

## **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 (Department) 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 Food Safety Plan (describing Who, What, Where, How, and When) is developed to ensure GAP is implemented by the PIC and that the PIC maintains written documentation demonstrating that the Food Safety Plan is being adhered to. (A template is available through <http://azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/index.php?pg=request-visit>.)
- Ensure that an outdoor garden is not located:
  - Adjacent to a well, septic system, garbage dumpster, in ground storage tank, compost area, school animals (rabbits, tortoises, birds, etc.), 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. Signs should be posted in garden area to wash hands. Drainage collection, if not plumbed to a sanitary sewer, should include a holding tank that is larger than the water supply holding tank.
- Provide a first aid kit.
- Ensure that the produce harvested from the garden is:
  - Rinsed with clean potable water to further remove soil and particulate matter, prior to consumption.
  - Prepared under sanitary conditions, in accordance with local food code requirements, and overseen by a person trained in Food Safety with a food handler's card, if available.

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

- Water used for hand washing, harvesting, or cleaning of equipment or utensils is from a municipal source or meets the minimum drinking water quality standards.
- 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.
- If irrigation is used for growing the produce, the irrigation water is tested three times during the growing season and meets the microbial requirements of the EPA Recreational Water Standard.

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- Collected rainwater is not used for edible plants unless an approved attestation and Standard Operating Procedure is on file with the Department.
- 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.
- Any fertilizer or compost containing animal products, such as manure, blood meal, or dried blood, must be from a commercially produced source and records from the supplier kept on the premise at all times.
  - School-made compost shall not be used for edible plants unless an approved attestation and Standard Operating Procedure is on file with the Department.
- Weeds are controlled with mulches, hand-pulling, or weeding implements, not with herbicides.
- An outdoor garden is protected from animal intrusion by fencing or otherwise enclosing the garden area.
- Raised beds shall use only non-toxic, non-leaching materials for the frame.

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

- Individuals harvesting the produce shall:
  - Wash their hands before beginning to work or returning to the garden,
  - Avoid contact with animals,
  - Eat and drink in designated areas away from the garden,
  - Stay home if they are sick.
- All soil and particulate matter is manually cleaned from the produce before placing in the harvest container.
- The produce is stored in food-grade quality, reusable containers that have been washed, rinsed, and sanitized, or single service containers such as paper bags, during harvesting and post harvest.
- Produce with bird droppings on it is not harvested unless the produce item will be washed and cooked prior to consumption.