



## **Connecticut School Garden Best Practices During COVID**

As schools plan to reopen for the fall, educators and administrators are preparing for the academic impact of lost time due to spring school closures. Compacted by trauma and stress from isolation and the uncertainty of the future, access to safe outdoor educational opportunities for students are paramount.

School gardens provide equitable opportunities for hands on education that foster and empower skill building to support the mental well being of students by bolstering resilience, and providing social emotional support. In addition to an outlet for teachers to introduce cross curricular subjects, school gardens provide hands-on learning that are accessible to all students and various types of learners.

Regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or ecosystem, children play in similar ways when they have safe free time in nature. They are an interdisciplinary platform where students can engage in core subjects in a safe, socially distant outdoor space. This document outlines best practices and protocols for keeping gardeners and school communities safe during COVID-19.

### **Best Practices for Gardeners**

1. **Clear signage and communications.** Ensure that all gardeners, staff, volunteers and the public are made aware of garden rules and hours. Post signs displaying hours of operation and safety precautions at each entrance to the garden and near shared areas and make the same information available on your website and social media platforms. Consider developing a communication plan that includes additional methods other than in-person or electronic communication only. Consider developing signs and messages in alternative formats (e.g., large print, Braille, American Sign Language) for people who have low vision or are blind or people who are deaf or hard of hearing or in other common languages spoken by members.
2. **Establish a sign up system for use of school gardens.** Be sure to provide adequate time between garden groups to clean surfaces and disinfect tools. School garden groups should be limited in size to adequately provide CDC social distance recommendation. Group size should be established by school administration or the organization supporting/sponsoring the school garden. Establish signage at school gardens with information about access and social distancing practices.



3. **Please stay home if you or a household member are sick. If you have a cough, fever, or trouble breathing, or, if someone you have come into contact with has tested positive for COVID, please do not spend time in the garden.**
4. **Please wear a mask and bring your own gloves and hand drying towel.** This is an additional protection to handwashing and social distancing measures, not a substitute. Bringing your own garden gloves and hand drying towel (or paper towels) will also minimize your contact with shared items.
5. **Minimize time spent indoors, within the school building, greenhouse or toolshed.** Wipe down any indoor surfaces that you touch.
6. **Mask Requirement - Wear a mask and bring your own gloves and hand drying towel.** Connecticut State Department of Health (provide link) requires cloth face masks or coverings while in public spaces. [Here](#) is one simple way to make a mask. This is an additional protection to handwashing and social distancing measures, not a substitute.
7. **Prop open all gates/doors first thing, to eliminate the need to touch them during your stay.**
8. **Wash your hands before and after gardening, after blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing, or touching your face.** Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. School gardens should provide access to a handwashing station at each garden with biodegradable soap. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
9. **Practice social distancing. Work at least at least 6' apart at all times.** In a small space, like a garden shed, enter one at a time.
10. **Disinfect equipment (tools, buckets, hoses, wheelbarrow, etc.) before and after use.** Wipe down the handles and high touch areas. Bring your own tools from home if you have them, but please don't share them with others.
11. **Spray your way in, spray your way out. Please spray and wipe all surfaces and objects before and after you touch them.** School Garden should provide alcohol spray. Leave on the surface for at least 1 minute before wiping down.

*Surfaces to spray:*

- a. Stair and ramp handrails
- b. Door Handles
- c. Tables and benches
- d. Water Spigots
- e. Hoses and Irrigation Timers
- f. Garden gates and locks



- g. Toolshed door handles or lids.
- h. Tool handles
- i. Bucket handles

*Steps to safely and properly clean and disinfect the above areas:*

1. Wash hands
2. Brush off any dirt or debris.
3. Scrub surfaces with soap and rinse with water.
4. Disinfect with bleach solution spray.
5. Leave wet for at least 1 minute.
6. Wipe Dry.
7. Wash Hands.



## **Best Practices for Safe Harvesting**

1. When produce is ready to be harvested, ensure that the individuals harvesting the produce:
  - a. Are not sick, and have not been in contact with anyone sick or testing positive for COVID;
  - b. Wash their hands before beginning to work or returning to the garden;
  - c. Avoid contact with animals;
  - d. Eat and drink in designated areas away from the garden;
  - e. Wear cloth masks and disposable gloves.
2. Clean and sanitize harvest containers
3. Clean and sanitize harvesting tools, such as pruners and scissors, before and after use, using 1 Tablespoon of bleach per 1 gallon of water. Wet thoroughly with bleach solution, then allow to air-dry, or dry with a paper towel after 10 minutes.
4. Rinse off all soil and particulate matter from the produce, and allow produce to air dry, before placing in transportation container. Use a garden sink or hose with POTABLE water over a clean (disinfected) surface.
5. Do not harvest produce with bird droppings on it unless the item will be washed and cooked prior to consumption.
6. Make sure you use potable (drinking) water to rinse any produce and clean equipment. Don't use harvested rainwater for this purpose.
7. Store produce in food-grade quality, reusable containers that have been washed, rinsed, and sanitized, OR single service (disposable) containers such as paper or new plastic bags, during harvesting and post harvest.
8. Keep harvested, rinsed produce cool until it is distributed. Most produce can be stored in a refrigerator if necessary

## **Stay informed**

CT Farm to School Collaborative will do our best to keep this document up-to-date with the latest recommendations from the [Connecticut Department of Public Health](#) and the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). [Connecticut Department of Agriculture Community Garden Guidelines](#) should also be used for reference.

## **Resources**



*COVID-19 Garden Safety Poster from Common Threads*

(LINK)

*Where to donate harvested produce*

<https://foodrescue.us>

*School Garden Support Organizations Network COVID-19 resources page*

<https://www.sgsonetwork.org/covid/>

*Simple Homemade Mask Directions*

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-make-cloth-face-covering.html>

### **Further reading on food safety**

*Arizona State Department of Health Services, School Garden Program*

<https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/index.php#school-garden-program-safety>

*Centers for Disease Control Basic Food Safety pages*

<https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/prevention/basic-food-safety.html>

*USDA Food Safety Tips for School Gardens*

<https://theicn.org/resources/652/produce-safety-best-practices-fact-sheets/107980/food-safety-tips-for-school-gardens.pdf>

*\*This document and its content was inspired Common Threads Best Practices During COVID-19 Document and Edible Schoolyard NYC*