How to apply for a Community Garden Fire Hydrant Permit in the City of Chicago

This instructional document was put together by Advocates for Urban Agriculture, April 2019.

1. Go to the following website: [http://hup.buildinganewchicago.org/#/home](http://hup.buildinganewchicago.org/#/home)

2. Read the provided questions and answers, then click the blue ‘Apply Online’ button at the bottom of the page. Please note that as of April 2019, they have not been charging a fee for the hydrant permit.

3. The next page asks what kind of permit you are applying for. Select ‘Community Garden’ and click the green ‘Next’ button.
4. The Application Form page will ask general questions about your garden, contact information, projected dates for hydrant use, and the location of the hydrant that you plan to use.

5. The last question on this portion of the form asks if you’ll need a custodian cap removed. To find out, check your hydrant for something that looks like this:
Respond to the question appropriately. If you do have a custodian cap, the Department of Water Management will need to come out and remove it before you can hook up the hydrant to irrigate crops. Custodian caps are usually silver and have a ‘+’ on their top. There is a charge to remove them, in the past it has been $300, it may be up to $950 now.

6. The next portion of the application form asks about Backflow Device Information. In order to hook up a hose to a fire hydrant, you’ll need to attach a backflow device, also known as a vacuum breaker, to prevent water from your lines and hoses flowing back into the freshwater supply in the hydrant. They are used to prevent contamination. In most cases, you will need to use a 0.75 or ¾ in. size device. You will need to purchase this separately, it will not come with your hydrant cap and key.

This is what a backflow device looks like:

They can be purchased at the following stores or online (AUA does not endorse these stores):

Amazon.com, Home Depot, Menards or any hardware store that carries plumbing supplies.

7. Next, and most importantly, you’ll need to submit a document with letterhead for your organization. The Department of Water Management assumes that community gardens are coordinated by organized community groups who would therefore have a logo and letterhead for communications. This is what you would upload into the ‘Attachments.’ Once the upload is complete, click the green ‘Next’ button.
Here is an example letterhead:

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Company Name

Date
Street Address
City, ST ZIP Code

Dear Recipient:
The [blank garden] as part of [blank organization] requests a community garden fire hydrant permit to irrigate our crops this season. The closest fire hydrant is located at [approximate cross streets of hydrant location].

Sincerely,

Your Name
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8. Once you’ve filled out and submitted your information, read the final page and click the green ‘Submit Application’ button.
9. A page that looks like the following should appear once the application is submitted. It states that you should receive an e-mail within an hour that confirms that your application has been submitted. You should find out if your application has been approved or not within a week.

10. If your application is approved and you do not already have a hydrant cap with a 3/4in hole for an adapter to a backflow device and hose, and a hydrant key to open up the water flow, you’ll need to purchase them at a local hardware or plumbing supply store. The DWM is no longer giving them out. You will need a 4.5in. cap with a 3/4in hole to attach an extension. This will then be followed by a backflow preventer, featured previously, and your hose. For more information on purchasing, check out our Fire Hydrant Caps and Keys List.

It should look something like this:
The key will likely look like this:

If you cannot find a key like this, a pipe wrench can also be used, though it is not recommended. Please know that if you do have a hydrant cap and key from previous seasons, you will still need to apply for a Community Garden Hydrant Permit every year.

11. Print out a copy of the fire hydrant permit once you receive it in your e-mail inbox of the address listed on the application. It is recommended to laminate it and keep it on-site of your garden in the case that a Department of Water Management plumbing inspector stops by. They will likely request to see it.

If you have any issues, please e-mail viviana@auachicago.org or call/text 708.629.1425