

Seattle Permits

— part of a multi-departmental City of Seattle series on getting a permit

Gardening in Planting Strips

Last Revised 5/07/09

Many Seattle residents are interested in planting vegetables and other edible foods in the planting strip immediately abutting their properties. Plants in planting strips vary greatly in their potential to provide optimum pedestrian and environmental benefits. SDOT encourages the installation of low (24-32 inches) shrubs, perennial or groundcover plantings that provide a superior degree of separation between the sidewalk and street at reduced maintenance costs. Under some conditions, a combination of the plantings and grass or plantings and pavers may be appropriate depending on the street classification and need to accommodate parking in the curb lane and allow appropriate sight clearances.

Can I plant food in my planting strip?

Yes. SDOT allows the growing of food in planting strips as long as setback and height guidelines are met. Please note that SDOT prohibits certain trees, including fruiting cherry, apple, and pear species that can pose a safety risk to pedestrians when fruit falls on the walkway.

Do I need a permit to plant in the planting strip in front of my house?

No, a Street Use permit is not required for gardening activities in the planting strip. However, a Street Use permit is required when planting a tree or installing hardscape elements, like raised planting boxes or pavers, in the planting strip. Street Use permits for these activities are **FREE**.

How do I apply for a Street Use permit?

You can apply for a Street Use permit online at:

http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/stuse/permits_online.htm

You may also apply in person on the 23rd floor of the Seattle Municipal Building at 700 5th Avenue.

Be advised that when you submit your Street Use application, you are agreeing that you have followed all the setback and height requirements for your proposed installation in the planting strip.

What are the setback and height requirements for installations in the planting strip?

Maintaining appropriate clear distances between certain elements in the right-of-way and on private property is necessary for a variety of reasons. Safety is a key consideration—for the traveling public, the property owner and for operations and maintenance crews who must access elements in the right-of-way for routine maintenance or repair. Appropriate clearances also enable the proper growth and development of trees and landscaping, and help protect and maintain both overhead and underground utilities.

The Seattle Right-of-Way Improvements Manual (ROWIM) provides information on the required clearances for planting strip treatments. The ROWIM can be found online at:

<http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/rowmanual/>

Planting height:

- Intersections. Plantings in planting strips shall be maintained to not exceed two

www.seattle.gov/transportation



feet (2') in height within thirty feet (30') of the intersection.

- Driveways. Plantings in planting strips within ten feet (10') of driveways shall be clear of sight obstructions between thirty-two inches (32") and eighty-two inches (82") in height from the ground.

Setbacks:

- Curb face. Closest part of any fixed object- three feet (3').
- Edge of sidewalk. Closest part of any fixed object- one foot (1').
- Utility pole/fire hydrant. Closest part of any fixed object-five feet (5').

Raised Planting Boxes:

- Size: Recommend six inches (6") to eighteen inches (18") in height, no more than forty feet (40') in length; and constructed to provide a minimum of three feet (3') unimpeded clearance at each end to provide pedestrian access between the sidewalk and curbside vehicles, in addition to applicable setbacks.
- Restrictions. Raised planting boxes may not be installed in planting strips less than three feet (3') in width.
- Planting heights in raised planting boxes shall be measured from the surrounding ground level rather than the ground level within the planting boxes.
- Planting boxes should not be made with creosote coated timbers. SDOT discourages other types of treated lumber for use as planting boxes.

What happens in the winter when my food is not growing?

The Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 10.52.030 requires the adjacent property owner or tenant to maintain the vegetation that impacts the sidewalk and planting strip area immediately adjacent to their property. You are also responsible for not allowing material to run-off into the storm drainage system or sidewalk area. For this reason, a

cover crop should be planted for the winter months to hold the soil in place.

What kinds of food can I plant in my planting strip?

SDOT does not regulate the type of vegetables that can be planted. However, the planting strip must be wide enough to allow enough room for the following:

- Vehicle clearance. There should be enough room for easy access from car doors.
- Pedestrian travel. There should be a 1' setback from the sidewalk to allow for pedestrian travel.
- Utility clearance. There should be enough room for setback and access to utility poles, vaults, meters and other utility installations.
- Visibility. Plantings should be low enough to allow for clear visibility from the street; generally, plantings must be below 3' to allow for visibility.
- Hardscaping. Pavers shall not exceed 40% of planting strip area.

All planting or installations must be in compliance with the applicable regulations of the Seattle Municipal Code and ROWIM.

What if I wanted to create a P-Patch in my neighborhood?

The Department of Neighborhoods manages the City's P-Patch program. Please refer to their website for information: <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch/>

Is the food I grow in the planting strip safe to eat?

It is important to wash all produce before consuming. Please note that the City of Seattle and SDOT are not responsible for the quality of food that is produced. Also, if you have any concerns about the quality of the soil, you may want to have your soil tested prior to planting edible foods.