

# City of Ottawa

## Residential Boulevard Gardening Guide

May 2025

### Introduction

The City of Ottawa allows property owners and tenants to plant and maintain a garden in the boulevard abutting their residential property. This activity may be done without a permit and without contacting the City, however, regulations in the [Use and Care of Roads By-law](#) (By-law No. 2003-498) and detailed in this guide must be followed.



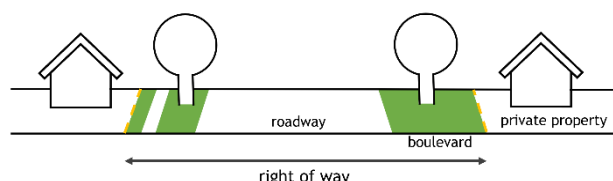
Boulevard gardens, especially those with native plants, offer many benefits, including:

- Building community awareness of and support for naturalization
- Attracting and supporting [pollinators](#) while increasing biodiversity
- Increasing drought and soil erosion resistance
- Reducing heat-island effects
- Reducing fertilizer and pesticide usage
- Improving on-site stormwater retention
- Conserving water
- Promoting [climate change resiliency](#)
- Fewer emissions produced from gasoline engines (mowing)
- Mental and physical health benefits

### Section 1: Before you begin

#### 1.1 Identify the boulevard and assess suitability

The boulevard varies in size across the city. In some areas the boulevard extends a considerable amount towards a residential property. In others, there may be a sidewalk, and the boulevard may be on one or both sides of the sidewalk up to the property line.



The City's [geoOttawa](#) program is helpful to determine the approximate location of your property line and the size of the boulevard.

The boulevard is a portion of the public right of way. It has many functions, not limited to space for trees, above and underground utilities and infrastructure, and snow storage.

In addition to the size of the boulevard, the amount and location of infrastructure, stormwater management, traffic and pedestrian volume all vary by neighbourhood and even by street. The street is a public space where you have little control over the way people and pets interact with your garden. A certain level of quality and contaminant control is lost when you garden in the boulevard. Visit Ottawa Public Health's [Gardening and Growing Food webpage](#) for ways contaminants impact gardens and plants.

Each resident must judge the suitability of their location, especially if considering growing food.

#### 1.2 Locate utilities before you dig

Only hand-digging is permitted within the boulevard. Utility locates, in accordance with Provincial law, must be obtained whenever any digging, by any means, occurs by contacting [Ontario OneCall](#).

## Section 2: Plan your garden



### 2.1 Decide what to plant

- You cannot plant a tree within the City-owned boulevard per the [Tree Protection By-law](#) (By-law 2020-340). Refer to the City's [Trees in Trust](#) program if you wish to have a tree planted by the City.
- **Do not plant any noxious weeds or invasive species.** [Appendix B](#) includes a list of plants that are not allowed, some of which may still be sold at local nurseries and garden centres.
- Prioritize Eastern Ontario [native plants](#). Gardening groups in Ottawa are an excellent resource when researching native plants that are suitable for the boulevard.
- Refer to [Section 4](#) to understand the risks before planting.
- Consider companion plants such as onions, leeks or strong-smelling herbs as a natural pest deterrent.
- Consider salt-tolerant plants if planting next to sidewalks and streets.
- Research the mature growing height of plants
  - No plants (including the raised garden bed or container height) are permitted to exceed a maximum height of 1.0 metre.
  - No plants (including the raised garden bed or container height) are permitted to exceed a maximum height of 0.75 metre within the corner lot visibility triangle.

- Plants cannot create a sightline or safety hazard. If you are unsure of the growth height of your selected plants, ensure they are planted closer to the property line in easy to reach locations where they can be appropriately maintained.
- Consider how you will water your garden. Note that food-producing plants typically demand more water and maintenance. You are not permitted to install an irrigation system in the boulevard and hoses can cause hazards for sidewalk users. If you are growing food, water plants using drinkable water. For other plants, use water that is known to be clean.

### 2.2 Turf grass alternatives

Abutting property owners may choose to replace the grass with a suitable groundcover. This can be done by overseeding and allowing the groundcover to naturally replace the grass, or grass can be removed by hand and groundcover planted in its place.

Suitable groundcovers for the boulevard are herbaceous (meaning soft-stemmed) plant species that grow to a mature height no more than 20 centimetres. Groundcovers cannot include any species listed in [Schedule "A"](#) of the *Use and Care of Roads By-law*, which are species prohibited in the right of way.

**Be cautious when researching suitable alternatives.** For example, commonly found groundcovers such as periwinkle may be invasive species in Ontario and would not be a permitted turf grass alternative in the boulevard.

Groundcover cannot interfere with the function of ditches, harm City trees or obstruct infrastructure such as fire hydrants and utilities. As with turf grass, if the groundcover is too tall or impacting these assets, the property owner or tenant is responsible for trimming it back.

### 2.3 Raised garden beds

- A raised garden bed is a straight-walled box or border that is uniform in construction
- May be made of wood or other suitable material for holding soil for vegetative plantings such as galvanized steel or

composite. It is recommended to use untreated wood, especially if growing food.

- Cannot be made of concrete, stone, rock, brick or pavers.
- Constructed to a maximum height of 45 cm.
- Must follow the location requirements outlined in [Appendix A](#).

## 2.4 Container gardening

- A container is a soil-separated vessel designed for the purpose of growing vegetative plantings (for example, old steel drums and tires are not suitable containers for use in a boulevard garden).
- Must be readily moveable (seasonal removal is required).
- Must follow the location requirements outlined in [Appendix A](#).

## 2.5 Plant supports

Plant support devices can be a useful tool for the healthy growth of plants and to prevent plants from spilling into unwanted areas. Temporary plant supports, such as a bean pole or tomato cage, are permitted in a boulevard garden if they are no larger than 1.0 metre in height and do not pose a safety hazard to pedestrians or animals. Large architectural trellises and arbors are not permitted in a boulevard garden.

## 2.6 Understand where gardening is not permitted

After determining the size of the boulevard abutting your property, locate any City trees, ditches and all at-grade and aboveground infrastructure such as a catch basin, water valve, fire hydrant, utility boxes and hydro poles to determine the required exclusion areas from those assets. Refer to [Appendix A](#) for a full list of garden, raised bed and container exclusion areas.

## Section 3: Understand your responsibilities

### 3.1 Garden maintenance

- Sidewalks and roadways must remain clear and unobstructed at all times.
- To help ensure gardens do not create safety issues such as sightline obstructions there are regulated height limits for boulevard gardens. Consider visibility and plant height restrictions when deciding what to plant in a boulevard garden.
- Raised garden beds and moveable containers must be kept in a state of good repair, without any projections or attachments that could create a safety hazard to pedestrians, animals or vehicular traffic.

### 3.2 Winter operations



- In the winter, the boulevard plays an important role in snow storage. Following heavy snowfalls, snowbanks may need to be removed, including on residential streets. Damage to boulevard gardens may occur due to [winter operations](#). The City is not liable for any damage caused to a boulevard garden.
- During the winter, salt and other abrasive materials (grit) are applied to sidewalks and streets, which can impact soil quality for plants close to these areas.
- All moveable containers must be removed from the boulevard as of November 15 each year. It is recommended that they not be placed back on the boulevard until April 15.

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### 3.3 Access requirements

The right of way, which includes the boulevard, is City-owned property and shared across multiple users. The right of way is subject to ongoing maintenance, utility and capital works, as well as other activities. Boulevard gardens, including any raised garden beds and moveable containers, must not encumber or impede anyone authorized to do work in the boulevard.

If you receive notice of planned work within the right of way that may impact your garden, please plan to remove and temporarily re-home plants in advance of the work taking place. Use the contact information provided to discuss with the utility company or City an option to re-instate the boulevard with topsoil only (no sod) for you to re-plant after work is complete. Garden removal and replanting must be done by yourself; utility companies or the City will not protect, repair, replace, or re-instate a resident's boulevard garden.

## Section 4: Understand the risks

### 4.1 Safe gardening in the right of way

- Keep sidewalks clear. Do not leave hoses or gardening tools in places that could create a tripping or falling hazard. Make sure plants do not obstruct sidewalks to prevent tripping and falling hazards.
- Be aware of your surroundings when gardening near roads. Garden during daylight hours, wear high visibility clothing and make sure children and pets are closely supervised if gardening near the roadway.
- Potted plants can be quite heavy. Use care when lifting or moving containers or gardening equipment.
- Chemical pesticides, rodenticides, herbicides and fertilizers can pose risks to human health and the environment. Consider [natural alternatives for weed and insect control](#).

- Homeowners and tenants that receive an annual letter from the City of Ottawa because their property may have contaminants of health concern in the soil should follow the suggested precautions to avoid unnecessary exposure.
- Additional tips for reducing risk of injury while gardening can be found on Ottawa Public Health's [Gardening and Growing Food webpage](#).

### 4.2 Considerations for growing food



#### *Related risks*

Some locations may not be appropriate for growing food you plan to eat. Given the proximity to the publicly travelled roadway or sidewalk, people and their pets may interact with a boulevard garden. This presents risks, including people picking and eating produce they have not been responsible for growing, gardens being disturbed by people exiting parked vehicles or by pets, urine and fecal contamination from pets or other animals, and neighbour disputes. Produce may attract animals, including rodents, birds and other garden pests which can increase the risk of fecal contamination and nuisances.

The City cannot guarantee the suitability of the boulevard for food production. Soil can sometimes be contaminated by pollutants such as germs, chemicals, or heavy metals. Soil can be contaminated from former land uses or by the introduction of new contaminants from vehicle-associated road run-off, salt used in winter operations or other sources. Soil and plants can also become contaminated by

airborne pollutants, or back-splash when it rains or when you water.

### *How to mitigate the risks*

Before deciding to plant, assess the location where you plan to grow food for any site characteristics that may impact the garden.

Only grow food in soil that is known to be clean and free of contaminants.

- If you plan to grow food directly in the existing soil, you should have the soil tested. Soil testing can be arranged through private analytical testing laboratories.
- If you don't know the soil quality and don't plan to have it tested, you should limit growing food to raised garden beds and/or containers filled with clean soil mix.

Raised garden beds constructed of wood should only be built using untreated lumber. Treated lumber and creosoted timber (e.g., railway ties) can contain contaminants that may leach into soil and groundwater and be taken up by plants. You should also place landscape fabric on the ground before you construct your raised garden bed. This will act as a barrier to stop clean soil mixing with the soil below and prevent plant roots from contacting the soil beneath the raised garden bed.

Containers can also be used to grow food. Containers must be constructed of a material that is appropriate for gardening and growing food (if applicable).

If you are growing food, water plants using drinkable water. For other plants, use water that is clean. Collected rainwater being used to water plants should be stored in a clean container and it should not be contaminated by roof materials, animal droppings, or other pollutants.



Consider what you plant.

- Choose plants that produce vegetable fruits (e.g., tomatoes, squash, beans) and berries as they take up less soil contaminants into their edible parts than do herbs, leafy vegetables or root vegetables.
- Root vegetables such as carrots and potatoes should not be grown in contaminated soil or soil of unknown quality. Avoid planting herbs or leafy vegetables as the edible part of these plants are in closer contact with soil contaminants.
- Leafy plants might be harder to rinse clean of dust and soil compared to other plants so they should be washed carefully.
- Cooking produce reduces the risk of pathogens, which are germs that can cause infections, but does not remove other contaminants, such as chemicals or heavy metals.

Do not consume any food grown in a garden unless you are confident it is safe to eat.

Harvest food promptly to not attract pests and wildlife. If you are concerned growing food in your garden will attract rats, refer to the [Ottawa Public Health Rat Control webpage](#).

## **Section 5: Liability and indemnity**

You may only install a residential garden within the boulevard directly abutting your own property. If you wish to do so in front of another residential property, you must obtain written consent provided by the abutting property owner. The abutting owner will remain responsible for maintenance, modification, or removal if required.

In accordance with the *Use and Care of Roads By-law* (By-law No. 2003-498), by installing a boulevard garden, you agree to indemnify and save harmless the City from any and all claims, demands, causes of action, loss, costs or damages that the City may suffer, incur or be liable for resulting from your installation or maintenance of the boulevard garden. You also agree that you shall have no claim for loss, costs, or damages caused or sustained against the City, its employees, agents or any person acting on its behalf, or any person authorized to

occupy or work within a Highway by reason of damage or removal of the boulevard garden.

Ensure you are familiar with the provisions of the [Use and Care of Roads By-law \(By-law No. 2003-498\)](#) prior to constructing your boulevard garden.

### **Section 6: Concerns and enforcement**

If you have a concern with a boulevard garden, consider discussing possible solutions with the gardener first. Most residents take great pride and care in their gardens and do not want to create frictions with neighbours.

If there is an operational or safety concern or the garden is causing drainage issues, contact 3-1-1. The City reserves the right to intervene and request modification or removal of a residential boulevard garden if there are issues present or the garden does not comply with the by-law regulations.

### **Section 7: Additional gardening resources**



Province of Ontario - [Restricted invasive species in Ontario](#) (with images)

Ontario Invasive Plant Council – [Grow Me Instead \(Southern Ontario\) Guide](#)

[Ottawa Public Health Gardening and Growing Food](#)

[Just Food gardening resources](#)

[Ottawa Horticultural Society gardening tips](#)



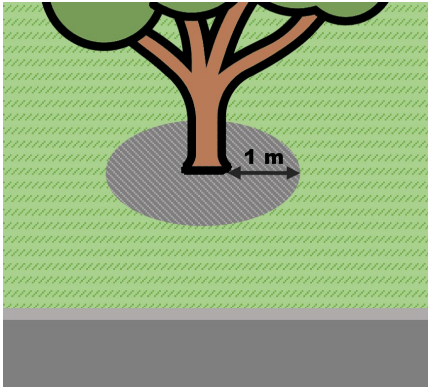
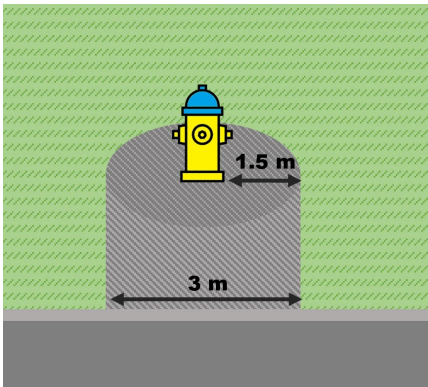
[Wild Pollinator Partners gardening resources](#)

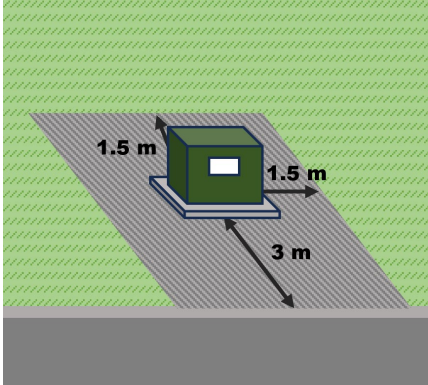
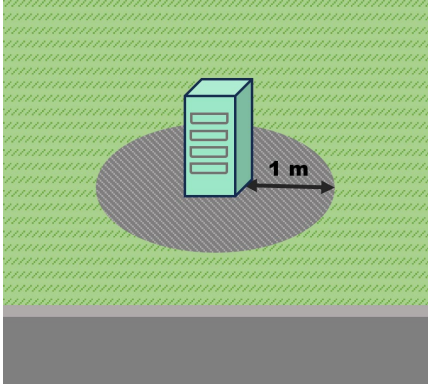
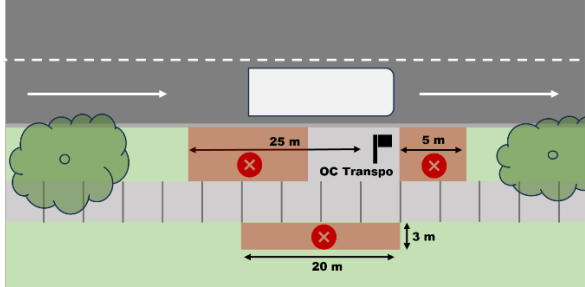
[Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton fact sheets](#)

## Appendix A: Gardening exclusion areas

No boulevard garden, **including a raised garden bed or moveable container**, is permitted within the areas outlined in Table 1. Only turf grass or permitted alternative groundcovers are allowed in these areas.

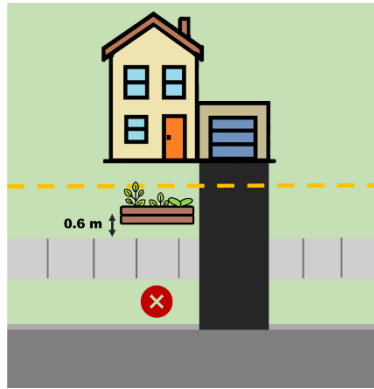
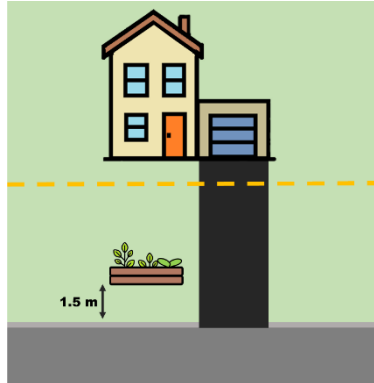
Table 1: Exclusion areas from items in the boulevard

Item	Not permitted within	Image
Ditch	Front or back slope or within the ditch	
Catch basin or manhole	1.5 metres	
Municipal tree	1.0 metre measured from the trunk	
Fire hydrant	1.5 metre radius of the hydrant as well as within a 3.0 metre corridor from the hydrant to the roadway	

Item	Not permitted within	Image
Hydro transformer box	1.5 metres at the back or sides and 3.0 metres from the front	
Other above ground or grade level infrastructure such as gas and telecommunication pedestals, City signage and Canada Post mailboxes	1.0 metre	
OC Transpo bus stop	25 metres of the ingress side of a bus stop flag or 5 metres from the edge of a concrete bus stop pad, whichever is further from the bus stop flag; and 5 metres of the egress side of a bus stop flag; and that area measuring 20 metres in length and 3 metres in width along the rear side of a bus stop, measured from the bus stop flag towards the ingress side of the stop	

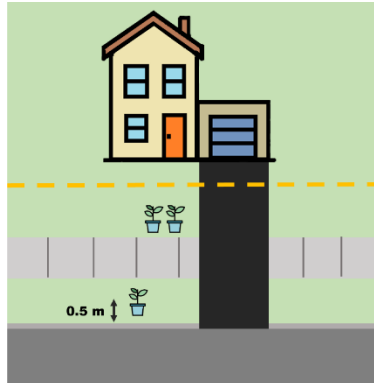
Raised garden beds must be setback from the sidewalk and roadway as outlined in Table 2.

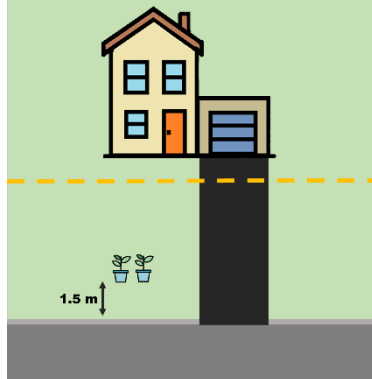
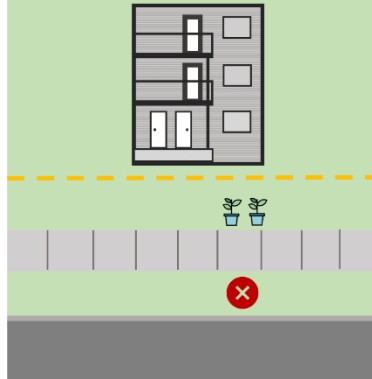
Table 2: Raised garden bed setbacks from the sidewalk and roadway

Boulevard type	Not permitted within	Image
With a sidewalk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the boulevard between the sidewalk and roadway</li> <li>0.6 metres from the sidewalk in the boulevard between the sidewalk and the property line</li> </ul>	
Without a sidewalk	1.5 metres from the roadway	

Moveable containers do not require a setback from the sidewalk; however, they cannot spill into the sidewalk or impede sidewalk users. Moveable containers must be setback from the roadway as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Moveable container setbacks from the roadway

Boulevard location	Not permitted within	Image
Road classified as local or collector with speed limit of 40 km/h or less	0.5 metres from the roadway	

Boulevard location	Not permitted within	Image
Road classified as a major collector or higher or on a road classified as local or collector where the speed limit is greater than 40 km/h	1.5 metres from the roadway when there is no sidewalk	
Road classified as a major collector or higher or on a road classified as local or collector where the speed limit is greater than 40 km/h	The boulevard between the sidewalk and the roadway	

## Appendix B

### Plants that are not allowed in the boulevard

[Schedule A](#) of the *Use and Care of Roads By-law* establishes a list of noxious weeds and invasive plants that are not allowed to be planted in the right of way. This includes many plants that may still be sold at local nurseries and garden centres.

The following plants are prohibited. Refer to the by-law schedule for the most current list.

#### Invasive ground covers:

- Creeping Jenny
- English Ivy
- Goutweed
- Lily of the Valley
- Periwinkle
- Spearmint
- Spurge (Cypress, Japanese, Leafy)
- Yellow Archangel

#### Invasive shrubs and grasses:

- Barberry (Common, Japanese)
- Buckthorn (European Glossy)
- Honeysuckle (Japanese, Ornamental)
- Jointed Goatgrass
- Miscanthus grass
- Multiflora roses
- Serrated Tussock
- Winged Burning Bush
- Wintercreeper
- Woolly Cupgrass

#### Other invasive plants and weeds:

- Coltsfoot
- Common Crupina
- Dame's Rocket
- Daylily aka Ditch Lily
- Dodder
- Dog-strangling Vine
- Garlic Mustard
- Giant Hogweed
- Knotweeds (Bohemian, Giant, Himalayan, Japanese)
- Knapweed
- Kudzu aka Japanese Arrowroot or Chinese Arrowroot
- Oriental Bittersweet
- Invasive Phragmites
- Poison-hemlock
- Poison-ivy
- Ragweed
- Smooth Bedstraw
- Thistles (Canada, Bull, Sow)
- Tansy Ragwort
- Wild Chervil
- Wild Parsnip