

Guidelines for School Gardens

This guidance document has been prepared to provide schools with recommended standards for on-site gardens in which produce is grown to be served by the school to individuals.

The Arizona Department of Health Services recommends that a school that wants to grow produce in a garden on school grounds to be served to students, teachers, parents, or guests of the school comply with the following:

The administrator of the school should:

- Designate an individual at the school who is knowledgeable about or trained in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Food Safety, as it relates to the type of produce being grown, to be the Person In Charge (PIC) of the garden and be responsible for managing the garden and overseeing daily operations.
- Ensure that a written Risk Control Plan (describing Who, What, Where, How, and When) is developed to ensure GAP and is implemented by the PIC and that the PIC maintains written documentation demonstrating that the Risk Control Plan is being adhered to. (A template is available at <http://azdhs.gov/phs/oe/fses/index.htm>.)
- Ensure that an outdoor garden is not located:
 - Adjacent to a well, septic system, garbage dumpster, in ground storage tank, or feed lot.
 - In a low-lying, poorly drained area.
 - In an area subject to any kind of chemical application: herbicide, fungicide, or pesticide.
- Ensure that toilet facilities and sanitary hand washing facilities, including dispensed soap, dispensed hand towels, and drainage collection are provided at, and in close proximity to, all garden areas. Drainage collection, if not plumbed to a sanitary sewer, should include a holding tank that is larger than the water supply holding tank.
- Ensure that the produce harvested from the garden is:
 - Rinsed with clean water to further remove soil and particulate matter, prior to consumption.
 - Prepared under sanitary conditions and overseen by a person with a food handler's card, if available.
 - Prepared under sanitary conditions, in accordance with local food code requirements, and overseen by a person trained in Food Safety if the produce is served as part of the school lunch program.

The PIC for a garden at a school should ensure that:

- Unless using commercially produced soil in a container garden, the soil in the garden is tested for lead, and that the level of lead in the soil is less than 300 ppm.
- An outdoor garden is protected from animal intrusion by fencing or otherwise enclosing the garden area.
- If irrigation is used for growing the produce, the irrigation water is tested and meets the microbial requirements of the EPA Recreational Water Standard.
- If well water is used for growing the produce, the well water is tested once during the growing season and treated if necessary to meet the GAP and Good Handling Practices Certification Program requirements.

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- Water used for hand washing, harvesting, or cleaning of equipment or utensils is from a municipal source or meets a minimum drinking water quality standard.
- Weeds are controlled with mulches, hand-pulling, or weeding implements, not with herbicides.
- Only commercially produced fertilizer, such as commercial manure products or commercial garden products containing blood meal or dried blood, or composting is used in the garden.
- When composting is used:
 - The compost includes vegetable peelings, leaves, grass, or shredded paper.
 - The compost does not include animal products, animal fat, farm manure, or pet waste.
 - Individuals handling the compost wash their hands after handling the compost and may wear gloves when handling compost.

When the produce is ready to be harvested, the PIC should ensure that:

- Individuals harvesting the produce wear non-latex disposable gloves.
- The produce is stored in washed, rinsed, and sanitized food-grade quality reusable containers, or single service containers such as paper bags, during harvesting and post harvest.
- All soil and particulate matter is manually cleaned from the produce.
- Produce with bird droppings on it is not harvested unless the produce item will be washed and cooked prior to consumption.