

Guidelines for Food Safety in Schoolyard Gardening

Kansas City Community Gardens Schoolyard Gardens Program's mission is to support schools in growing their own vegetable gardens that increase students' access to healthy food, hands-on learning, and community building. We do this by providing new garden site consultations, low-cost plants and seeds for schools, free workshops and training for teachers, and other resources as needed.

Food grown in your schoolyard garden can be a great asset to classroom snacks and cafeteria meals. As with any food source though, it is important to follow food safety guidelines to protect the safety of anyone consuming food from the garden. By following the guidelines listed in this document, you can ensure hygienic growing practices, the safe handling of produce and ultimately reduce risks of contamination.

Working in and Maintaining the Garden:

- Water Source:
 - Best Option: Only use a potable (drinkable) water source from an approved public water system to water garden plants.
 - Acceptable Option: If the garden is already using an untreated water source such as rain barrel or cistern, be sure to have the water tested at least once a year to ensure it meets the EPA standards for safety. Maintain all records of this testing.
 - K-State Extension Microbial Water Testing Information - <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/foodsafety/produce/testing.html>
- Compost: Wear gloves when handling compost.
 - Best Option: Obtain ready-made compost from reputable sources such as Lawn-Corp: <http://www.lawncorps.com/>. Contact your SYG coordinator for more information on obtaining compost for your school garden.
 - Acceptable Option: To be safe for gardening, material composted on-site must reach a temperature of at least 131°F for at least 3 consecutive days to kill pathogens. Check the temperature with a large compost thermometer. Do not compost animal waste, meat scraps, or dairy products.
 - For more information, please request the SYG Compost Manual from your SYG coordinator.
- Communicate with school grounds crew and/or maintenance staff to ensure safe practices on the school grounds near the garden.
- Do not use pesticides or herbicides in or around garden.
- Keep cats, dogs, and other pets out of the garden as animal waste can be a source of bacteria, parasites, and viruses.
- Do not feed wild animals or birds near your garden.
- Do not allow anyone to work in the garden while sick.

Harvesting Garden Produce:

- Always wash your hands before harvesting fresh produce.
- Plan ahead and make harvesting the first task you do in the garden before other activities involving weeding, watering, maintaining, etc.
- Pick up and remove rotting produce. Any animal feces present should be discarded by an adult. The produce immediately around the feces should also be discarded. Immediately wash hands to avoid contamination of other produce.
- All tools (scissors, knives, etc.) used for harvesting must be cleaned with water and soap and sanitized before each use.
- Shake or rub off all excess garden soil or debris on produce while in the garden.
- Use clean and sanitized, food-grade containers for transporting harvested produce. These are made from materials designed specifically to safely hold food. Do not use garbage bags or any reused bag.

- Best Options: Food grade plastic bucket or container, food grade re-sealable bags in gallon or quart size, produce bags
- Acceptable Option: Clean, new grocery bag

Preparing & Serving Fresh Garden Produce:

- Always wash hands before and after handling fresh produce.
- Always follow safe food handling practices and check with foodservice staff for specific instructions regarding kitchen and food use.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under cool, running, potable water before eating, cutting, peeling, or cooking.
- Do not submerge produce in water that is more than 10 degrees cooler than the temperature of the produce. Contaminants can absorb through porous tissues (e.g. stem scars of produce) when large variations in temperature occur.
- Never use soap, detergent, or bleach solution to wash produce.
- Avoid cross contamination when preparing produce. Cross-contamination occurs when a clean work surface, such as cutting boards and utensils or uncontaminated food, is contaminated by unclean surfaces, utensils, hands or food.
- If you have leftover produce that has been cut, sliced, or cooked, store it in clean airtight containers in the refrigerator. Use within two days.
- If the harvest from the school garden will be used in the school meals program, the garden coordinator should work cooperatively with the school nutrition director to plan the use of garden produce. Plan ahead to coordinate!

Storing Garden Produce:

- Plan ahead to harvest right before use or going home to eliminate the need for storage.
- Communicate with school foodservice staff to ensure storage facilities are accessible if necessary.
- If you plan to store produce for use on a different date than harvest, don't wash it before storing.
 - Best Option: Store unwashed produce in clean, food grade plastic bags or containers. Be sure to label the container in a way that makes it clear that the produce must be washed prior to use.
 - Acceptable Option: Store unwashed produce in clean plastic containers or bags.
- If you choose to wash produce before storing, be sure to dry them thoroughly with a clean paper towel. (NEVER wash berries until you are ready to eat them).
- Fresh fruits and vegetables needing refrigeration must be stored between 35- 40°F.
- Refrigerate all cut or peeled produce in airtight containers.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables stored at room temperature (onions, potatoes, whole tomatoes) should be in a cool, dry, pest-free, well-ventilated area at least 6 inches off the ground.

Additional Resources:

"Garden to Plate: Food Safety for School and Community Gardens"

<https://bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3152.pdf>

"Fresh, Healthy, and Safe Food: Best Practices for Using Produce from School Gardens"

http://www.wafarmtoschool.org/Content/Documents/School_Garden_Best_Practices_-_Natl_Farm_to_School_Network.pdf