

VOLUNTEER GUIDELINES





The Gaining Ground Story

Gaining Ground grows and distributes fresh, organic produce to Boston-area meal programs and shelters. Volunteers of all ages work and learn together in Gaining Ground's garden — planting seeds, tending plants, and harvesting produce. Since 1994, our program has grown more than 70,000 pounds of organic produce, which is donated to food pantries, meal programs, shelters, and hunger-relief programs throughout the greater Boston area.

This brochure tells you more about volunteer opportunities and answers some of the questions people have about our program.

THE GARDENS

Where is Gaining Ground?

The main garden of Gaining Ground is located in Concord, Massachusetts, on nine acres of farmland behind the birthplace of Henry David Thoreau, American writer and naturalist. Gaining Ground also operates a smaller, colonial-reproduction garden in Concord on the grounds of The Old Manse, once home to Nathaniel Hawthorne and to the Emerson family. Volunteer opportunities are available at both sites during the growing season for appropriate groups. Both gardens are near public transportation in Concord Center, but are easier to get to by car. Our administrative office is located in Concord Center at the Concord Scout House, 74 Walden Street.

When are the Gaining Ground gardens open?

Depending on the weather, our season starts in late April and runs into November. We welcome volunteers Tuesday through Saturday, between 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., depending on the needs of the garden. Our hours are more limited early and late in the season. All individuals and groups must call (978) 369-7281 to schedule their visits.

What's the work like?

Every day is different, but working in the garden is fun, physical work that our volunteers find rewarding and interesting. No gardening experience is needed.

Where does the food go?

Throughout the harvest season, produce from Gaining Ground's garden goes to shelters, food pantries, and meal programs throughout Greater Boston and Eastern Massachusetts. We maintain a waiting list of organizations in need — proof of the strong need for the service that Gaining Ground offers. Organizations that receive produce from Gaining Ground include The Open Table (Concord), Food for Free (Cambridge), Ayer Council on Aging, Sylvia's Haven (Devens), Sudbury Food Pantry, Concord-Assabet School, Loaves and Fishes (Ayer), Project SOUP (Somerville), Walnut Street Center (Somerville), and Cameron Senior Center (Westford).

OUR VOLUNTEERS

What do volunteers do?

Garden volunteers grow seedlings, and plant, mulch, water, weed, harvest, wash, and prepare vegetables and fruit for distribution. They also learn about organic gardening, issues of hunger and homelessness, local history and the environment, and the basics of agriculture.

How long do volunteers work?

Volunteers are invited to help for as little as a few hours, or to set up a regular schedule of volunteer times. Many volunteers choose to come several times during the growing season to see the results of their work.

Who volunteers?

We welcome groups and individuals (age 5 and older) who want to have fun while learning about growing food. Volunteers come as individuals and as part of faith, community, schools, and youth groups. Generally, several volunteers are helping at any given time, and we often have larger groups of students or other community organizations in the gardens for special programs. Depending on age, experience, physical ability, and interest, individual adult volunteers often help with groups. No previous garden experience is necessary.

How old do you need to be to volunteer? Minimum age for unaccompanied volunteers is 16.

What about younger children?

Children 5 and older are welcome if accompanied by parents or other adults to supervise them. We request one adult for every three children ages 8 and older, and one adult per child between 5 and 8 years old.

What is the minimum number of people that can volunteer as a group?

The group size will vary depending on the season and the activity. Please contact us at (978) 369-7281 to discuss your group's visit, or to arrange on-site workshops before your visit.

I'm a teenager interested in working regularly in the garden. Is there a program for me?

Yes, you are welcome to work in the garden as often as you like. We also offer the Community Service Youth Program — a special volunteer opportunity supervised by our Garden Coordinator/Educator for teens ages 13 – 16. Call for details.

Are there other programs offered by Gaining Ground?

Yes, we provide specialized educational workshops and talks each season — in the garden, at schools, or on-site.

DETAILS

What should we wear?

Please wear clothes you don't mind getting dirty. We strongly encourage you to wear a hat for sun protection, and bring sun block. If the forecast calls for rain, please bring rain jackets.

What if it rains? Is our visit canceled?

No. The only time we are not in the garden is during thunder and lightning.

What does Gaining Ground provide?

We provide tools, water, and gardening gloves.

Should we bring food?

Depending on the season, you will be able to sample produce from the garden. However, bring along any other snacks or drinks you might want during your visit.





OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT GAINING GROUND

Are there other volunteer opportunities outside of the garden?

Administrative volunteers help in our Concord office with marketing, mailings, responding to inquiries, database management, and program and event planning.

How can our group make a donation to Gaining Ground?

Gaining Ground relies on donations from individuals and groups to support its programs. For example, schools and church groups have generously established fund drives and other efforts to raise money for Gaining Ground. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to Gaining Ground, P.O. Box 374, Concord, MA 01742.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Our group would like to volunteer. What should we do?

Call us at 978.369.7281 to schedule your visit. Then arrange suitable transportation. Before the visit, introduce your volunteers to the program by sharing this brochure with them.



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