

COVID FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR GARDEN OPENERS

Following our recent District Organiser Coffee Mornings, some felt a 'crib sheet' might be helpful for discussions with potential Garden Openers who may have Covid related questions and concerns about opening next year. We have therefore prepared a 'Frequently Asked Questions' sheet, which we hope will be helpful. It goes without saying that we respect the decisions of Garden Owners (and all volunteers) to make sure that everyone feels supported and safe.

We will do our best to keep up to date with the latest developments and will update our guidance on the website too (link at the end). Please get in touch with Head Office if you have any suggestions to add.

I'm concerned about opening next year due to uncertainties around COVID. What advice do you have?

Many of our gardens opened in 2020 when we were able to do so and both Garden Openers and visitors had a good experience. Visitors know what to expect at the moment (and we have guidance on our website about what we expect from visitors) and we find that garden visitors are well-behaved and naturally give way to others and create their own distance. Some hints and tips to help with social distancing:

- **Signage** – we can provide a range of posters for you to print out and use to help with social distancing to remind people of the rules
- **One Way Systems** – consider creating a route with arrows (as above, these can be printed out) to direct people around your garden; one garden opener used a trail of pebbles to create a route around the garden, for a more natural effect.
- **Numbers in the Garden** – one garden had a basket with a fixed number of pebbles in it. People were asked to use hand sanitiser on entering and then take a pebble, returning it to the basket as they left the garden. This helped the garden owner to know how many people were in the garden at any one time.
- **Leave gates open** - if this is practical in your garden, gates can be left open to invite people through and avoid handling

- **Opening Times** – depending on the size and layout of your garden and your normal visitor numbers, you might consider expanding your opening times.
 - Traditionally gardens have opened from 2-5pm, however a longer opening time will enable your visitors to spread out their visit.
 - Consider opening for a longer timeframe, for example, from 12-6 instead
 - You could also think about opening for an additional day, such as over a weekend (this can also help if the weather is poor on one of the days)

Will I be able to offer teas? They're an important part of our fundraising income.

As we don't know what the situation will be like next year, it's worth thinking what you would like to do, whether basic teas, homemade or cream teas, and opt for that now and we can provide appropriate advice nearer the time.

This year, some of our Garden Openers thought about alternative ways to offer teas and these were very successful – visitors were really grateful and delighted and the teas still made impressive amounts of money for charity!

Here are some top tips:

- Operate as an outside take-away rather than a sit-down service. Visitors still find this approach very welcome and appreciate your efforts.
- Remember your masks and hand sanitiser and socially distanced queuing!
- Use disposable cups, cutlery and plates so you don't have to worry about washing up - or why not suggest that people bring their own mugs?
- Provide wrapped products such as biscuits or individual cakes
- Highlight seating areas around your garden or areas suitable for picnicking and encourage people to bring a rug
- Even if you don't wish to offer refreshments, you can identify picnic areas and encourage people to bring their own
- Have some bins at the ready so people can dispose of rubbish – or better still, ask them to take it home and recycle it.

You should feel under no pressure to offer teas if you're at all worried about it but we're happy to talk through ideas and suggestions.

How about a plant sale?

Everyone loves a plant sale! It's a wonderful way to encourage new visitors keen for a plant bargain, especially with all the new gardeners out there.

- **Plants for sale at your garden opening** - as an addition or alternative to teas, you might consider including some plants for sale as these are always really popular – save a few when you're doing your autumn or spring divisions or seed sowing and ask your friends to do the same.
- **SGS Plant Sale event** – why not organise a stand alone plant sale to celebrate our 90th Birthday next year? Although many were unable to go ahead in 2020, the James Street Community Garden Plant Sale in Helensburgh went ahead in September and was very successful!

We have plant sale guidance in our Covid Resources page here:

<https://scotlandsgardens.org/uploads/documents/1/sgs-plant-sales-during-covid-19.pdf>

What do I do when people arrive?

- Have some hand sanitiser available at your welcome desk and ask people to use it.
- At the time of writing, wearing a mask outside is not essential but you might find it reassuring and it is perfectly acceptable to do so.
- Consider how you position your chair, your welcome table and your donations/entry fee bucket, so you can maintain your distance.
- **Template posters** are available to help you remind visitors about any guidance
- **Money** – avoid handling cash and ask for exact change only or donations dropped into a bucket. Funds can be left for 3 days before counting and processing. We have found this to be sufficient, although we are also exploring the possibility of online payments by phone.
- **Track & Trace** – at the time of writing, outdoor visits were not subject to Track & Trace requirements, however we will work out a system for this in 2021, should it be required. It can be as simple as filling in details on a paper sheet or we will explore other technical options such as a QR code that visitors can use to check in and out, which should provide minimal trouble for.

What about toilets?

- You are under no obligation to provide toilets and visitors know not to expect them. We will make this clear that toilets will not be available in our Visitor Guidance online.
- However, it does happen that someone might need access to toilet and may ask you – if you feel able to offer this, it's worth having a plan ready, such as hand sanitiser available, disinfectant etc.

What if I'm not sure whether or not to open next year?

This is entirely understandable and we can be very flexible to help you make a decision you're comfortable with.

The benefit of deciding to open now is that your opening will appear in the 2021 Guidebook which will help to promote your garden opening and help you to raise the most funds, but here are some alternative ideas:

Appearing in the Guidebook and Website

- If you'd like to be featured in the Guidebook but don't want to commit to a single date, you could consider opening 'By Arrangement' over a period of time (need to agree this by the Guidebook deadline). Then if you wanted to have a special open day, we can create a Pop-up opening for you and promote accordingly.

Appearing on the Website only

- If you want to wait and make a decision next year, your garden wouldn't be included in the Guidebook but we can add it to our website, and promote in PR and on Social Media. Visitor numbers are likely to be less than usual given the shorter notice.

Flexible ways of opening:

- **Pop-up opening** – specific date events, can be added to the website and promoted with relatively short notice.
- **By Arrangement** – can be added to the website and promoted; very flexible and you can arrange visiting times to suit you.
- **Private opening** – you might consider restricting this to your friends and family and have a mini-fundraiser event; this wouldn't appear on the website but we can help with arrangements.

What if we need to cancel?

In 2020, we were able to cancel all listings with immediate effect and then when we were able to do so, reinstate or change listings where gardens were able to re-open. Hopefully we won't need to do the same again, but our database and website enables us to do this if we need to. If you needed to cancel your opening, we can make people aware in the following ways:

- In the 2021 Guidebook, we will include a prominent notice asking people to always check on the website for the latest news and updates.
- If you need to cancel your opening, please get in touch with your DO immediately. Our website is very flexible and as soon as we have a notification about cancellation, we can update the listing as cancelled straightaway.
- We will promote the cancellation on our social media
- We can send you a cancellation poster for you to print out and display nearby in case any visitors arrive.

Remember, things change and we have detailed COVID guidance on our website which we will keep updated here: <https://scotlandsgardens.org/covid19-resources-for-garden-openings/>

If Garden Owners have other questions not addressed here, please let us know at Head Office and we will do our best to help.

Scotland's Gardens Scheme September 2020