



PlantNetwork
Connecting gardens, sharing skills

Unlocking the lockdown: opening public gardens to visitors

Good practice guidelines and considerations

This document is a *living* document and is being used to collate policies and procedures that are considered to offer effective, reasonable and practical steps towards opening gardens to visitors as the COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown begins to be lifted. It is important that a consensus is reached between gardens to ensure that key messages are communicated to visitors so that they know what to expect when visiting gardens. Consistent messages will enable all to adopt the behaviour required to ensure that gardens remain open and that all – staff and visitors alike – stay safe.

Note that the term ‘good practice’ is used rather than ‘best practice’ to emphasise that these are unprecedented times and we do not yet fully understand what is ‘best practice’ when dealing with this new virus. A precautionary approach is recommended given the number of unknowns that exist and the duty of care that must be provided by the owners/operators of public gardens. However, while measures should be in place to protect staff and visitors, visitors will want to come to gardens to escape some of the stress that the pandemic might be causing so measures should be sensible to enhance safety and enjoyment and not cause unnecessary aggravation (which may lead to unsafe behaviour and a poor visitor experience).

Summary

- We need a consistent message/come to a consensus on what message should be communicated about visiting public gardens. There will be variations across gardens (due to location, size etc.) but if we can develop a level of expectation, this would be useful in ensuring the visitor experience is not compromised too much.
- Ensure that there is clear messaging before, on and after arrival.
- Normalise social distancing through use of timed tickets and/or pre-paid tickets, times for different visitors (families, pensioners etc.), tape/spacers on paths, removal of seating/path closure or opening, one way systems etc.
- Use established procedures developed by supermarkets to manage entry/payment as well as municipal parks for what can/can't do – we have all become used to the measures adopted.

Key considerations

There are two important areas to consider: protecting staff and protecting visitors. Safe working procedures for workers should already have been implemented and should be regularly reviewed in line with government advice. See the [PlantNetwork resource page](#). There are, however, overlaps when staff come into contact with visitors: this contact should be minimised if not avoided as much as possible. As such, it might be worth considering altered opening times (later opening or closure days) to allow staff to carry out their work without the presence of visitors. It would also be worth providing some interpretation (boards in the garden, notes on website, social media posts) about

the presentation of the garden to manage visitor expectations but also indicate the work that horticulturists do in the garden – an excellent opportunity to expand on the skills horticulturists have!

Volunteers are key for many gardens – and the gardens are important to the volunteers too. Many volunteers will fall in the vulnerable age group and a precautionary approach is therefore suggested at this time for anyone in that group. Measures will have to be put in place to ensure that any volunteers permitted to return to the garden have their own equipment, own facilities and can work in a socially distant way. This will vary considerably from garden to garden. Even if not permitted to work in the garden, a volunteer day when volunteers only are allowed to visit the garden might be helpful for those missing contact with the garden.

The focus is on minimising transmission of the virus hence social distancing and hygiene are the two most important considerations. Measures will include encouraging visitors to bring their own hygiene solutions and PPE (e.g. hand gels, gloves, masks), ensuring sufficient distance between household groups at pinch points in the garden (route from car park to entry/exit points, crossing the payment barrier, toilets and other amenities) as well as elsewhere on narrow garden paths, use of plastic screens at payment barriers and if refreshments sales are permitted (outdoor only), and providing additional hygiene measures (hand gel points near any doors/gates).

Use of consistent signage and repeated clear messages (both in the garden and elsewhere, particularly garden websites and social media platforms) will reinforce the measures adopted, ensuring that social distancing and enhanced hygiene measures become normalised when visiting gardens. Gardens are encouraged to share the signage and messaging they are developing to others in the sector to help develop a level of consistency across the sector.

Measures

- Ensure visitors are aware of procedures that are in place BEFORE they arrive at the garden. Website, social media, answerphone message on your contact number, local radio/TV news, even printed literature (local newspapers, posters in local community/vicinity of garden) should all be considered. Messages to communicate might include: PPE to bring, ticket advice (what to do, how to pay etc.), parking/entrance requirements and social distancing enforcement. Reiterate that if you are feeling unwell, displaying any of the symptoms of the virus or have been in contact with anyone with the virus in last two weeks, avoid visiting. It is essential that this is kept simple and straightforward, and is fairly consistent across all gardens.
- Will you recommend that certain groups of people visit at different times? It might be worth considering a time of day or day of the week for families, one for vulnerable groups etc. Even a key worker day could be considered.
- How many people will you allow in as a 'household group'? Note the restrictions in place in supermarkets. Do you need to set a maximum number to avoid people meeting up at the garden?
- It is difficult to know if the first few days of opening will result in high numbers of visitors or if there will be a fear factor. Consider a soft opening for members/friends/season ticket holders and the use of timed tickets to prevent crowding at key points.

- Even when/if open to all, timed tickets will be useful in controlling numbers arriving at and in the garden. Consider the holding capacity of your garden and average visiting time when calculating how many tickets to offer.
- Pre-paid timed tickets will reduce time spent at entry barrier to the garden and need to handle cash or contact card payments. There are a number of options that can be explored for pre-booking tickets, from Eventbrite to other, cheaper alternatives.
- Consider parking but don't get too concerned about enforcing a rule of parking in every other space. If you have a note on your website/on entry to car park (e.g. Please avoid parking next to a vehicle if you can see other people in/around it), that should be sufficient. Supermarkets appear to be coping without enforcing this rule. Controlling numbers arriving to visit will be key here – if open to all (no timed tickets/pre-booked), there might be a need to restrict parking places to reduce but this might result in increased traffic queuing waiting to enter the car park which is not ideal for garden, visitors or local community.
- Clearly sign post possible routes to the garden entrance/s, ideally with spacers every one or two metres (depending on whether government or WHO guidelines are in place).
- Even with timed tickets, there will be queuing so ensure this is managed as effectively as possible. Adopt the approach used by supermarkets – we are all familiar with it now. Provide shade/seating as applicable.
- Ensure welcome team staff are adequately protected with screens, PPE etc.
- If maps are required, consider online equivalents rather than paper based. However, paper is fairly inert for viral load so leave it up to the visitor.
- Is/are tape/spacers needed on leaving the pay barrier to prevent clustering around the entrance to the garden? Would a one way system work in your garden or in part of the garden – particularly where paths are narrow and it would be difficult to pass with necessary social distance? Some paths might need to be closed. Other routes might need to be opened e.g. across lawn or created in beds/borders.
- Children's play areas should be kept closed unless government advises otherwise.
- Consider seating in the garden: people will want to sit in the garden. What should be removed as too close to paths and what should be kept as allows people to sit and enjoy the garden while being separated from others. It will be difficult to sanitise seating so consider a note to this effect so visitors can make a judgement.
- Toilets will be needed but access will need to be controlled to ensure visitors are kept apart. Extra cleaning will be required. Perhaps have a hand sanitiser at the entrance/exit as an extra precaution.
- It is probably best to close all indoor areas at first (unless otherwise advised) to simplify opening. Indoor areas such as glasshouses will need regular cleaning/sanitising, monitoring for social distancing etc. If social distancing can be maintained with people walking through the area without lingering and handrails/doors etc. cleaned regularly, it might be possible to open these areas. Indoor cafes and shops, however, will need longer and will certainly require extra cleaning when permitted to open.
- Outdoor refreshments and sales areas might be possible, if not immediately, provided there is social distancing in queues (tape needed on the ground?), screening of staff and contactless payments available. Perhaps encourage visitors to bring their own cups to minimise contact further (and reduce waste!).

- Will you allow people to sit on the grass, have picnics, bring their dogs provided all are socially distant? There has been a lot of media coverage regarding sunbathers in parks but if they are distant/separated from others, is it okay to allow?
- Encourage engagement with the garden – it isn't all about command and control. Add photo points and encourage people to send their photos to social media, create virtual tours of the garden – different lengths and different parts of the garden to encourage visitors to spread out, online activities for children, etc.

Please see the appendix for a collection of procedures, guidelines and planning documents from a number of different sources.

Appendix

This appendix lists publicly available information (e.g. from HTA) as well as procedures being developed in the public garden sector. Please contribute your own planning considerations.

HTA Safe Trading Guidance

An excellent document which is very relevant to public gardens with entry barriers. Provides guidance on macro-control, site controls (car park, entrance, inside the centre, POS examples, till/purchase process, queuing guidance) and staff protocols. The guidance has been informed by leading retailers, the British Retail Consortium, and the relevant government bodies as a recommendation of best practice regarding safe distancing to protect staff and customers once garden centres are able to open.

PDF is freely available online:
<https://hta.org.uk/uploads/assets/633bb2d9-1918-47b5-9e2cb314ae1f6753/c8ad1b20-42f7-4fbc-963fe928960a1709/HTA-Safe-Trading-Guidance.pdf>

The HTA have also developed signage which can be adopted/adapted for use in public gardens. Available to download from Dropbox:
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/bvv95deaqygky81/AAAGwUNCbX4KKgcVEMLwslBua/Social%20Distancing%20Signs?dl=0&subfolder_nav_tracking=1

All are available from the HTA Garden Centre Reopening Campaign webpage:
<https://hta.org.uk/coronavirus-latest-information-and-advice/garden-centre-reopening.html>

Advice from The Parks Alliance

You may use your local park or green space for your one form of exercise per day alone or with members of your household but remember:-

- Exercise alone or with members of your household
- No gatherings of more than 2 people
- Stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

DO NOT use any equipment or facilities that have been closed by the park authorities.

If you do not follow these rules your park may be closed.

Remember to check with your local Council to see if your local park or green space is open or if the UK Guidance has changed.

See: <https://www.theparksalliance.org/guidance-on-corona-virus-social-distancing-and-parks/>

Garden reopening planning from the National Trust:

DECISION AND PLANNING PROCESS FOR GARDEN REOPENING DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

To provide a framework for deciding whether a garden (or parts) can be opened and what management actions need to be put in place to meet physical separation and other special requirements.

These considerations can be used to complete the table to show spatial and operational details and constraints.

1. Parking, reception and visitor facilities

These considerations are likely to be dealt with at a whole property level. For example, do car parks allow for wider (or alternate) spaces only to be used? Can we use parkland or other overflow spaces where this may prompt people to use NT site as a meeting and congregation place?

2. Garden layout/maintenance

Initial assessment of garden components:

- How much of the garden can be safely opened and are there suitable routes to access each component?
- Do path widths prevent social distancing without encroachment onto grass areas and, if not, will this cause excessive wear?
- Can unsuitable areas be closed?
- Is it possible to operate a one-way system, at least for entry and exit?
- Are there pinch points – gates, doors, pergolas, enclosed paths and can these be by-passed?
- Can seating areas, benches and tables be removed/closed?

3. Managed or flexible opening

Options for flexible or reduced opening:

- Different properties opening different days. This enables gardeners to return to open but to have some days with no visitors whilst maintenance of the gardens is carried out.
- Cyclical opening of different areas within gardens to allow for visitor-free maintenance and/or spreading of visitor impact.
- Limited opening of garden components. For example, open main garden but keep glasshouses or walled garden closed. WGs tend to have narrow paths and many pinch points. They could also provide space for volunteers to return, working away from visitors.
- Member-only, timed tickets or geographical proximity.

4. Management and maintenance considerations

- What level of additional staffing (essential+) will be needed?
- What level of cash will need to be released for materials, tools and services?
- Are there suitable hand washing and toilet facilities for working staff?
- We need to have dedicated tools for staff and volunteers with tagging to identify.
- Do we need to remove laminated sheets and other pick-up garden interpretation materials?

- Is there enough spacing for child buggies and accessibility scooters given the need for separation?
- Is there sufficient PPE?
- Many other locally specific considerations.
- How should we manage visitor expectations regarding standards of presentation and access?
- Some maintenance task will require special arrangements to meet separation requirements. Gardeners will need to develop a work plan for the coming two months after opening to highlight work practices that may require a change in visitor routes.
- Can we include volunteers at this stage?
- There will need to be regular monitoring and adaptation to meet safety and maintenance requirements

SUGGESTED TOOLKIT example table
PROPERTY:

Garden component	Open/close	Access meets criteria	Access does not meet criteria	Vulnerabilities	Work practice allows visitor access	Notes
Rose garden	Open	Use south gate (locked open) for entry, west gate for exit. Limit numbers to 25.		Grass paths – allow wide access but may need compaction relief each week. If wet weather not suitable.	Yes, but barriers needed when hedge cutting	Remove benches Staff allocation to monitor and guide visitors
Walled garden	Closed		Remain closed to visitors. Open to volunteers and staff max 5.			