

Water for Your Garden

Gardeners in Philadelphia have four options for accessing water for plants:

1. **Private, existing water sources**
2. **New, dedicated water lines**
3. **Rain collection**
4. **Fire hydrant permits**



installing a significantly installing a new water line, call Veronica Tyson at the Philadelphia Water Department at 215-685-6197.

Private water sources (such as your hose or your neighbor's) are a low-cost way to water plants. However, gardens, especially those on vacant land, are not always near available private water sources.

New water lines that go directly to a garden vary in cost depending on factors such as location. The cost of new water line begins at \$1,000-\$2000 but can cost more (sometimes more than \$10,000). To find out more about

The Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) Office of Watersheds and the Energy Coordinating Agency partner to provide **free rain barrels** to Philadelphia residents. This is a great way to collect water for your garden. In order to receive a free rain barrel, you must attend a workshop (held throughout the city, throughout the year). Visit www.phillywatersheds.org/rain-barrel-notification-list to be notified by email about upcoming workshops, or call PWD at (215) 685-6213 or the Energy Coordinating Agency at (215) 988-0929 and ask about upcoming workshops and obtaining a rain barrel.

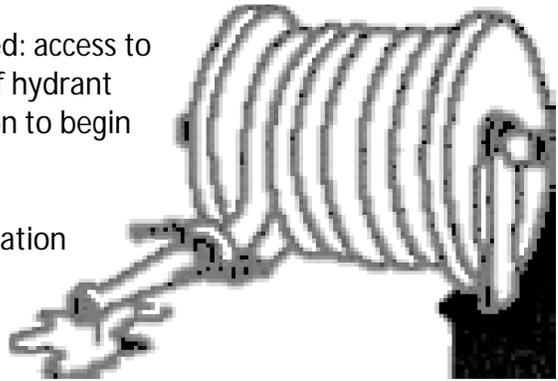
Philadelphia also provides **free water from city hydrants** to gardeners. To get access to a hydrant, gardeners need a permit (available to gardeners at no cost) and specified equipment. While water and the permit are free, the equipment can cost \$300 or more (and it must PWD requirements). The Garden Justice Legal Initiative has worked with PWD to create a step-by-step explanation the permit process. For more information, call George Stokes at PWD (215-685-6252).

Obtaining a Hydrant Permit – a Step-by-Step Guide

Step 1: Evaluate Garden, Hydrant, and Equipment Needs

To get PWD permission to use a hydrant, gardeners need: access to a nearby hydrant, a permit, and approved equipment. If hydrant water is your best option, here is some basic information to begin the permit process.

Locate the nearest hydrant and record this information in the **HYDRANT WORKSHEET**:



- Your Garden's Address
- Fire Hydrant Location
- Approximate distance between hydrant and garden (Note whether hydrant and garden are on the same side of the street).
 - *For safety reasons, PWD will not allow you to run a hose across a street.*
 - *If it is safe, PWD may give you a permit to carry water across the street in containers.*
- Estimate of how much water you will need
 - *Just make note of the size of your garden and take your best guess about how long it would take you to water it each day – it is okay to estimate.*
- Visually inspect the hydrant and note any defects.
 - *If there are any problems with the hydrant, e.g. if it is leaking or looks broken, you should always contact the hydrant desk (215-685-9641) as soon as possible to report malfunctions.*
- Examine the top of the hydrant and record the type of locking device.
 - *Hydrants are secured with a three-sided operating nut or a round operating nut (a three-sided nut uses a normal wrench, but it takes a special tool to open a round operating nut).*

EQUIPMENT

Before you can obtain a permit, you will need to have access to proper equipment to use the hydrant safely. There are two ways to get this equipment:

- Request a hydrant box from the city (limited availability) or
- Purchase the equipment (as a group or individual).

Obtaining Hydrant Boxes

PWD has an informal program that provides to a limited number of free, pre-approved boxes with all of the equipment necessary to use a hydrant for gardening. PWD delivers boxes at the beginning

of the growing season and collects them at the end. Due to increased demand, PWD does not have available boxes or funds to obtain additional boxes.

The best way to get a box is to check with PWD. Typically, gardeners who have hydrant boxes keep them from year-to-year. They do so by calling PWD in January to reserve their box. If a past user does not renew, the box becomes available on a first-come first-served basis. PWD maintains an informal waiting list for boxes each year. However, in the event that a box becomes available during the season, the city may also provide it to interested people on a first-come first-served basis.

Always check with PWD if there are any boxes available before purchasing equipment.

George Stokes (215-685-6252) is currently in charge of urban garden permits. If he is unavailable, you may call the PWD general number (215-685-6300).

Purchasing Equipment

If there are no hydrant boxes available you will need to purchase equipment. The list is below and the equipment is generally available from plumbing supply stores. PWD estimates that one complete set of supplies costs around \$350. The backflow preventer is the most costly piece of equipment required and you must purchase one approved by PWD. An approved backflow preventer typically costs between \$150 and \$450.

Step 2: Contact the Department

After evaluating your garden and hydrant, **call PWD**. Be prepared to provide a PWD staff person with some basic information about yourself (such as your name and contact information) and your garden.

- Explain that you would like to use a city hydrant for an urban garden and request approval for a no-cost garden hydrant permit.
- Provide the details about your garden collected in the worksheet.
- Confirm that you have the current equipment list.
- Confirm the hours and location of the office where you will need to bring the backflow preventer you will obtain to get it approved so you may receive a permit.



The Plumbing Unit in the Concourse level of the Municipal Services Building at 15th and Arch Streets.

PWD will send a message to the Licensing & Inspections Department pre-approving you for a no-cost permit.

Step 3: Obtain Equipment

After getting the equipment specifications from PWD, purchase your equipment. Purchase only the exact equipment approved by PWD. In some cases, secondhand equipment may be more affordable. If you plan on sharing equipment with someone who already has a permit instead of purchasing your own, call PWD and ask to have your name added to the existing permit.



You will need:

3/4" back flow preventer
Hydrant adaptor 3/4" X 4"
Standard Hydrant wrench
3/4" shut off valve

Some 3/4" X 4" nipples
3/4" garden hose
Pipe tape

It is always your responsibility to make sure equipment works properly. PWD recommends (but does not yet require) that a certified plumber test backflow preventers annually.

Step 4: Permit

After purchasing your equipment, you are ready to get your permit. Take your backflow preventer, photo identification, and your Hydrant Worksheet to the Licensing & Inspections Department.

- Present your device backflow preventer for inspection at the **Permit and Zoning desk in the Concourse level of the Municipal Services Building at 15th and Arch Streets.**
- Ask to apply for a permit for the **Temporary Use of a City Fire Hydrant.**
- Make sure to tell them that you already have approval from PWD for a no-cost permit! *An approved Urban Gardeners listing is supplied to the L&I Plumbing Unit at the start of each season and continuously updated through the year.*

Step 5: Permit Management & Responsible Operation

- Permits expire. Urban garden permits are normally issued for the duration of the growing season, six months, and require renewal each year.
- Always report any hydrant damage or malfunction immediately.
- Keep your Hydrant Worksheet and permit for later use.
- Protect the future of the hydrant program by following these directions from PWD



"Hydrant users must exercise judgment to ensure hydrant use does not create a hazardous condition that may compromise public safety. It shall be the responsibility of the user to ensure that the hydrant is functioning properly at the conclusion of the workday. When the permit expires, a post use inspection will be performed by PWD. The hydrant user shall be held responsible for a malfunctioning hydrant if PWD was not notified of any defects."

HYDRANT WORKSHEET	
Step 1: Evaluate Site	
Name (Gardener)	
Address of Garden	Street (name & number or block): _____ Zip Code: _____
Distance from hydrant to garden	Distance: _____ Feet. Are hydrant & garden on the same side of the street? ___ YES ___ NO
Estimated water usage (educated guesses are okay!)	___ Gallons or ___ Square Feet & ___ Minutes/Day of Water Usage
Are there visible hydrant problems/defects?	___ YES ___ NO <i>Call 215-685-9641 as soon as possible to report defects.</i>
What type of locking device is on the top of the hydrant:	___ 3-sided nut ___ Round nut
Step 2: Contact the Department	
Call George Stokes at PWD (215-685-6252) If he is no longer working on hydrant issues, call the main PWD number (215-685-6300) and find out who is handling hydrants.	___ Explain that you are a gardener seeking access to a hydrant, and ask if any hydrant boxes are available. ___ Share information from Step 1 about your garden and the hydrant. ___ Ask to be pre-approved for a no-cost permit from Licensing & Inspections. ___ Obtain an up-to-date equipment list.
Step 3: Obtain Equipment	
Obtain Equipment	___ 3/4" back flow preventer (<i>must be on PWD-approved list</i>) ___ Hydrant adaptor 3/4" X 4" ___ Standard Hydrant wrench ___ 3/4" shut off valve ___ Few 3/4" X 4" nipples ___ 3/4" garden hose ___ Pipe tape
Step 4: Obtain Your Permit	
Go to the L & I Plumbing Unit office to get your permit. Bring with you:	___ Backflow Preventer ___ Photo ID ___ This Worksheet (or garden information and notes)
Backflow Preventer Approved?	___ YES ___ NO (this is necessary for a permit)
Recordkeeping	Note your permit's <u>expiration date</u> ; and keep the permit (and this worksheet) in a safe place for future reference.
Step 5: Operate your hydrant responsibly and enjoy your garden!	