

Food Safety Considerations For Gardening Projects

There are many benefits that everyone can experience from participating in a gardening project at school, daycare, your community or at home. If you decide to start a gardening project, here are some food safety considerations to address to ensure the food your garden produces is safe.

1. Ensure the soil located at the garden site is clean soil (not contaminated with building material, and other buried hazards)
2. If you choose to use manure as fertilizer ensure that the manure is well composted as fresh manure has high levels of pathogenic bacteria that can transfer onto food products or hands and cause illness. The following resource may be useful:
<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/manure/documents/nm1478.pdf>
3. Use a safe source of water to water the garden. Avoid use of surface water from ponds and creeks which may contain various contaminants and parasites. If you choose to use a rain barrel, ensure it has a screen on top to prevent conditions that are favourable for mosquitoes. Water in rain barrels is exposed to run off from the roof which may contain bird droppings and chemical compounds found in roofing tiles. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/private/rainwater-collection.html>
4. Encourage thorough hand washing after working in the garden and before eating.
5. If your program progresses to include preparation of produce that was grown in the garden, ensure you have proper facilities at the location to wash produce and once again ensure everyone washes their hands prior to any food preparation. The Health Unit has food safety resources available. <http://www.healthunit.org/foodsafety/foodsafetyhome.html>
6. If your project progresses to include preservation or processing of produce from the garden, ensure validated recipes are used and followed exactly (doubling or increasing the recipe can create food safety hazards). Only recipes that have high acidity levels should be used to prevent the risk of Botulism (a risk from improperly canned foods). Jams, Jellies and pickled products are the safest to make in a non-commercial kitchen. **Processing in a boiling water bath is an essential step.**