

# Prepare for your open garden



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# Getting ready for an open garden

Once you have decided to open your garden, there are many things to think about. This information pack aims to cover the major points, giving suggestions and tips based on the experiences of people who have opened their gardens in the past. Not all will be applicable to every open garden event – so please don't be daunted by all this! We recommend that you keep a record of everything you do in connection with preparing for your event, for future reference!

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# Preparing the garden for the opening

## Work out a timetable of garden jobs to be done

Quite a long time before your open garden date (even up to 12 months ahead), it can be useful to take a slow walk around your garden with a notepad and make notes about **what needs doing** in each area. One way to do this is to draw a **rough map** of your garden with its different areas, so you can write the jobs on the map itself or use the map as a reference. This map can come in handy later on when you prepare a handout on your garden for visitors, so hang onto it! It can help to have a trusted gardening friend to walk around with you to point things out.

For example, look for:

- ◆ Gaps that need to be filled in (a trip to a nursery might be called for!)
- ◆ Ailing plants that need some attention or to be pulled out
- ◆ Plants that need pruning
- ◆ Areas that aren't pleasing and need some tweaking or replanting
- ◆ Weedy beds, paths or paved areas
- ◆ Plants swamping other plants
- ◆ Plants that need staking
- ◆ Potted plants that need repotting (or to be sent to the compost heap!)
- ◆ Rampant climbers that need to be reined in
- ◆ Mossy or slimy paths that need to be cleaned.

Other tasks to be done may relate to **general jobs** to ready your garden ahead of the event, such as:

- ◆ Regular fertilising with water-soluble plant food
- ◆ Regular deadheading spent blooms to promote new flowers
- ◆ Tip-pinching back plants to make them bushier
- ◆ Cutting back tired growth six to eight weeks before the open garden event to encourage fresh foliage and possibly more flowers
- ◆ Laying cane mulch to deter weeds from returning to weeded areas and retain moisture.

There are also the other general tasks to be done in a garden that is going to be open that need to be factored in to be done **close to the open day(s)** which will show your garden off at its best, such as:

- ◆ Mowing and edging lawns
- ◆ Clipping of hedges and topiary (where applicable)
- ◆ Checking for stray weeds; final removal of spent flowers and tatty leaves
- ◆ Cleaning outdoor furniture, paving, verandahs, paths, steps and decks, possibly using a pressure cleaner such as a Gerni.

Perhaps there are some particular **new garden projects** you'd like to get done in time for the open day(s). The prospect of an open garden event does give a fantastic incentive to complete something you've been meaning to get round to for ages!

One good tip is to plan to grow a few nice-looking, well-established 'back up' plants in pots that can be popped into unexpected gaps that might appear in your garden at the last minute!

It's a good idea to plan to tidy the **'working' parts of your garden**, such as the compost heap and potting area, as visitors might decide to poke around there – unless you prefer to cordon off these parts of the garden.

Prepare a **timetable** of when you plan to do all these different tasks leading up to the date of the open garden event, giving yourself plenty of time so that it doesn't become overwhelming – and building in time to allow for unexpected delays. No one wants to be desperately weeding on the morning of their open garden date just as the first visitor turns up!

## Evaluate the access around the garden

- ◆ It's worthwhile thinking about what is the **best route** for visitors to walk around the garden to see it at its best, even if it ends up that some of them don't follow it. Think about how you usually walk around your garden – this is probably the best route. Suggesting such a route to visitors will help to facilitate the flow of people through the garden.
- ◆ The route around your garden can be indicated on a rough map you might incorporate into a handout given to visitors at the gate, or shown by a few signs showing arrows placed around the garden on the day(s) of the opening.
- ◆ Decide whether **access** around the garden on the suggested route needs to be improved in any way: e.g. very narrow paths might impede the flow of visitors. Decide if access for prams/wheelchairs can be provided.

## Evaluate hazards

- ◆ Check that the proposed route around the garden is free of **hazards** – for example, uneven or slippery paths or paved areas; holes; protruding tree roots; or rickety steps. If there are problems, have them fixed way ahead of the event date, to avoid accidents on the open day(s). If they cannot be fixed, plan to rope these areas off so they are not accessible, and make visitors aware of potential hazards with a sign nearby (downloadable from the **My Open Garden** website; laminate if possible to make the sign(s) sturdy).
- ◆ Check for any other **potential dangers**, such as water in ponds, creeks and/or a swimming pool, which each will need a sign to warn garden visitors to take care (downloadable from the My Open Garden website; laminate the sign(s) if possible). Make absolutely sure your swimming pool is compliant with council requirements for fencing.

- ◆ Think about how any **garden chemicals** will be safely locked away at the time of the event, and where **garden tools, machinery, equipment and hoses** will be stored out of the way so that no one trips over them – and to make sure that they don't impede access around the garden. If there is limited room for 'hiding' wheelbarrows and other bulky items, perhaps a neighbour wouldn't mind storing them for you during the time of the open garden event.
- ◆ Check items in the garden such as children's swings and cubby houses, to make sure these are structurally sound, in case visiting children decide to use them. If they are not safe, plan to cordon these off to prevent access.
- ◆ Consider what you will do with any animals during the time of your opening. Dogs are probably best farmed out to a friend for the duration of the event, and other animals secured in their pens or paddocks.
- ◆ Make sure all sheds, garages and outbuildings are able to be securely locked during your event.

### Evaluate parking

- ◆ Think about where visitors will **park their cars**. If there is limited space in your street, you'll need to identify the nearest cross-street where cars can be parked. You may wish to prepare a corflute sign saying 'Parking' with an arrow, if this is relevant.
- ◆ On the day of the event, plan to ask your **helpers to park away** from your property, so that there is space near the entrance for visitors' cars, and to move your own car away if it is usually parked in the street near your home.
- ◆ If you plan to use **someone else's property for parking** (for example, paddocks in rural regions), make sure your insurance broker (and your neighbour's) are aware of this for insurance purposes. Liaise with the relevant neighbours well ahead of time to make sure that all is clarified.
- ◆ In rural regions where cars will be parking in paddocks, you may need to consider whether you'll need someone to direct people where to park. Such a **'parking warden'** would need to wear a high-visibility vest for safety reasons, as well as a hat, and there should be a roster so that shifts of no more than two hours are scheduled, to ensure workers are protected from the sun. Note that on **public roads**, it is not legal for unqualified people to act as a traffic warden.

### Evaluate where to put road signs and make them

- ◆ Make and work out where to put a few **road signs saying 'Open garden'** with an arrow pointing to your property. These should be placed at major intersections and roads leading to your garden from every possible direction on the day(s) of your event. In country areas, multiple signs may be needed, placed in advance of any turns required. Pieces of corflute (from hardware shops) are ideal for such signs. Use bright colours and large writing on your signs. Make an extra 'Open garden' sign to position at your entry table.

## Decide the best spot for entry table, as well as for plant stall and refreshments area (if applicable)

- ◆ The **entry table** should be at the most accessible point of entry to the garden and needs to be on a flat surface and should have room for a couple of chairs with it for helpers, and possibly a market umbrella on a stand to provide shade.
- ◆ A **plant stall** and a **refreshments area** are ideally sited under some sort of cover, to provide shade and shelter from rain for visitors and helpers alike – for example, on a verandah or covered patio, or under a carport, with a flat surface beneath. A position under a large, shady tree is another possibility – if the weather is fine! These areas need to have **plenty of space available**, so think about what needs to be moved out of the way in these areas to give enough space, and where this stuff will be stored during the event.
- ◆ If **chairs and tables** are to be used for people to sit down in the refreshments area, decide how many will be needed, and whether some will need to be borrowed from family or friends. Do a practice run of how the furniture will be arranged in the space to see if it all fits and is not too crowded. Check that there is plenty of room for your tables/stands for the plant stall.

## Think about seating in the garden

- ◆ Even if you aren't planning to serve refreshments, some visitors will appreciate somewhere to sit down, so contemplate whether there is already **sufficient seating in your garden** – or whether you might need to borrow some more chairs to put out on the day(s) of the event, and where it would be best to put them. Check whether chairs need cleaning.
- ◆ If you intend to allow visitors to have **picnics** in your garden (advisable for larger gardens only), work out the best spot for them, and perhaps make a sign for this purpose.

## Ensure house security

- ◆ Work out how you will make your house **secure** during the opening – perhaps by locking all the windows and all but one of the doors and having a family member inside the house at all times; or else locking up the entire house whilst you are outside if no one will be remaining inside.
- ◆ If you are having a refreshments stall, the workers on this stall will probably need **access to the kitchen** – other doors and windows, however, should be kept locked.
- ◆ It isn't advisable to allow visitors into the house except under emergency situations. If a **toilet** is to be available to visitors, it should be located outside or be accessible from outside and be clearly signposted, and will need to be checked/cleaned regularly during the event. If not providing toilet facilities, be aware of where the nearest public toilet is (and make sure all your helpers know this information) in order to advise visitors.

## Think about weather contingencies

Adverse weather conditions can impact on your event. All that can be done is to anticipate what the possibilities are (and consult weather forecasts) and have contingency plans in case you do have bad weather on the day(s) of your events. Possible plans are as follows:

- ◆ In very hot weather, provide shade with market umbrellas or portable gazebos. Pedestal fans near helpers working on the gate, plant stall and refreshments can provide some relief on very hot days.
- ◆ Have cold water available for visitors and helpers on very hot days.
- ◆ Have verandahs cleared so that people can shelter under them if it rains.
- ◆ Have a few spare umbrellas available for visitors in case of heavy rain.
- ◆ In areas where bushfires are a hazard in summer, check the Fire Danger Index in the lead-up to your event and consult the local fire authorities if the danger is 'high' or greater.
- ◆ Prepare a contingency plan of how to communicate any decision made to cancel your open garden event if there is the danger of bushfire or other extreme weather conditions – for example, notification on [My Open Garden](#), contacting local radio stations, phone calls to any charity or community group involved with your event etc.

## Advise the neighbours

Let your neighbours know well in advance about your upcoming event so they are aware of what will happen. They may even be interested in helping you on the day(s)! If neighbouring properties are to be used for parking for your event, make sure that both your and your neighbours' insurance brokers are advised of this.

## Labelling of plants in the garden

- ◆ It is a good idea to know the [botanical names](#) of any of the more unusual plants in your garden, as visitors are sure to ask you about them!
- ◆ Think about how you want to [identify plants](#) in your garden. Having too many labels in the garden can make it look a little cluttered – and some visitors may walk into garden beds to read the labels, trampling plants in the process!
- ◆ Perhaps the ideal is to [identify key or unusual plants](#) with a clearly visible label (perhaps tied on to a stem), or to incorporate them into a map of your garden on the handout that will be given to visitors.



# Notes:

Use this page to keep notes as you evaluate the garden.

✓	Task	Notes
	Garden jobs to be done	
	Access around the garden	
	Hazards	
	Parking	
	Road signs	
	Entry table, plant stall & refreshments	
	Seating in the garden	
	House security	
	Weather contingencies	
	Advise the neighbours	
	Labelling of plants in the garden	



## Involving a charity or community group

Traditionally, many open gardens have involved charities, community groups or schools in their events, and these organisations have benefited greatly from this. For many gardeners, their main motivation for opening their gardens is to fundraise for a cause close to their heart. Garden visitors also enjoy the idea of helping a charity or community group by attending your garden event.

Involving a charity or community group has benefits for the event as well – the organisation may be able to provide extra publicity for your garden opening through their own website and/or media channels, such as Facebook.

If you are opening on behalf of a charity or community group, this can be a point of interest for publicity in local newspapers or radio/TV gardening shows. When mentioning the involvement of such an organisation in any publicity, make clear what percentage of the proceeds of the event will be given to them.

Your donation to the charity or community group should be made as soon as possible after the open garden event.



## Preparing a garden guide and a handout

It's a good idea to prepare an **A4-sized garden guide**, covering such points as:

- ◆ The size of the garden, its overall layout and design
- ◆ The history of the garden
- ◆ How the garden has evolved over time
- ◆ The challenges you've faced whilst making your garden
- ◆ Highlights of your garden
- ◆ Your gardening philosophy or style, and who or what has influenced you
- ◆ Your favourite plants or favourite part of the garden.

A copy of your garden guide should be placed on your garden profile on the **My Open Garden** website well in advance of your open date(s), as this will help to promote your garden to potential visitors.

Perhaps draw up a rough **map showing the layout of the garden** and indicate a suggested route for visitors to follow. The map can indicate the name and position of major trees and/or shrubs and can show the different areas of your garden, even including names you might have for various sections, such as 'woodland walk' or 'tropical border' etc.

The garden guide and the map can be used to prepare a double-sided A4 handout to give to visitors at your event. Photocopy **40–60 handouts** (or more if you expect large numbers of people). If it is possible to laminate some of the handouts, these can be returned to the front gate by visitors as they leave – plan to encourage recycling of the paper ones as well if possible. Keep a copy of your handout for possible future open garden events, and update it next time to provide answers to visitors' most frequently asked questions!



## Promoting your open garden

- ◆ Your profile on **My Open Garden** will reach a large audience and **email alerts** will be sent as the date approaches to all those who have registered on the site who live within a 100km radius (more in regional areas) of your garden. Local garden clubs will also be notified in advance. Our website gives map references for visitors to find your address easily.
- ◆ As mentioned in the previous section, placing your **garden guide** on your **My Open Garden** profile will help to promote your garden to potential visitors.
- ◆ Further ways to publicise the event include contacting **local newspapers** to put an item in the community events section or possibly even to write an article about your open garden event, especially if the garden is opening as a fundraiser for a charity/community group. This would need to be organised several weeks to a month in advance, to fit in with newspaper deadlines – check what these are early on. Prepare a one-page media release with the important information about the event: a brief description of your garden and its special points; any charity/community group being supported by the open garden and why they are important to you; location of the garden, opening times and cost of entry; and your contact details. Provide a clear digital photo of a highlight of your garden at the time of year it is to be open (rather than a general scene) with your article.
- ◆ **Local radio stations** may have a timeslot for community announcements that could be accessed, especially if you are fundraising for a charity/community group. Some radio stations have a gardening segment at the weekend, and might be interested in mentioning your open garden. If you are able to secure an interview on such a show (which will need to be organised at least a week ahead), prepare yourself in advance and make a list of the key points you want to get across in the interview. Use your own garden guide notes as a reference to help in this. Make sure you state the important aspects of where the garden is, when it is open, and the name of any group that is benefiting from the event.
- ◆ **Make an A4-sized poster** with a clear photo of a highlight of the garden at the time of year it is to be open (rather than a general scene) and the basic details about times, date(s) and location. Keep the poster simple, without too much writing, and make the text a reasonable size. Make some copies of the poster (laminated if possible to help them last better) and put these up on community noticeboards and in the local shops, tourist information centre (where applicable), nurseries and libraries a few weeks ahead of the event. You could also prepare A5-sized **promotional flyers** to leave in shops, libraries, nurseries etc – or do a letterbox drop in your neighbourhood.

- ◆ Put a laminated poster on your own fence a few weeks in advance of the open date(s) to notify **passers-by** that the garden will be open.
- ◆ Contact **local community clubs (such as Probus) and retirement villages** a month or so ahead of time to let them know about the event so that they can communicate this to their members/residents.
- ◆ Using email and social media is another way to promote your event – let friends and colleagues on **your email contact list** know about the event and mention it on your **Facebook** page if you have one – or even use Twitter, Instagram etc! Give people plenty of advance notice. Ask your helpers to do likewise.
- ◆ If you are opening on behalf of a **charity or community group**, the organisation may help you with promotion on their website and/or other communications – this may depend on the extent to which the charity or community group is involved with your event and must be discussed directly with them.
- ◆ On the morning(s) of your opening, put up your **signs** saying 'Open garden' at the ends of your street pointing to your property. Also have a sign at the front gate or at the entry table saying 'Open garden'. A bunch of balloons tied to the letterbox will help draw attention to the event.



## Notes:

Use this section to plan your promotional activities.

Channel	Actions	Date
My Open Garden	Complete garden profile	
Newspapers		
Radio		
Posters/flyers/signs		
Local community groups, retirement villages		
Email/social media		



It is very advisable to make sure you have some **helpers for your event!** It isn't really possible to do it all on your own. Visitors like to talk to the garden owner and ask questions, so free yourself up from taking money on the gate or running a plant stall and/or refreshment stall (if applicable). In general, most helpers will enjoy the experience of being involved in your open garden event as it can be a very fun, social occasion, and they will usually be happy to help fundraise for a charity or community group (if applicable).

- ◆ Enlist the help of **friends and relatives** ahead of time, establish their availability on the day(s) of your event and their preferred roles, and make up a roster for every aspect of the event for each day the garden is open, so that no one is on duty for too long at a time – two hours or so is a reasonable length of time. Provide each helper with a copy of the roster ahead of time.
- ◆ Make sure your helpers are **thoroughly briefed** in advance as to what their roles are. You may wish to prepare an information sheet for them, especially those sitting on the entry gate, with information on nearest public toilet, any charity or community group you are fundraising for, parking information etc.
- ◆ Perhaps some members the **local garden club** may be happy to help out at your event.
- ◆ A **local community group** may be able to run a refreshments stall; a local nursery may like to run a plant stall.
- ◆ Ensure your helpers get some **refreshments** during or at the end of their shifts.
- ◆ Provide a **name tag** for each volunteer – large sticky labels with the names written in Texta are the simplest option.
- ◆ Getting in touch with all your volunteers **after the event**, to thank them for their involvement and let them know the result of the event in terms of numbers of visitors and funds raised, is a great gesture and will ensure goodwill for possible future events!

Use this section to organise your helpers.

Name	Phone/email address	Shift	Role



## The entry gate

- ◆ On the morning of your open garden event, you'll need to place a small **table at the entry point** to the garden and a couple of chairs for your helpers who will sit on the gate to greet visitors and collect the entrance fee. If it is very hot, a large umbrella or portable gazebo to provide shade could be good – or even an electric pedestal fan if feasible!
- ◆ A large **sign** saying 'Open garden' and a few colourful **balloons** will help identify the location of the property for visitors.
- ◆ Always have **someone on the gate** – don't rely on an 'honesty box' system!
- ◆ It is not advisable to have anyone **under the age of 18 years** on the entry gate on their own – and it is best to have two people at all times if possible.
- ◆ Be ready at the advertised time of opening, as visitors may arrive on the dot!
- ◆ A laminated sign on your table should state the **cost of entering the garden**. You may wish children to have free admittance (where accompanied by an adult!) to encourage gardeners of the future.
- ◆ If your garden contains a **water hazard or any other hazard**, display a relevant warning sign on the entry table (these signs can be downloaded from My Open Garden website).
- ◆ Have the **handouts** about your garden on your table. Try to encourage visitors to return these to you as they leave the garden if possible.
- ◆ If opening for a charity or community group, you may wish to have some **information about them** available on the table (leaflets etc), or simply a note on your sign listing the fee to enter, stating which charity or community group you are supporting. Indicate the percentage of proceeds that will be given to the organisation, including proceeds from refreshments and/or plant sales.
- ◆ You'll need a money tin or money belt to store the **money from the entry fee** – and sufficient change. Have a proper float (e.g. 1 x \$20 note; 10 x \$10 notes; 6 x \$5 notes; 20 x \$2 coins; 10 x \$1 coins (total of \$200) – only have 50c pieces if your entrance fee includes this). Larger notes can be taken inside the house every so often for safekeeping in a secure place.
- ◆ If you wish to keep track of visitor numbers, you can hand each visitor a ticket from numbered raffle books, or simply keep a tally on a sheet of paper.
- ◆ You can have a **clipboard** for visitors to write their email addresses if they wish to be kept informed of future open garden events; or else suggest they visit the My Open Garden website!
- ◆ You may wish to provide a **visitors' book** where people can write comments about your garden. It is a great memento of the event, allows visitors to give you some nice feedback, and will make it seem all the more worthwhile!



## Your role as garden owner at the event

As has been mentioned, garden visitors love to be able to talk to the garden owner when they visit a garden. For this reason, it is best if you free yourself up from any duties on the entry gate, plant stall or refreshments area.

You should identify yourself with a name tag (including 'garden owner' on the tag) and spend the time being available to chat to the visitors. You might find it best to wander around the garden so that you can meet different visitors. Often visitors like to ask questions about various plants, how your garden has developed, and so on. Make sure you have regular drinks and something to eat through the day!



## Having a plant stall

A plant stall at your open garden event adds to the appeal of visiting. All gardeners love the idea of getting something new and unusual for their gardens (especially if they have seen it growing in your garden), and it is a great way to raise extra money for a charity or community group. It must be said, however, that preparing for such a stall does involve quite a bit of work, and it also means you'll need more helpers at your garden event to sell the plants.

### Preparing the plants

- ◆ It's advisable to **start propagating your plants** four to six months (or even more!) ahead of your event, remembering that growth is slower in the winter months. Cuttings will take longer to develop into sturdy plants than divisions of plants. It is a good idea to propagate some of the more unusual plants in your garden for the stall, and it is also best to have a variety of plants – so that there are not too many of the same thing.
- ◆ Remember that the plants will need **regular watering and care**, so it is best not to propagate more than is practical to look after easily. You may have gardening friends who might like to contribute some plants to your stall.
- ◆ Be aware of plant cultivars protected under **Plant Breeders' Rights**, which can't be propagated for sale without a licence. Check for plants thus protected, on this website: [http://pericles.ipaustralia.gov.au/pbr\\_db/](http://pericles.ipaustralia.gov.au/pbr_db/)

- ◆ Don't attempt to sell plants that are regarded as **weeds** by your local council, or any which you know yourself will 'go berserk' in a garden!
- ◆ It is advisable to **label plants** as well as possible, which makes plants more appealing to the visitors: provide information on height, flower colour, best position for the plant (e.g. sun vs. shade, damp vs. dry), the season when it blooms etc. Labels including a photo of the plants flower are the ideal, but not always possible – however, much can be achieved with a simple laminating machine! Otherwise, use white plastic labels and write the details on them with a permanent marker. Old venetian blinds cut into short lengths make a good substitute for bought plant labels!
- ◆ Use a really **good-quality potting mix** when potting up plants – this will make a big difference to the quality of your plants. Ensure that the plants are sturdy, well rooted and thriving by the time of the stall, and that there are no weeds in the pots. It is useful to give your potted plants a fair bit of **feeding** with a soluble fertiliser once they are well established, and perhaps add some slow-release plant food granules. The pots themselves should be clean and presentable! Remove dead flowers and tatty foliage the day before the stall.
- ◆ The plant that sells the best is one with a **flower** on it, so if the plants are well established, you can try feeding them with a soluble high-potassium fertiliser a few weeks ahead of the event and ensuring they have plenty of sun (except for shade-loving plants!).
- ◆ The pots should be **well watered** the day before the open garden event.
- ◆ In general, smaller pots seem to sell better than large pots, which are difficult for people to transport home and take up a lot of room on the stall.
- ◆ To sell more plants, **make the prices appealing!** It is possible to buy wooden 'craft sticks' (like paddle-pop sticks) from craft stores and newsagents to write the prices on. Helpers on the stall can remove these from the pots selected by a purchaser and easily add up the prices from the sticks. Avoid prices that include 50c, so that you won't need 50 cent coins in your float.
- ◆ It can be helpful to have a few **baskets** for customers to use to place their plants in whilst they are browsing.
- ◆ If you don't want to grow plants for the stall yourself, it might be possible to get the local garden club to run the stall for you and to donate part of the proceeds to the charity you are fundraising for (if applicable); or maybe a local nursery might be interested in running the stall.

## Running the stall

- ◆ Consider who will run the stall. You'll need **people in shifts** (of around two hours) on the stall, unless it is to be located near the entry point, in which case the people manning the gate could take the money for the plants. Having two people per shift is ideal if possible. Provide chairs for them to sit on when the stall is quiet!

- ◆ Remember to collect plastic supermarket **bags or small boxes** (e.g. from the local greengrocer) ahead of time for people to take the plants away in.
- ◆ If it is to be a separate stall, have a **float** so there is plenty of change. A suggested float is 1 x \$20 note; 10 x \$10 notes; 6 x \$5 notes; 20 x \$2 coins; 10 x \$1 coins (total of \$200). Money can be kept in a money tin or money belts. Large notes can be periodically taken into the house for safekeeping in a secure place.
- ◆ Site the plant stall under **shelter** if possible, in case of rain and to provide sun protection for plants and people if it is very hot.
- ◆ It's advisable to **set up the plant stall the night before** your garden event so it is all ready for the next day. Use trestle tables or plant stands to display the plants, and make sure they all have prices on them. You may wish to group the plants – such as into those for sun vs. shade, groundcovers, perennials, herbs etc – using larger signs to indicate the categories.
- ◆ If running a stall for two days, it is still best to put all the plants out on **the first day**, as usually the keen buyers will be there on that day – and it can't be predicted that the second day will be as busy as the first if the weather turns nasty, for example!
- ◆ Visitors may wish to leave their plant purchases at the stall whilst they walk around the garden so it is a good idea to have a **'crèche area'** to store these plants behind the stall, and make sure the name of the purchaser is written clearly on the bags or boxes, or else use large sticky white labels. Have a Texta handy for this!



Serving refreshments to visitors can be another way to fundraise for charity, and is always appreciated by visitors, as it adds to the enjoyment of the outing. The type of service you may want to offer can vary from a cup of tea or coffee in a polystyrene cup with a biscuit from a packet, to a much more involved scenario with china cups and Devonshire teas served at cloth-covered tables! If there are no other refreshments to be offered, jugs of cold water and plastic cups on a table somewhere in the garden will be appreciated. If you prefer not to provide refreshments yourself, perhaps a **local charity or community group** could be approached to organise and run a refreshments stall at your event.

## Planning the catering

It is always hard to know how many people you will need to cater at your first open garden event, so in some ways it is best to keep things fairly simple and take a middle course. If you get larger numbers than anticipated, someone can always run to the shops to get more supplies!

Ahead of time, you'll need to make decisions about:

- ◆ The **type of drinks** you are going to offer – instant coffee vs. coffee plungers vs. espresso machine coffee; tea bags vs. teapot. It might be worthwhile having a small bottle of instant decaff coffee. It is a good idea to plan to offer some sort of cool drink as well as hot drinks – for example, elderflower cordial with iced water or iced water with slices of fresh lime added to the jug. Individual sugar and 'Equal' portions are useful instead of using sugar bowls.
- ◆ **Type of cups and plates** to be used (disposable vs. crockery, which will entail lots of washing up at the event) and **teaspoons** (metal vs. plastic disposable). If you decide to use china cups and saucers, it is possible to buy extras at local op shops for cheap prices or borrow some from friends. Don't use your best china!
- ◆ **Food** to be offered – it is possible to buy slab slices, large cakes and even oven-ready frozen scones for catering purposes; or perhaps you, friends and relatives can bake some items. It is worthwhile providing a gluten-free option, if possible. Have plenty of paper serviettes to offer to visitors.
- ◆ Whether people will be served at **tables** or will they be lining up to be served, and where they will sit to consume the refreshments; as well as what furniture you'll need.
- ◆ How to clear your **kitchen** of any clutter so that the helpers have a streamlined area to work in. Make sure there are lots of tea towels available for drying up, as well as a few pairs of washing-up gloves and sufficient detergent.
- ◆ Whether you plan to serve **alcohol**. A liquor licence must be obtained for this purpose.

## Running the refreshments stall

- ◆ Site your refreshments area under **shelter** if possible – such as on a verandah or under large trees – in case of rain or extreme heat. If possible, have some seating and tables available for people to sit at, sheltered by market umbrellas if these are out in the open. If providing tables and chairs, ensure these are all clean and set up the day before. Make sure tables are wiped down promptly between customers.
- ◆ Prepare a **sign or menu board** giving the price list of what is on offer and laminate this if possible. Avoid having 50 cents in prices so you won't need 50 cent coins in your float. Display the sign on the serving table.

- ◆ You'll need a separate **float** for this part of the event: a suggested float is 1 x \$20 note; 10 x \$10 notes; 6 x \$5 notes; 20 x \$2 coins; 10 x \$1 coins (total of \$200). Use a tin or money belt to hold the cash. Large notes can be periodically removed to safekeeping in a secure place inside the house.
- ◆ An **urn** makes serving hot drinks easier – try to borrow one if possible. A couple of kettles are also useful to boil extra water to add to the urn as the water in it gets used. Have the urn and kettles filled and heating ahead of the opening time.
- ◆ You'll need one or more **tables** to serve from, which need to be near a power point for urns and/or kettle(s) and have sufficient room for all the crockery, food and drink. Make sure you have enough extension leads/double adaptors – and be sure that the any long leads are not going to be a tripping hazard for workers, and are tucked well out of the way.
- ◆ Have everything **set up early** on the day of the opening.
- ◆ Make sure **proper food-handling practices** are observed at all times. Make sure helpers use food-handling gloves whenever directly touching any food served to visitors. Make sure perishables are kept under refrigeration at all times, and that crockery and utensils are thoroughly washed up in hot, soapy water between use.
- ◆ Have a large **bin** available for rubbish, and ensure it is emptied when necessary.
- ◆ Make sure there are enough helpers to serve as well as wash up (if applicable) – make a **roster** so people aren't working for too long – two-hour shifts are ideal.



Other activities that can be held to add interest to your open garden event could include:

- ◆ Produce or craft stalls
- ◆ A sausage sizzle
- ◆ Displays of local artists' work
- ◆ Live music.



# Suggested timeline for open garden preparations

Tick off the tasks as you go and you'll be more than ready for your open garden event!

## At the time of deciding to open your garden

- Consult your insurance broker and work out exactly what insurance you will need for your event and organise this as soon as possible.
- Carry out a risk assessment of your garden and identify any possible hazards that need to be dealt with.
- Work out how parking will be managed and whether you need to involve neighbouring properties in this aspect – discuss with neighbours.
- Decide what extra facilities you will be offering at your event – such as a toilet, picnic areas, refreshments, a plant stall or other activities – and whether you can get assistance from organisations or volunteers for these.
- Work out a general timetable of garden jobs to be done, including new areas to be developed or replantings, as well as general garden maintenance jobs, cleaning of paths etc, and jobs to be done very close to the event, such as mowing, hedge-trimming etc. Start work on the jobs that need to be done way in advance.
- Take (or find) good-quality photos of the garden – showing it at the time of year when it is to be open – to be used for promotion of the event.
- Evaluate the access around your garden for visitors and decide where it may need improvement.
- Start propagating plants if you intend to run a stall selling your own plants.

## 8–12 weeks ahead

- Prepare a garden guide to place on your profile on My Open Garden and to be used for a handout at your event. Draw a map of your garden (if desired) to be used on the back of your handout. The map can indicate the best way for visitors to go around the garden.
- Complete and upload your profile on My Open Garden with all relevant information, your garden guide and photos.
- Prepare other promotional information, such as posters and media releases.

- If you are opening on behalf of a charity or community group, contact them to inform them of the event and discuss how they might be able to help you.
- Identify all possible promotional avenues – newspapers, magazines, and TV/radio gardening programs – and find out details of what is required to achieve publicity about your event through these channels, including lead times and type of material required. Create a timetable of when material should be sent out and distribute material to magazines with long lead times (where applicable).
- Contact local community groups/retirement villages and ask them to let their members/residents know about your event.
- Start organising helpers for the event and establish their availability on the day(s) of your event.
- Continue with garden tasks on your timetable that need to be done in advance, and dealing with hazards in the garden.

### 6 weeks before

- Continue to organise helpers and start to create a roster of helpers for different aspects of your event over the day(s) it will run.
- Send promotional material to media outlets you wish to approach as per the timetable you've created.
- Plan the details of the refreshments stall if you intend to have one – what will be served, prices, where to site the stall etc. Make a list of everything that needs to be bought – food, drinks, serviettes etc. Make sure the tables, chairs etc to be used will fit into the space allocated.
- Plan the plant stall if you intend to have one – where to site it, prices to charge, what sort of labels to use etc. Make sure that tables, plant stands etc to be used will fit into the space allocated.
- Decide if you need to borrow chairs, tables, an urn, market umbrellas, crockery etc for any aspect of your event.
- Continue with garden tasks on your timetable that need to be done in advance, and dealing with hazards in the garden.
- If having a plant stall, start collecting plastic supermarket bags and some cardboard boxes for customers to take plants away in.

### 4 weeks before

- Continue sending out promotional material to media outlets as per your schedule.

- Put up posters about the event on local noticeboards, in the local library, nursery, tourist information centres and shops.
- Advise your neighbours of the upcoming event.
- Let all your friends and relatives know about the event, and ask your helpers to do likewise.
- Continue on with tasks on your garden timetable and dealing with hazards in the garden.

### 2–3 weeks before

- Work out where you will place your road signs pointing to your garden.
- Make (and laminate where appropriate) the signs needed for all aspects of your event.
- Plan where to site your entry table.
- Continue to send out promotional information as per your schedule.
- Label key plants in your garden, if desired.
- Finalise roster for helpers and send it to each of them.
- Continue on with tasks on your garden timetable and dealing with hazards in the garden.
- Place orders for any food required for refreshment stall (where applicable).

### 1 week before

- Put a poster on your fence indicating the date(s) and times of opening.
- Trim any hedges.
- Complete any cleaning tasks in the garden, such as pressure-cleaning paths, walls etc.
- Complete weeding.
- Make sure all plants for plant stall are properly labelled (if applicable).
- Buy all non-perishables need for refreshments (if applicable).
- Photocopy copies of your handout with garden guide (and map where applicable) for visitors; laminate some if possible.
- Liaise with helpers on plant stall and/or refreshments stall (where applicable) so that they know their roles and what is required of them.

## 2–3 days before

- Mow lawn and do lawn edges (if applicable).
- Arrange separate cash floats for entry gate and any other stalls you are planning to have.
- Check that all hazards have been dealt with and that the garden is safe for visitors.
- Check the fire danger rating forecast for the day(s) your garden will be open (where relevant).
- Purchase perishable food for refreshments stall (where applicable); begin food preparation if required.
- Prepare items for the entry table – money tin/belt; handouts; charity/ community group information; sign stating entrance fee; 'Beware of water' sign or other hazard sign(s) (where applicable); visitors' book and pen; raffle books of tickets to keep track of visitor number; clipboard, notepad and pen for visitor contact details, if desired.
- Deadhead spent flowers and remove any stray weeds.

## Day before

- Put all tools and equipment away securely.
- Lock up sheds, garages and outbuildings.
- Deal with animals so they are secure.
- Set up tables, chairs, crockery etc for refreshment stall (if applicable).
- Set up plants on plants stall (if applicable).
- Water pot plants and ensure the garden is well watered.
- Cordon off areas where you don't want visitors to go.
- Put out any extra seating planned for visitors in the garden.
- Complete food preparation required for refreshments stall (where applicable).
- Prepare toilet for visitor use (if applicable).
- Sweep paths, steps, verandahs and paved areas.
- Clean any leaves or debris in swimming pool and/or pond(s).

## Day(s) of opening

- Ensure no cars belonging to you or your helpers are parked near the entrance to your property.
- Put up 'Open garden' road signs (and balloons, if using).
- Put up 'Parking' signs if required.
- Put up signs indicating where the toilet is located (where applicable).
- Put up a sign showing where picnics can be had (where applicable).
- Put up arrow signs indicating route around the garden (where applicable).
- Set up entry table, with chairs for helpers; provide cash float; put up balloons.
- Brief all helpers as to their roles and provide them with necessary information. Give them each a name tag.
- Put out 'Beware of water' or other hazard signs where necessary in the garden and at the entry table (if applicable).
- Ensure helpers set up refreshment stall, provide cash float (where applicable).
- Provide cash float for plant stall (where applicable).
- Secure your home.
- Make sure helpers are given food and drink during or after their shifts.
- Make sure someone regularly collects large notes from the various stalls and entry gate and secures these in a safe place inside the house.
- Make sure someone checks/cleans toilet regularly during the event (if applicable).

## After the event

- Take down all road signs promptly.
- Donate the cash raised to the charity/community group (where applicable) as soon as possible.
- Write to all helpers, neighbours etc to thank them for their assistance and to let them know the gate numbers and amount raised by the event.
- Make a note of your experiences during the event: what worked well and what could be done differently ... next time!