

Garden Suites

A garden suite — sometimes called a granny flat — is a self-contained dwelling without a basement. It is installed in the rear or side yard of a lot with an existing, permanent, single-family house.

Usually, a garden suite has a kitchen, living area, one or two bedrooms, bathroom and storage space (see Figure 1). Your municipality may have planning or zoning regulations governing garden suites. These regulations can set restrictions, such as distance from the permanent house, parking requirements, how long a garden suite can stay on a lot and the appearance of the garden suite.

WHO LIVES IN A GARDEN SUITE?

Garden suites are usually intended for individuals or couples over the age of 65 who can live independently, or for people with disabilities. The people living in the permanent dwelling, or the “principle dwelling” — can provide the care and support to those living in the garden suite. The owners of the principle dwelling: are usually the children, grandchildren or other close relatives of the garden suite occupants. Once the people designated to live in the garden suite move out, it may be possible

to apply to the municipality for another family member meeting the criteria to move in.

THE BENEFITS

Garden suites provide affordable housing. They can be barrier-free and should be easy to maintain. Garden suites are an affordable housing option for family members requiring some level of care, but who also want to maintain independence. Where municipalities allow garden suites to be rented, they can provide income for the owner of the principle dwelling, and an affordable housing option for the community. Garden suites:

- allow the family members to provide support, companionship and security to the occupants of the garden suite while giving both households continued independence and privacy
- provide a healthy and supportive environment that may enable occupants to continue to live independently longer. Can be an affordable solution for taking care of aging family members



Figure 1 Floor plan of a garden suite

- may reduce demands on community services when the host family can provide support
- often do not alter neighbourhood character, as they are temporary

OWNERSHIP

In Canada, typically, garden suites are owned and installed by the owner of the permanent home on the property where the suite is located. Some municipalities require the occupants of one of the two dwellings to be the owner of the property, some expressly prohibit the rental or lease of the property, and some require the occupant of the Garden Suite to be a relative or a caregiver of the host family.

MUNICIPAL PERMITS

Municipalities regulate the use and location of Garden Suites, typically through their zoning by-law. The zoning by-law stipulates if and where Garden Suites are allowed and the terms and conditions for their occupancy, such as how long the suite may be permitted on a property, who can occupy the unit, the minimum or maximum size of the suite, servicing parking and design. In some cases, municipalities require a temporary use permit or an agreement between the owner of the principal dwelling and the municipality which outlines the terms and conditions for allowing the Garden Suite. This agreement may include location of the garden suite; servicing; access; parking;

eligibility of the occupants; design compatibility of the garden suite and host family dwelling; maintenance and repair obligations; removal of the garden suite; restoration of the property; and monitoring of use and occupancy of the garden suite.

INSTALLATION

Garden suites are temporary structures with no basement. They can be constructed on site, assembled from modular components or be entirely prefabricated. Water, sewer (septic) and utilities are typically connected to the principal residence services.

They can easily be installed on large rural or urban lots with enough space to build or assemble the unit or manoeuvre it into. In cities, manoeuvring is easiest in corner lots or lots next to rear laneways. In mid-block, or where yards are too small to bring in a garden suite in whole or in sections, a crane can lift

the garden suite onto the property. Crane rental and insurance costs can be substantial.

COMPLYING WITH CODES AND STANDARDS

Garden suites must meet National Building Code of Canada requirements under the certification provisions of Canadian Standards Association (CSA) documents **CAN/CSA-A277-08 (R2013)** for modular housing or panelized component housing, and **CAN/CSA-Z240 MH SERIES-09 (R2014)** National Standard of Canada for mobile homes. These are consistent with provincial building codes.

PORTABILITY

It is possible to construct garden suites in place using conventional construction methods. Portable, factory-built garden suites are easier



Figure 2 Garden suite

to install, remove and relocate than built-in-place suites. Several companies in Canada manufacture one or more of the following types of housing that can be used for garden suites.

Modular Housing

This type of housing is delivered on a flatbed truck as completed modules or boxes. Each module contains the roof, exterior walls with all insulation, plumbing and electrical work installed, as well as finished interior walls, floor coverings, cabinetry, mouldings and electrical and plumbing fixtures. Two or more modules can be joined at the construction site to form a completed house. A garden suite would typically not exceed two modules.

Panelized Component Housing

This housing is constructed from a series of factory-produced wall, floor and roof panels. The panels may be “closed” with insulation, wiring, vapour barrier, interior gypsum board and exterior sheathing installed at the factory. Panels may also be “open,” consisting only of the framing lumber or “closed one side,” consisting of exterior sheathing applied to the framing members as the panel leaves the factory. The “open” and “closed one side” panels are finished on site. Panelized component housing is easier to install on mid-block sites with restricted access to the rear of the property.

For contact information for builders of garden suites or advice about municipal regulations, contact:

Canadian Manufactured Housing Institute: www.cmhi.ca/contact-us

For more information about manufactured home companies across Canada, consult your telephone directory or visit these websites:

The Canadian Manufactured Housing Institute

www.cmhi.ca

Manufactured Housing Association of Atlantic Canada

www.mhaac.ca

Manufactured Housing Association of British Columbia

www.mhabc.com

Modular Manufactured Housing Association of Alberta and Saskatchewan

www.mhaprairies.ca

Société québécoise des manufacturiers d'habitation

French only www.sqmh.ca

COSTS

A number of factors affect the capital cost, installation costs and operating costs of garden suites. They include:

- type, size and design of the suite;
- distance from the manufacturing plant to the installation site;
- type of foundations, skirting and landscaping;

- municipal connection to water and wastewater or hook-up to well and septic system;
- municipal permit fees, levies, onetime development charges or licence;
- municipal property tax;
- removal and restoration costs;
- if rented or leased, monthly fee and end-of-lease refurbishment charge.

ADJACENT PROPERTY VALUES

Neighbours are sometimes concerned that a garden suite might devalue their property. Studies assessing garden suites show that they do not reduce the value of nearby properties. Interviews with neighbours show that garden suites do not interfere with their use and enjoyment of their property.

MUNICIPAL TAXATION OF GARDEN SUITES

Most municipalities regard garden suites as property improvements, which increases the assessed value of the property — and property taxes — as long as the suite is in place. Some municipalities consider garden suites as chattel, since they are temporary. If so, the assessed value of the property is not affected. Instead, the unit is licensed and the municipality levies a licence fee.

SUMMARY

Garden suites are self-contained dwelling units for seniors, dependants or people with disabilities. Upon approved zoning, and a building permit, a garden suite can be rented, leased or purchased, and installed in the rear or side yard of the lot of an existing single-family house.

Occupants of the garden suite and the existing single-family house can benefit both financially and socially.

Depending on your situation and municipality, you may qualify for financial assistance to acquire a new garden suite or retrofit an existing one.

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Product No. 65544

Other Related Publications

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Product No. 60967

Maintaining Seniors' Independence Through Home Adaptations: A Self-Assessment Guide

Product No. 61087



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