Sunflower Award

Competition Guidelines & Tips

How to Participate

- **Form Your Team**: Every family team needs a primary gardener under the age of 18 and have at least one adult as a team member.
- **Pick Your Style**: Get creative! Choose any garden type that fits your space:
  - In-ground, Containers or Raised Beds
  - Vegetable or Flower Gardens, Pollinator-friendly or whimsical Fairy Gardens
- **Document the Magic**: Take photos and keep a journal of your progress through these stages.
  a. Preparing your soil: Describe the initial planting.
  b. Early Growth: When did those first sprouts settle in?
  c. Mid-Summer: Capture growth and pictures of family in action!
  d. Final Results: Harvest and note what you have learned.
- **Complete the Nomination Application**: This can be done online or handed in the paper copy included in this packect to the BRC front desk. The application requirements include:
  - a short essay
  - the four photos of your garden's progress this season.

Important Dates

Application Deadline

Friday
August 7, 2026

Winners Announced

Friday
August 21, 2026

Prizes!

A total of five Sunflower Awards will be given for various categories. The prize packages will include;

- Winner Yard Sign
- Gift basket of gardening supplies
- Gift certificate for the 2027 UAL plant sale
- Recognition in a park district newsletter

5 Step Guide for “Dirt” to “Delicious”

Step 1: Pick Your "Secret Spot"
Plants need the right environment to be happy.

- The Sun Test: Find a spot that gets at least 6 hours of direct sunlight.
- The Water Test: Make sure your spot is close to a hose or a sink.
- The Space: If you don't have a yard, grab a large pot or a bucket (ask an adult to help you poke drainage holes).

Step 2: Prep the Bed
Plants "eat" through their roots, so they need healthy soil.

- Clear the Area: Remove any rocks, weeds, or old grass.
- Mix in the Good Stuff: Buy a bag of "Compost" or "Potting Mix" and mix it into your dirt.
- The Finger Test: The soil should be fluffy and moist, not hard like a brick or soupy like mud.

Step 3: Choose Your "Easy-Win" Plants
If you’re a beginner, start with plants that grow fast and are hard to kill.

- From Seed: Sunflowers, Zinnias, Radishes, and Snap Peas.
- From Seedlings (Small Plants): Cherry Tomatoes, Strawberries, and Mint.

Step 4: The Big Plant

- Read the Label: The seed packet or plant tag will tell you how deep to plant.
- Don't crowd your plants! They need space for their leaves to breath and roots to stretch.
- Water them immediately after planting to help them settle into their new home.

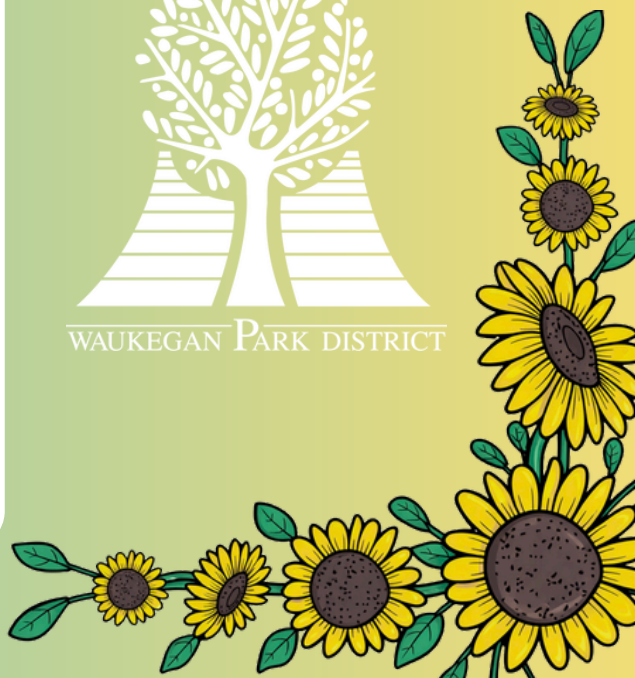
Step 5: The "Daily Check-In"
You don't need to spend hours in the garden, just 5 minutes a day.

1. Check Moisture: Stick your finger an inch into the dirt. If it feels dry, give it a drink.
2. Pull the Party Crashers: If you see a tiny green plant that you didn't plant (a weed), pull it out! They steal the "food" from your plants.

Youth Gardening Starter Kit

- Lightweight garden gloves (protects hands from thorns and bugs)
- Hand trowel (for digging small holes and planting)
- Hand rake or cultivator (to loosen soil and remove weeds)
- Watering can with a "shower" nozzle (gentler on young sprouts)
- Kneeling pad or old towel (to keep knees clean and comfortable)
- Garden labels or popsicle sticks (to mark what was planted)
- Sun hat and sunscreen (garden safety essentials!)

WAUKEGAN PARK DISTRICT



Scoring Card

Criteria	Exemplary (21-25 pts)	Proficient (11-20 pts)	Developing (6-10 pts)	Beginning (0-5 pts)
Kid-Led Family Collaboration (25%)	Photos and essay clearly show the youth making key decisions. Adults are seen in a supportive/coach-ing role. High level of teamwork evident.	Youth is actively involved in most tasks. Adult help is balanced. Essay reflects a shared family effort.	Adults appear to be doing the majority of the work. Youth involvement seems limited or secondary in documentation.	Little evidence of collaboration. Garden appears to be managed entirely by adults or the youth worked entirely alone without "coaching."
Garden Layout & Health (25%)	Garden is highly organized with healthy, thriving plants. Creative use of space (vertical, containers, or patterns) is documented in photos.	Garden is well-maintained and plants are generally healthy. Layout is logical and provides enough space for plants to grow.	Some plants are struggling or overcrowded. The layout is somewhat disorganized or difficult to navigate in photos.	Garden is overgrown, poorly maintained, or plants are failing. No clear plan or layout is evident.
Environmental Care (25%)	Document 3+ sustainable practices (e.g., composting, rain barrels, native plants, organic pest control, or upcycled containers).	Document 2 sustainable practices. Evidence of basic environmental awareness (e.g., hand-weeding instead of chemicals).	Minimal evidence of environmental care. Basic gard en maintenance is performed but sustainability is not a focus.	No evidence of environmental care or sustainability. Use of harsh chemicals or wasteful practices is noted.
The "Story" (25%)	Essay is detailed, reflecting on specific challenges, "aha!" moments, and what was learned. Narrative is engaging and heart-felt.	Essay provides a clear timeline of the garden's progress. Includes some reflection on what went well and what was difficult.	Essay is mostly a list of tasks completed. Very little reflection on the experience or the growth process.	Essay is incomplete or missing. Photos are provided without context or explanation of the journey.