

WISCONSIN SCHOOL GARDEN INITIATIVE BRIEF: CONNECTING THE SCHOOL GARDEN TO THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA



**Wisconsin
Partnership Program**
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Bringing school garden produce into the school cafeteria can be a win-win: food service staff find a local source of fresh produce and students enjoy the bounty that they helped plant and harvest. With proper attention to food safety, both in the garden and in the cafeteria, students are able to see their food change from seed, to plant, to lunch!

The Many Roles of a School Garden

A school garden can be a student's classroom, gymnasium, and cafeteria all in one location. As a classroom, it boasts lessons in every subject. The garden becomes a laboratory for learning and the student becomes the scientist. A garden also transforms into a gymnasium as the student carefully maneuvers a wheelbarrow around and through a garden's obstacles. Finally, a school garden features a buffet of produce in every color of the rainbow, with as many flavors and textures to match.

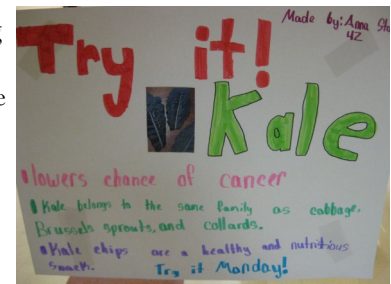


So which of these roles is the garden's most important service? All of them! A garden that offers varied, engaging opportunities for student involvement will be much more effective than a garden serving only one or two capacities. Encourage students to plant, tend, and harvest a variety of produce whose gifts will teach, inspire, and nurture the students now, and for years to come.



Tempting Tastings

Schools across Wisconsin are offering students of all ages tasty bites of garden-grown kale, tomatoes, spinach, and more. Research shows that promoting the source of such tastings, whether it be from down the road or from right outside the cafeteria doors, leads to increased student participation. Take a cue from Kewaskum Elementary School and have students be the teachers. Students there made posters highlighting the benefits of eating kale.



St. Mary's Students Go Crazy for Kale

Eighth grade students at St. Mary's School in Richland Center had visions of kale fields after seeing their fellow students gobble up the kale chips served in the school cafeteria. "They wanted to plant the whole garden with kale!" said school principal, Vicki Faber. The students resisted the temptation to replant the entire plot with the leafy plant, but you can bet that kale chips will be on the cafeteria menu again!



Considerations for a Healthy Garden to Cafeteria Program

Federal and state agencies allow the use of school garden produce; however, your community may have local regulations that apply. All school garden produce, whether eaten in the garden, classroom, or cafeteria should be planted, maintained, harvested, stored, and prepared with care. The following suggestions are general considerations and should not serve as the final rule for food safety regulations.

Planting and Maintaining the Garden: (Resource: [Tips](#))

- Test soil for contaminants.
- Use compost safely.
- Use approved water and water system.
- Control weeds and pests without use of herbicides or pesticides.
- Keep animals, both wild and pets, out of garden.

Harvesting the Garden:

- Use food-grade containers to collect and transport produce.
- Wash hands before and after harvesting.
- Do not harvest when ill or within 48 hours of suffering from vomiting and/or diarrhea.
- Use only clean tools to harvest.

Storing Garden Produce: (Resource: [Produce Safety](#))

- Produce requiring refrigeration must be stored at 41° F or less.
- Produce stored at room temperature should be kept in a cool, dry, well-ventilated area.
- Store produce in clean, sanitized containers with labels.

Preparing Garden Produce:

- Wash hands before and after handling produce.
- Rinse produce even if skin or rind will not be consumed. Use a scrub brush on firm surfaces.
- Avoid cross-contamination with dirty surfaces, tools, or foods.



Food Safety Resources

USDA: Farm Safety Tips for School Gardens

<http://nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20110822025700.pdf>

USDA: School Garden Memo for WI Farm to School Toolkit

<http://www.cias.wisc.edu/foodservtools14/3-locate-and-purchase-local-foods/USDA-school-garden-memo.pdf>

Life Lab: Policy and Protocols for School Gardens and Garden to Cafeteria

<http://www.lifelab.org/for-educators/gene/garden-to-cafeteria/#Policy>

ChangeLab Solutions: Serving School Garden Produce in the Cafeteria

<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/school-garden-produce>



**For more information about
the Wisconsin School Garden Initiative,
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