

Dahlem Ecology Farm

Betty's Garden Guidelines - 2026

DahlemCenter.org

General Information

Betty's Garden at the [Dahlem Ecology Farm](#), located at 1429 Wickwire Road, provides garden plots to rent and education about how to grow food and flowers organically. Betty's Garden is named for Betty Dahlem Desbiens, who provided generous start-up funding that supported installation of the deer fence and water system.

You are encouraged to meet and make friends with other enthusiastic gardeners, participate in meetings and enjoy the various social events. This is our 17th year and each year gets better with your support. Please consider participating in volunteer opportunities throughout the year, such as garden clean up events, work days, produce harvest, and supporting fellow gardeners.

Betty's Garden is open during daylight hours, seven days per week. Be sure to hike the trail over Crouch Creek to the Dahlem Environmental Education Center. Dogs or other pets are not allowed on Dahlem property except on the Butterfly Trail surrounding Betty's garden. For health reasons, dogs are not invited inside the gates of the gardens.

There is an extensive trail system at Dahlem – you can walk from Jackson College to Dahlem main campus and then on to the gardens. The trail map is on the [Dahlem website](#) and there are maps posted along the trail.

Garden Amenities

- Garden plots are 20' x 20' with walkways between each plot.
- Deer fencing surrounds the perimeter of the Garden, plus a critter fence along the bottom edge of the fence.
- Wheelbarrows, water and hoses are supplied.
- Porta-potty is located near the Cattle Barn for public usage (May through Oct).
- Two three-bin compost sites are available for gardeners to use (east and west sides). The Ecology Farm also receives occasional loads of compost and woodchips for gardeners to spread on their plots free of charge.
- Garden equipment (tomato cages, stakes, etc.) may be stored in the open Cattle Barn.
- The only public apiary in Michigan on the west side of the garden. (See the Dahlem website for beekeeping course information.)

Garden Management and Important Contacts

Betty's Garden is managed and overseen by The Dahlem Conservancy. Volunteers support Dahlem and Betty's Garden through sharing communications, making plot assignments and decisions about the garden, and mentorship to fellow gardeners.

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Garden Plot Rental

The cost of the 20' by 20' garden plot is \$50.00 per year.

- 2026 season plot rental fee payments are due March 10th, 2026.
- Dahlem membership is required for a plot reservation. (See DahlemCenter.org for [membership options](#).)
- By renting a garden plot, you are agreeing to adhere to Betty's Garden policies including the Gardener's Responsibilities, Code of Conduct, and Garden Standards.

New prospective gardeners can be added to the waiting list by contacting the Dahlem Center office (517-782-3453 ext. 101 or contact@dahlemcenter.org). New gardeners can get a tour of the garden with current gardeners to learn about responsibilities and ask questions. Prospective gardeners on the wait list will be contacted as plots become available.

Gardener's Responsibilities

1. Pay your plot rental fee and update your contact information by **March 10th, 2026**.
2. Adhere to Dahlem's policies and Garden Guidelines, including Betty's Garden code of conduct and gardening standards.
3. Plant your plot by June 15th.
4. Maintain your plot and surrounding pathways during the growing season, approx. May through October.
5. Clear plot in accordance with guidelines by November 1st.

Betty's Garden Code of Conduct and Gardening Standards

- **Be respectful and treat everyone with kindness and courtesy.**
- **Keep the garden safe and welcoming for everyone.** If you see a safety concern, please notify the Dahlem office (517-782-3453 or contact@dahlemcenter.org).
- **Garden plots must be actively planted and maintained.** Betty's Garden is for active gardening, including growing produce and flowers.
 - **Gardens must be planted by June 15.** Plots not planted by June 15th will be subject to forfeit by the renter without refund. (If you are experiencing an unanticipated delay to planting your plot, please let us know – contact@dahlemcenter.org.)
 - **Garden plots and surrounding pathways must be maintained and weeded during the growing season**, approx. May through Oct. Maintaining your garden plot is an essential part of your role within the Betty's Garden community. **IMPORTANT:** Plots that are not maintained during the growing season will be considered abandoned. (Notify contact@dahlemcenter.org if you are unable to maintain your plot.)
 - Arrange for someone to assist with your plot maintenance if you will be gone.
- **Garden plots are organic.** Any fertilizers and weed/pest control measures allowed in the gardens must be approved by major organic certification agencies.
- **Do not plant non-acceptable plants**, including invasive species, mint, grapes, raspberries, garlic mustard, morning glories, trees, bushes, shrubs or illegal/dangerous plants.

- **Herbicides are prohibited.** Mechanical controls such as hoeing, mulching, and hand weeding are recommended.
- **Synthetic insecticides are prohibited.** Most problems can be controlled if you maintain a healthy soil, choose disease-resistant varieties, water judiciously, and remove diseased plants from the garden.
- **Gardeners must stay on-site when watering.** Water and hoses are provided on-site. The water should be turned off at the faucet and the hose should be bundled neatly off the walkways.
- Weeds and diseased plants should not be put in the compost bins.
- Remove all trash.
- **Garden clean up must be completed by November 1st.**

We encourage you to offer your ideas and suggestions for improvement. This is YOUR garden! Without your help, we will not continue.

Additional Guidelines and Information

Abandoned and Neglected Garden Plots

Betty's Garden is for active gardening, including growing produce and flowers. We typically have a wait list of interested gardeners who can be assigned to plots that are not being used.

As part of your commitment to Betty's Garden, garden plots must be planted by June 15th. Plots not planted by June 15th are subject to forfeit without refund. If there is an unanticipated delay in planting your plot, please let us know – contact@dahlemcenter.org.

Maintaining your plot is important the success of the entire garden community.

Neglected/abandoned plots are a huge problem transferred to your fellow gardeners.

Maintenance includes weeding and keeping the pathway clear. Your weed seeds can quickly wreak havoc.

If you will be on vacation longer than 2 weeks, arrangements should be made for someone to care for your plot. This, of course, can be anyone you know, but you will also get cooperation from your fellow gardeners.

Plots that are not maintained (not planted, significant weed issues, etc.) during the growing season, which is approximately May through October, will be considered abandoned and will be subject to forfeit if reasonable attempts are not made to remedy these issues. Gardeners of abandoned/forfeited plots will not be guaranteed a plot for the following year.

Path Maintenance

Mulching the pathways that surround your garden plot is important maintenance. You will spend a lot of time and money preparing and planting your garden. You will now want to protect your investment from the invasion of weeds, such as quack grass.

The most permanent solution that you'll see used in our gardens is to cover the pathways with a heavy black plastic (provided by Dahlem in the open cattle barn) that will block the sunlight that

the weed needs. Gardeners have been successful using this method combined with adding a thin layer of wood chip mulch (provided by area tree-trimmers) over the top of the black plastic to help keep it in place, protect the plastic from the sun and prevent tearing of the plastic layer.

Wood mulch alone, or the use of cardboard or landscape cloth and wood mulch or similar techniques, does not work. The paper breaks down in one year or the grass pushes right through the weave of the cloth making it more difficult to pull out the rhizomes through the cardboard or cloth and mulch.

Composting

Compost bins are located within the fence. **These bins are for disease-free plant material only. Weeds should not be placed in the compost bin** to avoid allowing them to spread/re-seed. Please remove weeds from the garden. (There are areas outside the fence near the parking lot where they can be dumped. Look for the piles of dead weeds.) We need everyone to take a turn turning the compost bins, please.

Garden Clean Up

Clean up must be completed by all gardeners by November 1st. All non-organic materials, (stakes, plant supports, tomato cages, pots, black plastic or fabric in your plot) ideally should be removed from your plot.

Note that winter takes quite a toll on equipment and this is for your best interest. Additionally, surrounding pathways must be cleaned and weeded. You can use the Cattle Barn by the parking lot for storage but please label your stuff with your **plot number!** In the summer, when everything should be out, there may be another clean-up of the barn.

Please DO NOT sweep the Cattle (AKA swallow) Barn. The aerosolized bird droppings can be harmful to humans; do not stir them up.

Sharing Produce

Excess produce can be taken by individuals to the Interfaith Shelter, John George Home, St. Vincent's, churches, other food pantries, up to the discretion of the person harvesting/delivering, etc. During the peak harvest weeks during 2021 through 2025 we partnered with the food pantry of Jackson Free Methodist church, providing transportation of donated produce to the church and plan to do that again in 2026.

Note that most anything* left on the picnic table– Plot 16 -can be considered “shared”. You will often find produce here during peak harvest – help yourself! Take to the food pantry, your neighbors, etc. (*If you find someone's lunch on the table at Plot 16, that doesn't count!)

Lost and Found Items

The picnic table also functions as a lost and found. Smaller found items may also be found attached to the kiosk. Valuable found items, such as car keys, will be taken to the lost and found at the Dahlem Center Office/Gift Shop.

Betty's Garden Plot Payment and Rental Form

The cost of the 20' by 20' garden plot is \$50.00 per year, due March 10th, 2026.

Gardener(s) Name(s)	
Street Address, City, Zip	
Phone Number(s)	
Email Address(es)	
Plot Number	

Payment Amount: _____ Date: _____
 Received by: _____

Garden Plot Payment Options

Once you've been assigned a plot, you can turn in your rental form and pay your garden plot rental fee in the following ways:

- Stop by the Dahlem office (7117 South Jackson Rd.), Tues. – Fri., 9 am – 4 pm.
- Leave your payment in an envelope in the black Donation Box next to the entrance of the sidewalk at the main Dahlem office. (Please include your plot rental form!)
- Call the Dahlem office 517-782-3453 ext. 101
- Mail the plot form and check payable to: The Dahlem Conservancy, 7117 S. Jackson Road, Jackson, MI 49201
- Online at <https://www.dahlemcenter.org/make-a-donation/>
 - o Instructions: enter your contact details, donation amount (\$50), and mark it as a one-time gift. In the section to specify the purpose of the gift, please make a note it is for your garden plot rental fee and include your plot number. (Note: you do not need to turn in a paper plot rental form with this option.)