

## Guidance for School Food Gardens

Eating fresh garden produce is a healthy choice for all people. School food gardens are acceptable and encouraged by the District to foster further learning opportunities for students as well as continued community engagement and sustainable practices.

Recently, Oregon Health Authority reviewed scientific research about the safety of gardening in soil that could contain lead. The most significant contributors to soil lead concentrations are sources such as lead-based paint chips and dust. The research shows the amount of lead delivered to soil through water is quite small compared to the amount of lead already present at background levels in soil. In general, garden plants do not absorb significant quantities of lead. However, it is important to wash all soil and dust off vegetables and hands after gardening, as soil and dust are the primary potential sources of lead contamination on produce.

Per information from Oregon Health Authority, school gardens may be irrigated with water from hose bibs at schools regardless of lead level readings. The District encourages running the water from hose bibs for 1-2 minutes prior to irrigating gardens to flush the hose bibs of any standing water.

Produce grown in gardens that is intended to be consumed in the school cafeteria should be initially rinsed outdoors to remove dirt particles. The food will then be washed thoroughly by Nutrition Services staff with fixtures that are below the EPA standard for lead and prepared for consumption. If the produce will be consumed somewhere on campus other than in the cafeteria, garden programs can make arrangements with the Nutrition Services staff to use sinks outside of food prep times. If the produce is going off campus, do not wash it with a garden spigot.

The Oregon Department of Education School Garden Food Safety Program recommends that food garden program coordinators possess a state food handler's card. All students/staff must wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before harvesting food to be served at school. When harvesting, rewash hands after breaks, visiting restrooms, sneezing, coughing, handling trash or money, or anytime hands become soiled. ANY student or staff who are ill should not participate in harvesting so they will not spread bacteria or viruses leading to foodborne illness.

If you are building a new garden, please work with our Project Management staff.

Thank you  
David Hobbs, Sr. Director of Facilities and Asset Management