copies that your visitors can take away. Using clear plastic

sleeves on some notes can also encourage their return (and may be handy on rainy days). As a guide, you will need to print around 100 copies, and provide ca. 10-20 in plastic covers or laminated. We will put your Garden Notes on our website if we receive them in time (see Checklist for timetable). Many visitors now read the notes online.

Use your notes to tell the story of your garden:

- Describe your garden — where is it, how big is it, what type of garden is it? What makes it special to you?
- Think about what sets your garden apart and how it differs from others in the street or region. Why should visitors come and see it?
- What have been the biggest challenges in creating your garden? Think about what you have learned the hard way. Have drought, floods or pests been an issue? Have you struggled with soil conditions or something else?
- What is your favourite part of the garden? Is it a particular plant or something that you have had success with, or that took a lot of work to achieve? Why do you like this aspect?
- Why have you decided to open it to the public? Why is gardening important to you? Who or what has had a major influence on your own gardening style? What do you hope visitors will take away?

Labelling plants of interest

Many garden visitors will want to identify some of the plants in your garden. To save you answering the same questions repeatedly, you could consider labelling plants of special interest, preferably with both their botanic and common names. Alternatively, you might like to have a board or a box with labels from your plants, or even a plant list. A plant labelling system is available to borrow from Open Gardens Canberra if you wish to use it. The tech-savvy may even wish to add a QR code!

Garden fees and charities

Open Gardens Canberra uses membership fees to support the work of the organisation and its aims. Members have free entrance to all OGC open gardens for the financial year. We will pay you a \$1,000 flat fee to cover all attending members (current, renewing, and new). In addition, Open Gardens Canberra will also share the non-member day entrance fees with the garden owner 50/50, nett of fees charged by the event booking website for any tickets booked online (if used). Garden owners will receive a minimum payment of \$1,000 for opening their gardens.

Following the opening you will receive a “Payment details for open garden owners” form from OGC. Open Gardens Canberra will process your payment within 14 working days of OGC receiving the completed “Payment details for open garden owners” form.

You may decide to use your garden opening to raise funds for a charity of your choice. If you decide to support a charity, we suggest that you discuss with them as soon as possible what assistance they might provide, for example:

- help with off-street parking
- arrange and run ancillary activities such as morning tea or a plant stall
- arrange other entertainment
- help with publicity through their own usual avenues.

The sooner you do this, the better: you and they will have a clear idea of who is doing what, and you can use any ancillary activities to help attract visitors to your garden.

If you decide to offer your visitors the chance to make donations direct to the charity you have chosen, you are responsible for all signs, collection bins, banking of donations and so on relating to donations to the charity.

Ancillary activities

Visitors enjoy other activities associated with open days and many garden owners have raffles, produce stalls, live music or displays of local artists' work. You may decide that opening your garden is quite enough to manage, so please don't feel pressured to undertake more activities. If you do decide to offer any ancillary attractions, remember that visitors are above all coming to enjoy your garden, so it's important that any ancillary activities don't detract from its beauty.

You may decide to run some other activity yourself, to have your charity arrange it or to invite another organisation or business to arrange it.

Plant stalls

Visitors will often want to buy plants they have seen growing in your garden. Plant stalls need to be of a high standard with well-grown and clearly labelled plants. Please ensure that any plants for sale are not considered weeds in the ACT (see <https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/View/ni/2025-177/current/html/2025-177.html>). For South East NSW, see <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2025-02/South-East-Regional-Strategic-Weed-Management-Plan-2023-2027.pdf>

Teas and lunches

We encourage you to ensure that appropriate food handling certification has been obtained by anyone providing catering at your garden opening. Information on food safety is available on the ACT government website <https://www.act.gov.au/business/food-safety-for-businesses> . In particular, see the section *Information for temporary and market food stalls*. For NSW locations, see <https://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/retail/markets-and-temporary-events> . You will also be responsible for any COVID safe practices related to teas and lunches that are required at the time of opening.

Wine sales: please note that a licence may be necessary if you are planning on serving or selling wine or any other alcohol at your garden opening. Many wineries have their own 'portable' licence which allows them to sell wine at events, and you will need to check.

Two tips for teas and lunches:

- put tables and chairs under trees or umbrellas if the weather is warm and
- put up a menu board so visitors can easily see what is on offer.

Finance

You are responsible for all monies associated with ancillary activities and how the proceeds of these activities are dispersed.

Notifying your immediate neighbours

Please let your neighbours know well in advance of your opening days:

- Let them know about any parking instructions given to visitors. Tell them that you and your volunteers will park some distance from your property and leave the closest parking spaces for your garden visitors.
- suggest to them that it would be helpful if they could garage their vehicles for as much of the weekend as possible.

Publicising your garden locally

Open Gardens Canberra will do most of the publicity for your open days and you can help with many of these actions. For example, you can:

- distribute flyers for the current season to neighbours and contacts
- forward our newsletters on to your own email contacts
- be available for an interview and photograph with print media, two to three weeks before your open days
- be available for radio interviews on the Saturday morning or Sunday morning (clarify which day when contacted by the radio station)
- if you are a fan of social media, create a more personal view of your garden on our Facebook page or on Twitter, with links to our website. For example, post some fun photos of you in your garden with your prized plants.

Practicalities

Access

Some of your visitors will be elderly or have limited mobility. They will be grateful if you would allow them to drive close to the garden entrance to either park or to drop off and pick up passengers. Perhaps you could mark off a “Reserved - Drop or pick up” area with orange hat signs.

Toilets

We suggest you prepare a sheet for your Entrance Table providing information about availability of toilets, particularly in country areas:

- if a toilet is available on your property, give directions so that visitors can find it
- if no toilet is available on your property, give directions to the nearest public toilet. You may need to provide the address of the public toilet and a map.

For security reasons, we do not recommend indoor toilets be made available to visitors. In an emergency, arrange for one of your volunteers to accompany the person to and from a toilet inside the house. Don't leave them alone as that would compromise the security of your home. Our volunteers, however, would appreciate access to your toilet if required.

Please note that Open Gardens Canberra does not generally reimburse the hire costs of portable toilets.

Visitors' Book

A Visitors' Book is a memento of your garden opening. Open Gardens Canberra does not provide Visitors' Books, but we are happy to direct visitors to your book if you have one. To make sure as many visitors as possible see the Visitors' Book, we suggest you direct visitors to take a particular route around your garden, so they are most likely to end up where the Visitors' Book is placed. In our experience, almost

every garden visitor asks which the best route is to take so most visitors will probably just take the suggested route.

If possible, put the Visitors' Book on small table with a chair nearby to encourage visitors to write in it.

Your Garden Selector or Coordinator will discuss with you the best route for garden visitors to take and your Entrance Table volunteer can direct visitors to take that route.

2. What Open Gardens Canberra will do

In summary, Open Gardens Canberra will:

- Provide you with a Garden Coordinator to coordinate the opening and answer any questions that you might have
- do most of the publicity for your garden opening including notifying radio stations and print media who may contact you
- provide all the signs you will need for the opening
- provide two Open Gardens Canberra volunteers for your entrance table each day (separate morning and afternoon shifts)
- provide an entrance table, chairs and shelter if required
- collect, secure, and bank all entry and membership fees
- provide Voluntary Worker insurance cover for volunteers, and Public Liability cover for members and visitors on your designated open days
- work with you to ensure your event complies with COVID Smart practices and any public health requirements in place at the time of opening

Publicity for your garden opening

Our email newsletters

Open Gardens Canberra will publicise your garden opening in our email newsletters to members and others on our email lists. We encourage you to forward these newsletters on to your own email contacts.

Flyers

Open Gardens Canberra may produce and distribute a flyer to publicise the season's gardens.

Email and hard-copy newsletters produced by other organisations

Open Gardens Canberra has good relationships with other organisations that will publicise your garden opening in email or hard-copy newsletters to their own members.

Print media

Open Gardens Canberra will arrange publicity for your garden opening through City News, Canberra Weekly, the Canberra Times, and other appropriate print-based media. At least one of these is likely to contact you for an interview and photograph, two to three weeks before your open days.

If your garden is in a country area that has its own newspaper or local magazine, please give your Garden Selector or Coordinator their contact details so that we can arrange to publicise your garden there, too.

Local radio

Open Gardens Canberra will make information about your garden available to ABC Radio Canberra (666) and 2CC. We encourage you to be available for interview, especially for the Saturday morning gardening programs. It is the station's decision whether to approach you for an interview.

Website

Your garden open day will appear on our website www.opengardenscanberra.org.au. Garden visitors love to see photos on our website so your Garden Selector will ask you for suitable photos of your garden, or s/he will take photos herself. The photos need to show the garden at the time it will be open. We may also publicise your garden on other appropriate event websites.

Social Media – Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter

We will promote your open day on our Facebook page and on Instagram.

We encourage you to create a more personal view of your garden on these pages — post some fun photos of you in your garden with your prized plants, for example.

If you are familiar with Twitter or any other social media, post some photos of you in your garden there, too. Include links to our website in your postings.

Road signs

You will be supplied with several large double-sided signs with arrows pointing either left or right. They should be prominently displayed at major intersections and roads leading to your garden. Signs can be set up any time in the week before the garden is opened, and should be set up before 9am on your first opening day.

Before your opening, drive around your neighbourhood to determine the best locations for the signs. Your visitors may come from any direction. If you need additional large signs, please contact your Garden Coordinator well before your open days.

Take down the signs as carefully as possible at the end of your garden open days so we can re-use them for other gardens.

A banner will also be provided for placing at the entrance to the garden.

Volunteers and the Entrance Table

We will provide two Open Gardens Canberra volunteers for your open days who will:

- manage entry to the garden (check membership status, collect entry fees or check tickets as appropriate)
- assist attendees to purchase tickets or apply for membership online, and
- give general support.

Volunteers staff the entrance table for a morning or afternoon shift.

Where higher than normal numbers are expected for example at the first open gardens of the spring season, Open Gardens Canberra may provide up to three volunteers to make sure that garden entry runs smoothly. If you have any questions, please approach the volunteers, or contact your Garden Coordinator.

For your information:

- the entry fee to visit just one garden is \$10 per person. There are no pensioner, senior, family or group discounts.

- visitors may choose to join Open Gardens Canberra for an annual fee of \$30 and then they have free entry to all our open gardens, ending 30 June.
- children under 18 accompanied by an adult enter free.

Insurance and incidents

Open Gardens Canberra has arranged Voluntary Worker insurance for OGC volunteers working on your garden opening. The essence of this policy is coverage for personal injury and it has a \$10m limit. There is also a \$20m Public Liability insurance for visiting OGC members and non-member public visitors, covering personal injury and property damage due to negligence on the days it is open under the Open Gardens Canberra banner.

It is strongly recommended that you have your own current house insurance in place. It is also important that you check with your insurance provider whether your policy provides coverage for a garden opening and advise them of your opening if required.

If you arrange for other unpaid helpers at your opening, e.g. to run a stall, you should consider your own insurance coverage or that of the helpers' organisation.

Our Public Liability policy does not extend to all the activities you might arrange such as activities associated with farm or domestic vehicles, animals (pony rides etc), jumping castles, model train rides or power tools. If you are contemplating any activity of this nature, you should check your own insurance cover.

If you need any further information on our insurance cover, please contact your Garden Selector or Coordinator.

Minimising Risks

Before your opening, you need to ensure that any potentially dangerous areas of the garden are roped off and that all garden tools and equipment are safely stored. Trim any overhead branches and ensure pathways are stable and unobstructed.

If you have ponds or other exposed water, put up warning signs. Take precautions to make your home secure. Close windows and blinds. Lock doors and give keys only to a small number of trusted family and assistants.

Ensure that you and your helpers have easy access to phones so you can call emergency services promptly, should the need arise.

Managing any incident

A basic first aid kit is available at the entrance table.

On your open days, if you become aware of any incident however minor that may give rise to a claim, whether any claim has been made against you or not, please let the entrance table volunteers know, and they will record the name and address of the people involved on the "Reporting an Injury" form and will notify your Garden Coordinator immediately. Do not admit liability or offer to make any payments.

COVID and public health

We take safety at our events seriously. We endeavour to follow COVID Smart behaviours. If COVID or other public health restrictions are introduced, we will work with you to do whatever is needed.

3. Garden opening checklist

4-6 weeks before your Opening
Complete and send your garden notes.
If you are involving a charity, confirm the assistance they will be providing.
Your Garden Coordinator will contact you and answer any questions you have about opening your garden
Notify your immediate neighbours of your opening days.
2 weeks before your Opening
Prune hedges and other plants if you want to avoid that “just clipped” look.
Identify the best locations for your road signs.
3 days- 1 week before your Opening
Your Garden Coordinator will be in contact to: • Confirm whether a table, chairs and shade are available or are required • Confirm what signs are required and whether you can erect them • Make arrangements for the delivery of items before the opening Local media may also contact you
Mow and water lawns for the last time.
Print Garden Notes
1 day before your Opening
Your Garden Coordinator will drop the following off at the time previously agreed: • Entrance table, chairs, shade (if needed) • Signage • Publicity material • Volunteer/Finance kit and associated items
Sweep the paths and ensure all equipment and tools are put away.
The BIG days
Greet the volunteers and help set up the Entrance Table and Gazebo.
Be prepared for your radio interview if one has been arranged
At the end of the first day, securely store the first day’s takings, donations, and EFTPOS terminal
At the end of the second day, return the takings, signs etc to the Garden Coordinator or other OGC committee member
After the opening
Return the “Payment details for open garden owners” form to OGC.

