

Opportunity for Soil Safety Support from City of Philadelphia

Dear Philadelphia Gardener,

Do you want more information about the soil in your garden? Are you thinking about starting a community garden on a vacant lot, but you're not sure if the soil is safe? Here's an opportunity for soil safety support through the City of Philadelphia's Brownfields Assessment Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The City got this grant to support existing and new urban agriculture and green stormwater infrastructure projects. The agencies in charge of this grant are the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (PRA), Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR), Philadelphia Water (PWD), and the Office of Sustainability (OOS).

The information in this letter explains how this grant can support healthy and safe growing in your garden.

If you would like your garden or lot to be considered for soil safety support from this grant, [please fill out this simple online form](#). If you have questions, feel free to reach out to grant team member Elisa Ruse-Esposito, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation FarmPhilly Program Manager at elisa.ruse-esposito@phila.gov or 215-683-3605.

Brownfields are properties where expansion, redevelopment, or reuse is complicated by the presence or potential presence of hazardous substances, pollution, or contaminants. Many properties in cities are brownfields.

Urban agriculture means growing or producing food in a city.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) is a new way to catch rainwater. Rainwater normally collects on the sidewalk and runs into the gutter and sewer pipes. With GSI, rainwater falls into a barrel, on grass, or in gardens and slowly soaks back into the earth.

Brownfields Assessment Grant Information

Philadelphia's community gardens benefit gardeners and their communities in many ways, including providing healthy and affordable food. However, urban soils may have contaminants from years of human activity.

In October 2015, the EPA gave the City of Philadelphia a \$200,000 Brownfields Assessment Grant. The grant pays to have Phase I and Phase II environmental site assessments conducted by professionals. Environmental site assessments help find issues in the soil, water, and air. The assessments paid for by this grant will help the City find possible environmental issues, and come up with policies that support healthy growing in the city. The assessments will take place only on properties that the City owns.

Phase I Assessment– Site History and Soil Screening

Each site in the program will start with a Phase I assessment which looks into the site's past uses and owners. This research helps find the site's possible environmental issues. Phase I assessments will also include a soil screening for heavy metal contaminants in the soil, but they will not disturb garden work.

Professionals mostly use the internet and libraries to do a Phase I. They will visit the site to walk around and take soil samples for screening. Professionals will need to be able to get into the garden for the site visit. Looking at the land helps them see where there might be environmental issues. They might also want to talk to gardeners about the history of the site.

Gardeners will get the results of the heavy metal contaminant screening. The screening will help gardeners understand what contaminants might be in the soil. The grant team will also give gardeners information on what they can do to reduce their exposure any contaminants found.

Phase 2 Assessment – Soil Testing

If professionals find something in Phase I that they want to know more about, they will do a Phase II assessment to test the soil. Not all sites that get a Phase I assessment will need more tests. For a Phase II, professionals will need to be able to get into the garden to take more soil and/or water samples. They may need to drill or dig holes to do the assessment.

Professionals will collect soil samples from specific places in your garden. Digging tools can range from a small shovel to a truck. They will work with gardeners to avoid disturbing the ground and garden beds as much as possible, but you may need to adjust garden activities for the testing. The time it takes to do Phase II depends on what issues Phase I found.

What will the City do with Phase I and II assessment results?

The grant team will explain the results of the assessments to gardeners. They will also help figure out whether gardeners might be exposed to contaminants in the soil. There are many things gardeners can do to reduce their risk of exposure, like:

- Wearing gloves and washing hands
- Washing fruits and vegetables from the garden before eating them
- Growing in raised or mounded beds

Most gardens will be safe for gardening as long as gardeners do these things. The grant team will work with gardeners to make sure they understand and use safe practices.

This project wants to increase the number of Philadelphians safely growing food, and the City is committed to finding opportunities for every existing gardener to continue to grow. If testing finds issues, the grant team intends to apply for cleanup funds from the EPA.

Got questions? Let us know!

Thank you for considering this opportunity for your garden.