



UpstreamPgh Volunteer Workdays Frequently Asked Questions

What are the physical requirements for volunteer workdays?

Most importantly, volunteers are never expected to do any activities that make them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. In terms of physical capabilities, volunteers should expect to do a small amount of walking to and from our work sites when in Frick Park. Volunteers should also be comfortable bending down for digging, planting, and pulling weeds. Collecting litter with a trash grabber permits less bending, but can strain your hands or wrists. Volunteers do not need to carry heavy items, though it is useful if you can. For specific questions about accessibility and volunteering, please reach out to Erica Jackson erica@upstreampgh.org or Keith Moore keith@upstreampgh.org.

Where does UpstreamPgh conduct volunteer workdays?

UpstreamPgh conducts volunteer workdays throughout the **Nine Mile Run Watershed** and surrounding areas. This includes **Frick Park** - usually along Nine Mile Run or in Fern Hollow Valley, and **UpstreamPgh's rain gardens**- mostly in Wilksburg, also in Edgewood, Homewood, and East Hills. Occasionally volunteer workdays are held at **UpstreamPgh's office** or nearby.

What should I wear to a volunteer workday?

Volunteer workdays are almost always held entirely outside, so take a good look at the weather before you leave for the event!

- **Winter:** multiple layers are important, you'll want to maintain warmth while being able to cool down during hard work. Avoid cotton if possible, since it will not retain body heat if it becomes wet. Wool or synthetic layers are recommended. Waterproof boots are recommended in snow or mud, but not required. You'll probably want to wear long pants.
- **Spring/Fall:** temperatures are extra variable during these seasons, so layers are recommended. Some days may feel cool but quickly heat up when conducting physical labor. We recommend pants to prevent exposure to ticks and thorns, but they are not required. We also recommend waterproof boots if you have them, especially for Frick Park workdays which are often held in muddy areas along the stream



- **Summer:** high temperatures combined with humidity in summer pose a significant heat risk while volunteering. We recommend loose fitting, thin fabric, long sleeves and pants to protect yourself from ticks, thorns, and poison ivy, especially during workdays held in Frick Park. However many people opt for t-shirts and shorts to accommodate the heat. Sunhats are also highly recommended.

What happens during a typical volunteer workday?

Frick Park Volunteer Workdays: **1)** UpstreamPgh staff meet volunteers in the parking lot at our truck, typically at the Lower Frick Park Play Area Parking Lot or the Biddle Parking Lot off of S Braddock Ave. Volunteers sign in and tools and materials are distributed. **2)** Next staff lead volunteers to the predetermined work space within the park and give instructions for that day's work. We often remove invasive plants, plant native plants, and pick up trash. **3)** UpstreamPgh staff lead volunteers back to the parking lot to return tools and other materials before parting ways.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure (rain gardens) Volunteer Workdays: **1)** Volunteers will meet at the rain garden and sign in with staff. Tools and materials will be distributed. **2)** UpstreamPgh staff will give instructions on tasks for the site and work will commence, which usually involves removing invasive species, planting native plants, and picking up trash. **3)** Volunteers will return all tools and materials to UpstreamPgh staff before dismissing.

What skills do I need before volunteering with UpstreamPgh?

Volunteer workdays **do not require any type of previous environmental knowledge or gardening skills.** All instructions are given during events and volunteers are encouraged to ask questions about any uncertainties! Volunteers wishing to become Urban EcoStewards will receive training as needed from the Ecosystems Program Coordinator.

What should I bring with me to a volunteer workday?

Most importantly, **a water bottle!** No matter the time of year, it is always important to drink fluids during physical activity.

Items UpstreamPgh will bring along:

- Gardening gloves and/or nitrile gloves
- All gardening tools, equipment, and plant supplies
- Water & snacks
- First aid kit
- Sunscreen



- Bug spray
- Hand sanitizer
- Tecnu (poison ivy wipes)

Optional personal items you may want to bring:

- Sunscreen
- bug spray/tick repellent
- personal fan
- portable battery charger
- change of socks/shoes
- change of clothes

Additional personal items may include:

- Gardening gloves
- Hand trowel/shovel
- Knee pads

What hazards might I encounter while volunteering?

While we strive to make volunteering an enjoyable experience, along the way, you may encounter some potentially harmful situations.

- Plants
 - UpstreamPgh staff will point out any harmful plants before our event begins, some examples include: Poison ivy - can cause bad rash for weeks when plant oil comes in contact with the skin, stinging nettle - can cause pain and/or numbness for a few days when trichomes enter the skin, Poison Hemlock - deadly if ingested, sap can cause skin irritation, Locust/ Hawthorn/ Thistles/ Roses/ Raspberries - all have thorns/spikes that can be quite painful
- Insects
 - Ticks - can spread Lyme Disease
 - Honeybees - painful sting, can be very serious for some
 - Native bees - can bite, but not very painful
 - Wasps/hornets - painful stings, can sting multiple times
 - Mosquitoes - itchy bites, can spread some diseases
- Animals
 - Snakes - Common snakes in Frick Park include the gray ratsnake, garter snakes, and watersnakes, which are all non-venomous
 - Deer - deer are generally friendly, but can be aggressive during mating season in the Fall or in Spring when babies are being raised, keep a safe distance to avoid scaring them



- Land and Stream
 - Steep slopes - workdays are typically held on flat areas in the park, but some locations may include steep hillsides or steep streambanks, volunteers should be extra conscientious here
 - Streamside - in addition to steep streambanks, rocks or boulders are often slippery, especially when wet.
 - In the stream - the streambed is composed of rocks, boulders, and sediment meaning it is quite uneven, when moving through the stream walk slowly and check your step before shifting your weight, sudden drops and sticky mud are common
 - Water quality: Nine Mile Run is impacted by sewage and polluted stormwater runoff, and generally does not meet water quality standards for safe recreation. The water quality is worse during and after rainfall. During workdays that involve work in the stream, it is important to minimize your contact with the water. Protect yourself by wearing waterproof shoes or waders and gloves, avoiding touching your face, covering any open cuts or wounds, and washing thoroughly after work in or near the stream.
- Trash
 - Sharp objects like broken glass, any metal, and even some plastic should be carefully handled in order to avoid injury, staff will typically have designated buckets for sharp objects

Will I have access to bathrooms?

UpstreamPgh events typically have limited bathroom access. Volunteers in Frick Park do have access to porta-johns at the parking lot. *However volunteers at the rain gardens do not have any bathrooms available.* Events at our office do have access to multiple bathrooms.

Is there a time requirement?

UpstreamPgh does not require any time commitment for our volunteers. Whether you only come to one workday a year or steward your own plot in Frick Park every week, we appreciate all the work our volunteers put in. While there's no time requirement, we do offer "end of year rewards" for every 10 hours of volunteering. Expect items like UpstreamPgh merchandise, gardening tools, and appreciation events!