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Student and Food Safety: Best Practices for Hawai'i School Gardens

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There is a renaissance in school gardening in Hawai'i. It is a great time for school children because many subjects can be taught in a garden, and it gives students time outside with exercise during their school day. Books such as *Growing an Educational Garden at Your School*, by Colleen Carroll (National Tropical Botanical Garden, 1998) or *How to Grow a School Garden*, by Arden Bucklin-Sporer and Rachel Kathleen Pringle (Timber Press, 2010) can help get a garden off to a good start.

Even with renewed enthusiasm for school gardening, it is important to note that gardens and gardening are different than in the past. For example, there are more human pathogens in the environment, and more children are affected by allergies and asthma. Therefore, schools need to be more mindful of legal liabilities than in the past. This publication contains checklists that teachers, volunteers, and students can use to reduce risks found in the garden. The document is divided into advice about the students, the garden, and the food. It also mentions certain regulations of the Hawai'i departments of health and agriculture. Just like a pilot working through a printed "preflight" checklist before taking to the skies, going through these lists is a "best practice." All of the best practices in the following lists can be easily turned into curriculum topics, as they relate to STEM: science, technology, engineering, and math.

The following pages contain references to the many gardening resources provided by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, College of Tropical Agriculture and



Human Resources (CTAHR). One is the companion to this guide, *Best Food Safety Practices for Hawaii Gardeners* (<http://tinyurl.com/4s2e7cp>). To find additional resources, visit www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/freepubs. Other resources are listed at the end of this publication.

FOR THE STUDENTS . . .

Sun sense and hydration

Hawai'i students are often outside in the sun. They should take precautions to protect their skin from damaging UV sunlight and stay hydrated to prevent heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Protect students in the garden by having them

follow these steps:

- Have cool, potable (drinkable, municipal) water on hand and let students drink all they want whenever they feel thirsty. Use and label one-time-use cups with names, or encourage the use of reusable water bottles.
- Wear wide-brimmed hats and long-sleeved shirts.
- Wear light-colored clothes to repel the sun, rather than black or other dark colors.
- Wear glasses to protect against sun and other garden hazards.
- Wear sunscreen with a high SPF that blocks UVA and UVB rays. Some types contain insect repellent.
- Create a shaded area where the students can rest.
- Watch students for signs of heat stroke or heat exhaustion: increased thirst, weakness, fainting, irritability, muscle cramps, sweating, or fever.

Safe handling of tools and supplies

Proper tools and supplies make gardening easier and often more productive. Be sure to demonstrate the correct, safe use of each tool. Make sure all tools are

- used only by students of an appropriate age and under adult supervision
- kept sharpened (as appropriate)
- stored properly in a locked container
- examined regularly for damage and replaced when needed
- placed on the ground in a safe manner
- put away properly when work is done.

Personal protective equipment (P.P.E.) for students

Gardening can be hazardous, so it is a best practice to equip students with the appropriate P.P.E.

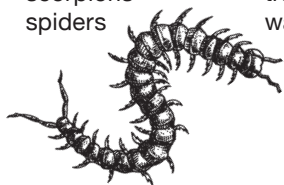
- Wear clear safety glasses (or sunglasses) on projects where eyes need protection.
- Covered shoes should be worn while working in the garden. Students should not be allowed to go barefoot or wear slippers in the garden; there are too many ways for them to get hurt.
- A dust mask should be on hand for use during potentially dusty jobs, such as turning compost.
- Have water on hand to flush eyes, if necessary.
- Have sturdy work gloves available for use with tools such as shovels and rakes.

Animals that bite or sting in Hawai'i's gardens

There are beneficial animals in our gardens, many of them insects. The good ones help us control pests and break down plant materials to make soil and compost. The bad ones, however, can bite or sting us, or cause allergic reactions (just like poisonous plants). They can also attack our plants. *What Bit Me?* by Nishida and Tenorio (University of Hawai'i Press, 1993) provides a good summary of "bugs" in Hawai'i's gardens. Some children are hypersensitive to the bites or stings of bees, ants, or fleas, so they should come to the garden with proper attire and a personal response

ants
bees
beetles
centipedes
cockroaches
fleas
flies
lice
millipedes

mites
mosquitoes
scorpions
spiders



thrips
ticks
true bugs
wasps

kit. Because of this type of sensitivity, be mindful of the animals listed here in and around the garden. Also, make sure there is no standing water in the garden to reduce the chances of Dengue fever being transmitted by mosquitoes.

Watch out for other physical dangers

Students are not always aware of their surroundings. Therefore, it is important to scan the garden environment for any dangers and remove or minimize them. These dangers can include:

- Wood preservatives—If constructing a raised bed, be aware of what might have been applied to the framing material to keep it from rotting or being eaten by insects. Many chemical wood preservatives, especially older ones found on recycled wood, can come off on hands and leach into the soil, becoming hazardous to humans. Since 2003, the EPA has regulated the use of heavy-duty wood preservatives. EPA advises not to use wood treated with most preservatives for edible crop production and around children. See options at <http://www.epa.gov/oppad001/reregistration/cca/>. Also avoid using rubber tires and granite as border materials. For raised bed borders in school gardens, it's best to use untreated redwood or cedar lumber (naturally resistant to rot and insects), hollow tiles, stone, bricks, logs, or "plastic lumber" made of recycled plastic.
- Dry soil or compost can be full of molds and other fungi such as *Aspergillus fumigatus*. Small dust particles can also create problems for students with allergies or asthma. It is best if these dusty products are handled by an adult, or students whose parents have given permission to work with them.
- Students should wash their hands with soap and water after handling soil, compost, worms, or worm castings.
- Wooden poles, metal rebar, or anything sticking up or out can be tripped over or fallen on. Cover the tops of these hazards if they cannot be removed.
- Even if students wear covered shoes in and around the garden, their ankles are still exposed. Make sure short plant sticks, metal fence posts, rebar, and other discards are cleaned up.

IN THE GARDEN . . .

Fertilizers

Fertilizers and other soil amendments provide plants with nutrients they need to grow. Some fertilizers, both organic and non-organic, carry the warning "KEEP OUT

OF REACH OF CHILDREN.” This is because they can be hazardous. For a school garden, fertilizers should be

- Used only as necessary—avoid the use of manure and biosolids; some products are approved for certified organic production. See: <http://www.omri.org>.
- Stored safely and off the ground to reduce the chance of run-off into water sources in the case of flooding.

Pesticides

The EPA believes that children are significantly more sensitive to pesticides than adults. Pesticides, organic and synthetic, are applied to repel or kill pests. The suffix, -cide, means “to kill.” Spraying liquid dish soap to kill leafhoppers or using powdered borax to kill ants *is using pesticides*. Students should not apply pesticides. Some pesticides, organic and non-organic, carry the warning

“KEEP OUT OF REACH OF CHILDREN.” This is because they can be hazardous. Do not let anyone apply “experimental” pesticides on food crops that will be eaten. Check with your schools’ groundskeeper to see what and where any pesticides may be applied on school property. See the box below for more information. All pesticides should:

- be used avoided or used minimally in school gardens
- be labeled with a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registration number for *commercial agriculture* use (this is required for school gardens by the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture); do not use household products, such as baking soda or milk, as they are not specifically labeled as a pesticide and thus do not have precautionary information on the label for safe use

... continued on page 6

Science-Based Knowledge: Organic vs. Non-Organic Chemicals and Pesticides

Confusion often arises when people speak of “chemicals,” “pesticides,” or ask what is allowed in “organic” production. Let’s try to clarify these three terms.

Chemicals. Humans consume chemicals to live. Merriam-Webster’s Medical Dictionary (2007) defines *chemical* as “a substance (as an element or chemical compound) obtained by a chemical process or used for producing a chemical effect.”

The Collins English Dictionary (2009) says *chemicals* are “any substance used in or resulting from a reaction involving changes to atoms or molecules, especially one derived artificially for practical use.”

Thus, the water we drink is a chemical. The foods we eat contain chemicals. In fact, the human body is made up of 60 basic elements and countless chemical compounds! In the case of garden production, all composts, soil amendments, fertilizers, and pesticides (used to manage pests: insects, weeds, slugs, etc.) are or contain chemicals. The US National Organic Program (NOP) must approve chemicals for use in organic production. The NOP is part of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service.

Pesticides. The EPA defines a pesticide as “any substance or mixture of substances intended for preventing, destroying, repelling, or mitigating any pest.” Pests can be insects, slugs, mice and other animals, unwanted plants (weeds), and fungi or other microorganisms like bacteria and viruses. Under U.S. law, a pesticide is also any substance or mixture of substances intended for use as a plant regulator, defoliant, or desiccant.

So, what is the difference between a chemical pesticide or fertilizer labeled “organic” or “natural” and other chemicals called “synthetic” or “man-made”? The NOP defines *synthetic* as “a substance that is formulated or

manufactured by a chemical process or by a process that chemically changes a substance extracted from naturally occurring plant, animal, or mineral sources, except that such term shall not apply to substances created by naturally occurring biological processes.”

Some physical actions act like pesticides; for example:

- using flames to burn weeds.
- using plastic to cover the ground and create heat that will kill soil-borne pests, such as nematodes.

Organic production. In organic production, synthetic chemicals are usually prohibited. In certified organic production, however, there are over 45 instances when synthetic chemicals are allowed “with restriction,” as approved by the NOP with input from the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB). For example, the synthetic chemical hydrogen peroxide (produced by a chemical reaction in a factory) is allowed, with restrictions, in organic production. The synthetic chemicals ferrous sulfate (iron), ozone, and sulfur dioxide also make the allowed-with-restriction list. The synthetic substances that can be used under some circumstances in organic production are listed on the “National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances” (<http://tinyurl.com/ylcf9vw>). Otherwise, gardeners can search for NOP-compliant pesticides by looking for the Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) designation on the label (<http://www.omri.org>).

When choosing a pesticide, use only those labeled by EPA. Searching for the OMRI designation on a product will guarantee that the pesticide is NOP-compliant. Do not use household chemicals in school gardens, because they are not EPA-labeled for “commercial” use (as required by the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture).

Always read and follow the pesticide label.

Notice: Pesticides on Hawai'i School Campuses

"Hawaii does not have any laws restricting pesticide use in or around schools and does not require schools to implement IPM. There are no posting requirements for indoor or outdoor pesticide applications near schools, nor are there any statewide laws regarding restricted spray zones near school property." Source: <http://www.epa.gov/region9/childhealth/pesticides-hawaii.html>

However, school applicators **MUST** follow the label on the pesticide, as "the label is the law."

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is using a combination of methods, including pesticides (if necessary), to keep pest populations at or below an acceptable level. The U.S. EPA has advice on how to employ IPM on school properties:

www.epa.gov/pesticides/ipm/schoolipm/index.html

Plants as natural pest repellents

The following plant varieties are recommended to be planted as in-row or border plants to repel pests (and they are not considered poisonous to people and pests; see

Danger: Toxic Garden Plants):

- basil
- lavender
- rue
- borage
- marigold
- sage
- catmint
- mint
- santolina
- chives
- nasturtium
- Southern-wood
- coriander
- oregano
- tansy
- garlic
- pot marigold
- thyme
- horseradish
- rosemary
- hyssop



Source: <http://gardening.about.com/od/naturalorganiccontrol/a/Companion.htm>

Beneficial insects: attracting and cultivating "good bugs"

Not all insects in the garden are pests. In fact, many insects and other arthropods are considered "good bugs." Biological control of insect pests is an extremely important component of an ecologically balanced garden.

In Hawai'i, import of natural enemies (including ladybugs) from outside the state is highly restricted, and there is currently no commercial source of natural enemies in-state. Fortunately, many beneficial insects have naturalized here. The three most important strategies to conserve natural enemy populations are:

1. Cultivate flowering plants in and around production area.
2. Limit or avoid pesticide sprays (including organic pesticides).
3. Know who your insect friends are!

- braconid wasps
- lady beetles (bugs)
- encyrtid wasps
- minute pirate bugs
- hover flies
- predatory mites
- ichneumonid wasps
- pteromalid wasps
- lacewings
- trichogramma wasps

See the CTAHR publication titled *Integrated Pest Management* and this UH CTAHR resource on beneficial insects, including plants that attract beneficial insects: www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/sustainag/links/production.html#pest.

Food allergies and home-made pesticides

Some books and websites suggest using items such as milk and seafood as natural pesticides. While they may seem harmless enough, a consumer with a particular food allergy might have a negative reaction when eating a sprayed product. Do not use homemade, unapproved (unless they are on the minimum-risk list below), and unlabeled (EPA label) pesticides in school gardens. See more information about food allergies at www.foodallergy.org.

Minimum-risk pesticides

If you need to spray something to control pests, consider organic products (<http://www.omri.org>) or these "minimum-risk pesticides":

- 2-phenethyl propionate
- castor oil (U.S.P. or equivalent)*
- cedar oil
- cinnamon and cinnamon oil*
- citric acid*
- citronella and citronella oil
- cloves and clove oil*
- corn gluten meal*
- corn oil*
- cottonseed oil*
- dried blood
- eugenol
- garlic and garlic oil*
- geraniol
- geranium oil
- lauryl sulfate
- lemongrass oil
- linseed oil
- malic acid
- mint and mint oil
- peppermint and peppermint oil*
- potassium sorbate
- putrescent whole egg solids
- rosemary and rosemary oil*
- sesame (includes ground sesame plant) and sesame oil*
- sodium chloride (common salt)*
- sodium lauryl sulfate
- soybean oil
- thyme and thyme oil*
- white pepper
- zinc metal strips (zinc metal and impurities, only)



* indicates exempt active ingredients that are also exempt from pesticide residue tolerance requirements.

Source: EPA Minimum Risk Pesticides
<http://tinyurl.com/4gbfprq>

Danger: Toxic Garden Plants

Plants have varying levels of natural toxicity. Toxicity is the degree to which something can cause harm to living things. It is important to caution students not to eat or touch unidentified plant material in the garden. Some plants on the following list are common on school grounds, and this is a good opportunity to inform students about toxic plants and plant parts. Each of the four toxicity levels has a number, in parenthesis. If a plant has an added toxicity issue, it will be followed by another number in parenthesis. Some of these plants, like taro, have their toxicity reduced/eliminated through thorough cooking.

(1) Major toxicity: Ingestion of these plants may cause serious illness or death. If eaten, immediately call 911.

- angel's trumpet (*Brugmansia x candida*) (4)
- azalea (*Rhododendron* sp.)
- be-still tree (*Thevetia peruviana*)
- black-eyed susan (*Abrus precatorius*)
- cassava (*Manihot esculenta*)
- castor bean (*Ricinus communis*) (4)
- cerbera (*Cerbera manghas*) (4)
- cestrum (*Cestrum* sp.)
- chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*)
- gloriosa lily (*Gloriosa superba*)
- Hawaiian poppy/puka kala (*Argemone glauca*) (4)
- hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*)
- Japanese anemone (*Anemone hupehensis*) (4)
- jatropha (*Jatropha* sp.) (4)
- jimsonweed (*Datura stramonium*)
- lantana (*Lantana camara*) (4)
- mushrooms (*Agaricales*, not all species)
- nightshade (*Solanum* sp.)
- oleander (*Nerium oleander*) (4)
- pencil plant, crown of thorns, red spurge, and slipper flower (*Euphorbia* and *Pedilanthus* spp.) (4)
- periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*)
- pokeberry and coral berry (*Phytolacca* spp. and *Rivina humilis*)
- star-of-Bethlehem (*Hippobroma longiflora*) (4)
- tomato leaves (*Solanum lycopersicum*) (4)

(2) Minor toxicity: Ingestion of these plants may cause minor illnesses such as vomiting or diarrhea. If eaten, call 911.

- allamanda (*Allamanda cathartica*) (4)
- aloe (*Aloe* sp.) (4)
- amaryllis (*Hippeastrum* sp.) (4)
- candlenut (kukui) (*Aleurites moluccana*) (4)
- croton (*Codiaeum variegatum*) (4)
- cup of gold and silver cup (*Solandra* sp.)
- foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) (4)
- kava (*Piper methysticum*)
- plumeria (*Plumeria* sp.) (4)
- poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*)

(3) Oxalates: The juice or sap of these plants contains oxalate crystals. Ingestion of these needle-like crystals can irritate the skin, mouth, tongue, and throat, resulting in throat swelling, breathing difficulties, burning pain, and stomach upset. Call 911 if any of these symptoms appear following ingestion of plants.

- anthurium (*Anthurium* sp.)
- crown flower (*Calotropis gigantea*) (4)
- dumb cane (*Dieffenbachia* sp.) (4)
- elephant ear (*Alocasia* and *Xanthosoma* sp.) (4)
- taro (*Colocasia esculenta*)
- peace lily (*Spathiphyllum* sp.)
- philodendron (*Philodendron* sp.) (4)



(4) Dermatitis and eye injury: Contact with the juice, sap, or thorns of these plants may cause a skin rash or irritation or eye injury. Wash the affected area of skin with soap and water as soon as possible after contact. The rash may be very serious and painful. Call 911 if symptoms appear following contact with the plants.

- aloe (*Aloe* sp.) (2)
- amaryllis (*Hippeastrum* sp.) (2)
- angel's trumpet (*Brugmansia x candida*) (1)
- castor bean (*Ricinus communis*) (1)
- cerbera (*Cerbera manghas*) (1)
- croton (*Codiaeum variegatum*) (2)
- crown flower (*Calotropis gigantea*) (3)
- dumb cane (*Dieffenbachia* sp.) (3)
- elephant ear (*Alocasia* and *Xanthosoma* sp.) (3)
- foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) (2)
- Japanese anemone (*Anemone hupehensis*) (1)
- jatropha (*Jatropha* sp.) (1)
- kahiki flower and silky oak (*Grevillea* sp.)
- lantana (*Lantana camara*) (1)
- mango (*Mangifera indica*)
- oleander (*Nerium oleander*) (1)
- pencil plant, crown of thorns, red spurge, and slipper flower (*Euphorbia* and *Pedilanthus* spp.) (1)
- philodendron (*Philodendron* sp.) (3)
- plumeria (*Plumeria* sp.) (2)
- star-of-Bethlehem (*Hippobroma longiflora*) (1)
- tomato leaves (*Solanum lycopersicum*) (1)

Source(s): S. Scott and C. Thomas, *Poisonous Plants of Paradise*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2000.
 Washington State Poison Control Center: www.wapc.org/poisons/plantlist.htm
<http://hurthawaii.blogspot.com/PoisonPlantsHawaii.pdf>
http://hawaii.gov/hdoa/pi/pest/BROCHURE_TOPTENproof.pdf
www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/poison/indcoa_e.htm

- be used *only* per label instructions, under adult supervision, and with the custodian's knowledge
- be used with appropriate personal protective equipment (P.P.E.) as required by the product's label
- have a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) (www.msds.com), which provides information in case of a spill or other accident occurring with that particular substance
- have warning signs and/or verbal warnings used in the garden as required by the label
- be stored in a posted, locked, well-ventilated facility.
- Keep dogs and cats out. While many consider feces to be a "fertilizer," animal dung can also contain human pathogens, such as *Toxoplasmosis* in cats.
- Keep food scraps out of the garden, as they can attract rodents and other animals. Compost them first.
- Minimize the presence of birds around food crops by using nets and/or bird deterrents (rotate frequently). Bird droppings can carry as many as 60 fungal, bacterial, and viral diseases, including West Nile virus and avian flu. Bird droppings can also contaminate aquaponic tanks and sources of human drinking water.

Garden sanitation and protection

School properties are typically abandoned at night and on the weekends. People often have access to gardens, whether you know about it or not. Enclosing the garden with a fence and posting signs to limit trespassers provides some control over the site. Members of the community may want to help, but may unknowingly introduce pests or diseases. Inform the community that it is a school garden and ask them to contact the school if they have questions or concerns. A posted list of rules for a school garden might include the following:

- No dumping. All waste, even green material, should be thoroughly composted before it enters the garden. It is best to add compost to the soil between crops, or when the plots are fallow.

Managing rats, slugs, and snails and reducing the chance of rat lungworm

Hawai'i, like other tropical areas, has a unique pest: the rat lungworm. This microscopic nematode (shaped like a worm and invisible to the naked eye) lives in the lungs of rats, and when it is excreted it can be eaten by slugs and snails. The photo of a semi-slug on p. 7 shows how small slugs can be. People can accidentally eat a slug or snail if they do not look carefully at what they harvest or eat. The disease can make people very sick: they can even die if the rat lungworm reaches their brain. Precautions must be taken to reduce the chance of selling or consuming contaminated produce. Best practices for managing this pest include

- removing rodent, slug, and snail hiding places; trap

Understanding Soil, Amendments, Water Quality and Safety by Laboratory Testing

When starting a new garden it is wise to conduct a few tests to determine the condition of your production environment. Knowing about your garden's condition and possible amendments to increase its productivity can lead to a more satisfying experience, keep costs down, and reduce harmful impacts to the environment.

Soil (tests available from CTAHR in Mānoa or Hilo [www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/site/adsc.aspx] and private labs: see list under Water, below). Collect soil samples as advised in the CTAHR publication, *Testing Your Soil: Why and How to Take a Soil-Test Sample*, www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/SCM-9.pdf. Test for:

- pH and extractable nutrients: calcium (Ca), magnesium (Mg), phosphorous (P), and potassium (K) and pH levels of your soil so you can get site-specific advice about amendments.
- Heavy metals: find out if there are any metals at dangerous levels. This could be the case if soil was brought into the garden from off-site.

Compost and worm castings (compost or worm "food" with animal feces or meat should be avoided). If used, test for:

- *Salmonella* and *E. coli* 0157:H7 bacteria. Contact Hawai'i-state-approved laboratories for their costs and testing supplies (<http://hawaii.gov/health/environmental/water/sdwb/environmental/water/sdwb/index.html>).

Water (irrigation and produce wash). Test for the presence of:

- *E. coli* bacteria. Contact Hawai'i-state-approved laboratories for their costs and testing supplies (link above).
- Non-potable water that has a generic *E. coli* count less than 126 bacteria/100 ml can be used for irrigation as long as it does not touch the edible portion of the crop. If such non-potable water must be used, applying it through drip irrigation tubes under plastic mulch will help minimize contact.
- Rinse or wash water for produce must be potable according to State of Hawai'i regulations.

and kill them in your garden

- not harvesting or eating produce with slugs or snails, or their feces or slime, on it.

If you suspect that slugs and snails have been on your produce, consider rinsing the produce in water containing a sanitizer that has been approved for food contact by the FDA.

More information on rat lungworm is found here:

Advice for consumers:

www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/FST-35.pdf

Advice for commercial producers:

www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/FST-39.pdf



A female rat lungworm, smaller than a pinhead.



Juvenile semi-slug on a nickel; it can contain rat lungworms.

Photo: Juliano Romanzini, courtesy Carlos Graeff Teixeira

Photo: Chris Jacobson

stronger when the core temperature of a plant is more than 10 degrees warmer than the rinse water. This is because water moves from cold parts to hot parts. The best practice is to follow FDA's Current Good Manufacturing Practices (cGMP, <http://tinyurl.com/3jq6n5g>) and use only potable produce rinse water. This guidance also follows Hawai'i Administrative Rules §11-11-8 (<http://gen.doh.hawaii.gov/sites/har/admrules/default.aspx>) and recommends that food manufacturers use water from an approved source when rinsing produce. There are some commercial "sanitizers" on the market, but they may not be labeled for some of Hawai'i's crops.

Growing fish and produce together

Many of Hawai'i's families, farms, and schools are trying a new farming method called aquaponics. It is a combination of hydroponics (plants grown in water) and aquaculture (fish farming). Having students near an open water source is something to be careful of, especially with younger ones. Many of the precautions and recommended production methods can be found in these CTAHR publications on aquaponics and hydroponics.

On-Farm Food Safety

www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/FST-38.pdf

Small-Scale Lettuce Production with Hydroponics or Aquaponics

www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/SA-2.pdf

More hydroponics publications are here:

www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/hawaii/Vegetable.aspx

Which water for what use?

Plants need water to grow, but water quality can vary greatly. You need to choose the proper water for the task.

Irrigation. There are no national or state standards for irrigation water quality. Therefore, the produce industry has chosen the EPA Recreational Water Standard (www.epa.gov/waterscience/criteria/recreation) as a maximum requirement. This standard says that *E. coli* in irrigation water must be fewer than 126 bacteria per 100 ml. Some Hawai'i rivers, ditches, and water catchment systems (open reservoir and roof-top) can have *E. coli* numbers in excess of this maximum, so care must be taken when using these sources in your garden. If the water is not from a city source (called "potable," or drinkable), the best practice is to use drip irrigation under plastic mulch. At least this will keep the non-potable irrigation water from touching the "edible portion of the crop" (unless it is a root crop).

Produce rinse water. When a crop is harvested, the cut surface of the crop can act as an entry point for pathogens, just like when we cut ourselves. Recent science tells us that produce, just like cut flowers in a vase, can absorb water through the places where it was cut for harvesting. This process is called capillary action. Thus, if the produce rinse water contains pathogens, they might be sucked into the edible portion of the crop. Capillary action is even



What if your garden has been flooded?

Rain is the best source of water for growing plants. There are concerns, however, about the safety of flood-damaged vegetables and fruits for fresh consumption, especially those crops grown close to the ground. Flood waters can transfer fertilizers, pesticides, feces, pests and debris into your garden from farms, lawns, septic and sewer systems, parking lots, etc. If your garden has been inundated by water, follow these recommendations from the FDA for commercial crops:

- If the edible portion of a crop is exposed to flood waters, it is considered contaminated and should not be eaten. There is no practical method of sanitizing the edible portion of a vegetable or fruit that has been sitting in contaminated water. Therefore, gardeners are encouraged to reduce the risk by discarding affected crops or incorporating the crops into the soil.

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Critical Points about Student and Food Safety

FOR THE STUDENTS

Sun sense and hydration

(see "P.P.E" below)

- ✓ Provide drinking water.
- ✓ Provide sunscreen.
- ✓ Provide covered area where students can rest in the shade.
- ✓ Provide eye protection as needed; sun glasses are recommended
- ✓ Wide-brim sun hats are recommended.
- ✓ Light-colored clothes and long-sleeved work shirts are recommended.

Safe handling of tools and supplies

- ✓ They should be age-appropriate and used under adult supervision.
- ✓ Maintain tools and store them in a locked container.
- ✓ Place them on the ground in a safe manner.

Personal protective equipment (P.P.E.) (see "Sun sense and hydration" above)

- ✓ Provide a well-stocked first-aid kit.
- ✓ Provide eye protection as needed.
- ✓ Provide work gloves for heavy jobs.
- ✓ Covered shoes are highly recommended.
- ✓ Dust masks should be available as needed.

Animals that bite and sting

- ✓ Be mindful of ants, bees, centipedes, scorpions, etc.
- ✓ Children who are hypersensitive to the bites or stings of bees, ants, or fleas should come to the garden with proper attire and a personal response kit.

Other physical dangers in the garden

- ✓ Don't use treated lumber, granite or rubber tires for raised garden bed borders.
- ✓ Be mindful around compost and other dusty materials.
- ✓ Wash hands after handling compost and worm bins.
- ✓ Rid the garden of sharp objects, such as rebar or fence posts, or make sure stakes are capped.

Good Garden Guidance

Let your words and actions always reflect your aloha for your friends and the garden.

Covered shoes are highly recommended.

Seek adult permission before applying anything to plants.

Wash your hands after eating, touching your mouth, going to the bathroom, turning compost, working in the worm bin, and before handling produce.

To protect the plants, walk around rows, not through them.

Use garden tools and equipment carefully.

Keep the garden free of dangers and trash.

Keep animals and pets out of the garden.

In case of emergency, call 911.

IN THE GARDEN

Fertilizers

- ✓ Use only under adult supervision.
- ✓ Use as needed to meet plants' nutritional needs.
- ✓ Use organic materials listed at www.ORMI.org.
- ✓ Follow all label precautions, as some fertilizers can be dangerous for children.
- ✓ Keep always stored in a locked container.

Pesticides

- ✓ Avoid using if possible.
- ✓ Use only under adult supervision.
- ✓ Read and follow the label.
- ✓ Understand that children are more sensitive to pesticides than adults.
- ✓ Grow plants that naturally repel pests.
- ✓ Do not use "home-made" or experimental pesticides; rather,

use only ones approved by EPA for commercial farms and listed at www.ORMI.org.

- ✓ Always keep stored in a locked, labeled, well-ventilated storage container.

Animals and pests

- ✓ Take active steps to keep pets, wild animals, and insect pests out of an active growing area.
- ✓ Do not leave food discards uncovered in compost piles.
- ✓ Remove rats, slugs, and snails, as they can carry the rat lungworm pathogen.
- ✓ Do not use raw manure with a growing crop.
- ✓ Livestock should be housed down-slope from garden areas to avoid run-off of fecal matter into food-growing areas.

Garden care and maintenance

- ✓ Water garden with potable water (or use drip irrigation with non-potable water and apply water at the soil surface and never on the edible portion of the crop).
- ✓ Use science-based composting techniques that create pathogen-free finished compost.
- ✓ All manure and kitchen discards should be properly composted for at least 90 days.
- ✓ Be mindful that many plants found in Hawai'i can be toxic. Children should ask before eating.

Best Practices for Hawai'i School Gardens

ABOUT FOOD HANDLING

Food safety supplies

- ✓ Use only city/county-supplied drinkable water.

Provide:

- ✓ clean sink for washing hands and produce
- ✓ non-antibacterial soap in a pump-type dispenser
- ✓ single-use towels (do not wipe hands on clothes)
- ✓ trash can with lid
- ✓ a well-stocked first-aid kit
- ✓ water to flush eyes if needed.

Harvesting, cleaning and handling

- ✓ Wash hands (at least 20 sec.) with soap before and after harvesting or handling produce.
- ✓ Do not harvest or handle produce when sick.
- ✓ Do not harvest damaged plants, especially ones with slug/snail slime or damage, or ones with feces on them.
- ✓ Use disposable gloves properly for harvesting (or handling) (or both).
- ✓ Use clean, food-grade harvest containers to hold harvested produce.
- ✓ Make sure cutting tools are sharp, cleaned, and sanitized (according to manufacturer's label) before use.
- ✓ Harvest containers should be kept off the ground in a clean wheelbarrow, tarp or pallet, to avoid contaminating produce with soil and pathogens.
- ✓ Food contact surfaces should be non-porous and cleaned.
- ✓ Make sure knives and cutting boards are clean.

Rinsing and preparing fresh produce

- ✓ Wash hands (at least 20 sec.) before handling produce.
- ✓ Inspect all harvested produce and discard and compost damaged products.
- ✓ All food served to the public, must be prepared in a kitchen with a Food Establishment permit from the Hawai'i Department of Health.
- ✓ Washing fruits and vegetables with soap or detergent is NOT recommended because soap is not approved for use on food.
- ✓ Scrub firm produce, such as melons or potatoes, with a clean produce brush.

- ✓ All cut, peeled, or cooked fruits and vegetables must be eaten or refrigerated within 2 hours. Cut produce left at room temperature longer than 2 hours should be discarded or composted.
- ✓ Refrigerate any other produce that is not going to be consumed immediately.

Seller displays

- ✓ Wash hands (at least 20 sec.) with soap before handling produce.
- ✓ Use food-grade bags for any pre-packaged produce.
- ✓ Un-packaged produce needs to be displayed on clean, sanitized tables or in clean containers, preferably with a cover. Plastic or stainless steel surfaces are preferred over porous wood surfaces.
- ✓ Loose leafy greens should be kept at 45°F or lower.
- ✓ Display packages chilled, or have a display sample with packages for purchase kept in a cooler or refrigerator.
- ✓ If you are providing food samples, a Hawai'i Department of Health Temporary Food Permit is required.
- ✓ Store and display samples in a covered container to avoid environmental contaminants like dust and pests. To prevent cross-contamination, serve samples in single-use containers or have toothpicks for one-time sampling from a "dish." With sauces or dips, prevent "double-dipping" by using a squeeze bottle.
- ✓ Do not serve unpasteurized juice or milk.



Interested in agricultural science?

If you are a student interested in exploring a degree in the agricultural sciences, in one of dozens of agriculture-related fields, then the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa has a program for you! Visit us at www.ctahr.hawaii.edu.

These critical points summarize the contents of "Student and Food Safety: Best Practices for Hawai'i School Gardens"* published by the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The publication is available online: www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/FST-45.pdf.

* Authors are James Hollyer, Fred Brooks, Lynn Nakamura-Tengan, Luisa Castro, Jayme Grzebik, Maile Sacarob, Vanessa Troegner, Donna Meyer, the Hawaii School Garden Network, Theodore Radovich, Lydi Morgan-Bernal, and Dexter Kishida



**College of Tropical Agriculture
and Human Resources**
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Planning your school garden

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Compost



Operating Your Garden Like a National Organic Program–Certified Farm



Here are basics of the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP), if you want to run your garden as "certified organic."

1. Research the site's history

Transitional

- The garden site must be 36 months without the use of "prohibited" substances.
- If prohibited substances were applied, determine the date and obtain something in writing that describes them.
- Pick a transition starting date and work toward certification.

Immediate eligibility

Newly planted, previously fallow land may be eligible immediately for certification—check into this.

2. Know the regulations

Get a copy of the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) regulations, read them, and find someone to answer your questions about what they mean. (www.ams.usda.gov/nop)

3. Exemptions from certification

A producer or handler that sells agricultural products as "organic" but whose gross annual agricultural income from organic sales is \$5,000 or less is exempt from certification. *But, that non-certified operation must follow all the NOP guidelines, just like a certified farm.*

4. Certification

Develop an early relationship with an organic certification agency to ensure that you are making good decisions and using only appropriate and allowed substances.

5. Develop an Organic System Plan (see USDA NOP Section 205.201)

a. Monitoring plan

Describe practices and procedures to be performed and maintained, including frequency.

b. Soil amendments

Develop a list of fertility needs for your crop and find organically approved materials allowed under USDA NOP Sections 205.203 and 205.601. (www.omri.org / www.agr.usda.gov)

c. Soil biodiversity

Develop a program to enhance soil biodiversity with organic matter (USDA NOP Section 205.203).

d. Pest, disease, and weed management plan

A comprehensive plan listing each approved organic pesticide used in production or handling.

e. Seeds and planting stock

Document that seeds and annual transplants are certified organic; for any non-organic seed or planting stock used, you will need to document your search.

f. Physical barriers

Describe management practices and physical barriers that prevent commingling of organic/non-organic products on a split (organic and non-organic) operation and also describe practices that prevent contact with prohibited substances (i.e., aerial sprays, drift from neighboring farms, runoff).

g. Recordkeeping practices (USDA NOP Section 205.103)

Auditing documents that track products from the origin in the field to final use or sale is critical. A random audit is part of the inspection procedure. It may require the following.

- field, planting, and production records
- harvest and yield records
- postharvest handling records
- storage and transport records
- sales or final use records

Helpful links

www.ams.usda.gov/nop USDA National Organic Program
www.ifoam.org International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements

www.omri.org Resource for approved substances

<http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Organic/> Resource for approved substances, beyond OMRI

www.ncat.org Helpful tools, publications, workbooks

- Crops in proximity to but less exposed to flooding, where the edible portion of the crop has NOT come in contact with flood waters, need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Factors to consider in the evaluation include:
- What was the source of the flood waters and were there potential upstream contributors of bacterial and/or chemical contaminants?
- The type of crop and stage of growth. For example, was the edible portion of the crop still developing? How far above the ground was the lowest edible portion?
- Were conditions such that the crop may have been exposed to prolonged periods of moisture and stress that could foster fungal growth and, possibly, development of mycotoxins?

Source: EPA: <http://tinyurl.com/3o6744q>

THE FOOD . . .

Food safety supplies

Garden products are eaten both raw and cooked. To protect produce from non-production contamination, you will need the following supplies:

- potable (drinkable, municipal) water for hand washing and produce rinsing
- sinks: one *exclusively* for hand washing, a separate one for produce rinsing, and, if necessary, a third for washing tools and equipment.
- non-antibacterial soap in a pump-type dispenser (no bar soap)
- single-use paper towels (no cloth towels)
- covered trash can
- a well-stocked, up-to-date, first aid kit that is easily accessible by everyone at all times.

Allow No Animals (or Uncomposted Manures) in the Production Area

There have been produce and food recalls, sicknesses, and deaths due to contamination with animal feces containing human pathogens. The pathogens have been found in raw produce and in processed foods. Keep animals and their uncomposted manures out of the garden at all times. For example, the American Public Health Association's Compendium of Methods for the Microbiological Examination of Foods says, "*E. coli* is not part of the normal microflora of fresh produce, therefore their presence can be related to the use of polluted water for irrigation or washing, presence of animal feces, unclean hands, or contaminated surfaces of harvesters and containers."

Follow these best food-safety practices:

Animals, including pets, should be kept out of growing areas and buffer zones at all times (<http://tinyurl.com/4qfajku>). Any production animals should be humanely housed in an enclosed area down-slope from the produce production area.

This will help keep manures from getting into the garden during heavy rains.

If feces are occasionally found in the garden, use a trowel or shovel to pick them up, place them in a plastic bag, and discard them in a trash can. Alternatively, bury feces in a hole downhill and well away from the garden. Sanitize the trowel or shovel when done.

Avoiding manure will minimize risk of microbial contamination. If manure is used to amend soil in a produce production area, it must be processed according the EPA 503 practices (<http://tinyurl.com/3wqahn3>) and Hawai'i State regulations. Purchase compost from a reputable supplier. See also the CTAHR publication titled *Composted Animal Manures: Precautions and Processing*. [AWM-1]

Worm castings collected from worm bins must never be applied to the edible portion of the crop. Side-dress plants with castings or incorporate them into the soil as an amendment.

All compost piles containing manure should be located down-slope from the produce production area. No raw manure or compost leachate (water at the bottom of the pile) should run into open bodies of water (EPA Clean Water Act: <http://tinyurl.com/yhlsgyf>).

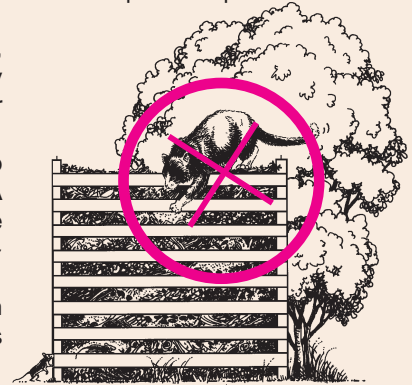
Change boots (i.e., "animal-only" or "produce-only" boots) and/or have a sanitizing boot bath if people are moving from an area with animal feces to a produce production area.

Keep birds away by using bird deterrents and changing types frequently. (The Internet has many homemade ideas.)

Bury all food discards (garbage) in a hole or in a compost pile. When raw food is exposed, it can attract dogs, cats, rodents, mongooses, birds, and other undesirable animals.

Wash hands with soap and water after being in an animal area and going back into the produce production area.

Allow *NO* raw manure or animals in a garden during the production season, especially at harvest time!



Harvest, clean, and handle produce with food safety in mind

It is important that you not contaminate recently harvested produce. Contamination can come from unclean hands, animal feces on or in containers, from contaminated rinse water, and so forth. Follow these best practices:

- Make sure that everyone washes his or her hands with soap and water before handling or eating produce.
- If someone is ill, they should not be handling produce (harvesting, rinsing, or any preparation). Find a non-food contact project for ill students, like weeding.
- Make sure cutting tools are sharp, cleaned, and sanitized (according to manufacturer's label) before use.
- Harvest containers should be made of materials approved for food use (plastic, stainless steel, etc.).
- Harvest containers and tools should be washed with soap and water and an approved sanitizer before each use.
- Harvest containers should be kept off the ground in a clean wheelbarrow or on a tarp or pallet to avoid contaminating produce with soil and pathogens.

Rinsing and preparing fresh produce (also known as "raw agricultural produce")

- All food contact surfaces, utensils, and equipment should be clean and sanitized (according to the manufacturers' label) before each use.
- Food served to the public (as free samples or at a group food event) must be prepared in a kitchen with a Food Establishment Permit from the Hawai'i Department of Health (<http://tinyurl.com/3sqbo6w>).
- Cut away damaged or bruised areas on fresh fruits and vegetables before preparing and/or eating. Produce that looks rotten should be discarded or composted.
- All produce should be inspected and rinsed thoroughly with clean running water before preparing, cooking, and eating. This applies to both conventionally- and organically-grown produce.
- If a produce rinse or sanitizer is used, use a clean container and follow the label instructions.
- Even if you plan to peel the produce before eating, it is still important to rinse it first.
- Soap and detergent are not approved for use on food, so do not use them to wash fruits or vegetables.
- Scrub firm produce, such as melons or potatoes, with a clean produce brush.
- Drying produce thoroughly with a clean cloth towel or paper towel may further reduce surface bacteria.

Dude! Wash Your Hands

Here's how to do it right:

1. Wet your hands with potable running water.
2. Apply liquid or powder soap.
3. Rub your hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds. Remember to scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails. (Sing the "ABC" song while washing to ensure at least 20 seconds.)
4. Rinse well.
5. Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel or air dryer.
6. If possible, use your towel to turn off the faucet.
7. If possible, use your towel to open the door.
8. Dispose of your towel responsibly.

Note: Antibacterial soap is not more effective than regular soap for cleaning hands. Antibacterial soap does have an additional bacteria kill ingredient but may also lead to the development of more resistant bacteria. Waterless antibacterial hand gels with at least 60% alcohol can kill bacteria but are not effective for heavily soiled hands.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/handwashing

Proper Disposable Glove Use

Disposable gloves can be an effective safety measure if used properly. If gloves are not used properly, the chance of cross contamination is similar to bare-hand contact. The National Restaurant Association has stated in a report that they have found the key to improved food safety is proper hand washing technique. Because the 2009 FDA Food Code mandates no-bare-hand contact with ready-to-eat foods, proper glove use is essential when working with food.

Rules of proper glove use:

1. Use powder-free, non-latex gloves to reduce the chance of an allergic reaction.
 2. Do not re-use gloves.
 3. Gloves should be changed whenever an activity change occurs or when there is contact with face or hair.
 4. Proper hand washing should be done prior to putting on new gloves, and between activity changes.
- Refrigerate all produce that is not going to be immediately consumed.
 - All cut, peeled, or cooked fruits and vegetables must be eaten or refrigerated within 2 hours. Cut produce left at room temperature longer than 2 hours should be discarded in the trash or composted.

Source: www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/NEW/foodsafety/forms/FIGHTBAC_saferFV.pdf

Is it okay to use a public school cafeteria's kitchen for garden produce?

This is a complex question! Please contact the Hawaii Department of Education's School Food Services Branch on Oahu at 808-733-8400 for more information on this matter.

Setting up a seller display and best food handling practices

Setting up a good seller display, such as you would find in a professional farmers' market, always requires good food handling practices. Remember, people are paying for a safe, quality product. To prevent cross-contamination from the environment or people:

- Have easily accessible hand washing and toilet facilities for students, teachers, and other participants.
- Hands *must* be washed with soap before handling produce. Avoid bare-hand contact, by using gloves after washing hands. Hand sanitizer can also be made available to clean unsoiled hands than may contain contaminants.
- Use food-grade bags for any pre-packaged produce.
- Un-packaged produce needs to be displayed on clean, sanitized tables or in clean containers, preferably with a cover. Plastic or stainless steel surfaces are preferred over porous wood surfaces.
- If using tablecloths, wash them before each use.
- Loose leafy greens should be kept at 45°F or lower. Display packages chilled, or have a display sample with packages for purchase kept in a cooler or refrigerator.
- If you are providing food samples, a Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) Temporary Food Permit is required (<http://tinyurl.com/3sqbo6w>).
- Samples of cut produce must be prepared in a DOH-certified kitchen (<http://tinyurl.com/3sqbo6w>). Cut fresh produce left at room temperature for more than 2 hours should be discarded.
- Store and display samples in a covered container to avoid environmental contaminants like dust and pests. To prevent cross-contamination, serve samples in single-use containers or have toothpicks for one-time sampling from a "dish". With sauces or dips, prevent "double-dipping" by using a squeeze bottle.
- Have a trash can handy to minimize rubbish around your display.
- Do not serve unpasteurized juice or milk.

Wanting to provide food for the school cafeteria?

At the current time, the Hawai'i Department of Education's School Food Services Branch requires that all produce in cafeterias must:

- have a food safety line of liability; for example, through an approved produce vendor, or by means of procurement
- be available (equity) for all students participating in the meal program.

Content for this publication is original and was adapted from the following sources and other best school-garden practices publications

UHM CTAHR's Farm Food Safety Website, which contains information for school gardens under "client services": <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/ctahr/farmfoodsafety>

University of California at Davis: *Food Safety in Your Home Vegetable Garden*
<http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/pdf/8366.pdf>

University of Connecticut: *Five Steps to Safe Fruit and Vegetable Home Gardening*
www.ladybug.uconn.edu/food/documents/RItraining-FiveStepstoFood.pdf

University of Florida school garden website:
http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/schoolgardens/hot_topics/garden_safety.shtml

University of New Hampshire: *Garden to Table: Five Steps to Food Safe Fruit and Vegetable Home Gardening*
http://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/schoolgardens/hot_topics/garden_safety.shtml

University of Maryland: *Food Safety in the School Garden* (great page!)
www.growit.umd.edu/Youth%20Gardening/Garden%20and%20Food%20Safety.cfm



Hawai'i School Garden Hui Contacts

Hawai'i

Hawai'i Island School Garden Network
The Kohala Center
Nancy Redfeather, Program Director
Phone: (808) 322-2801
nredfeather@kohalacenter.org
www.kohalacenter.org/HISGN/about.html

Maui

Maui School Garden Network
Day: Monday–Saturday
Time: 8 am–5 pm
Phone: (808) 250-8323
msgn@hawaii.rr.com
Place: Ha'ikū, Maui
www.maui-school-garden-network.org

Community Work Day Program

Day: Monday–Saturday
Time: 8 am–5 pm
Phone: (808) 877-2524
m_lane@hotmail.com
Place: Pu'unēnē, Maui

South Maui School Gardens Project

Day: Monday–Saturday
Time: 9 am–4 pm
Phone: (808) 269-6300
kirksurry@yahoo.com
Place: Kīhei, Maui

Kaua'i

Kaua'i School Garden Network
Tiana Kamen, Director
Malama Kaua'i
(808) 828-0685 ext. 12
tiana@malamakauai.org
www.malamakauai.org/aboutSchoolGardens.php

O'ahu

'AINA In Schools Program
Kokua Hawai'i Foundation
aina@kokuahawaiiifoundation.org
www.kokuahawaiiifoundation.org/aina

Grow Hawai'i (Hawaii Association of Independent Schools)

Phone: (808) 973.1538
growhi@hais.org
www.growhi.org
Place: 1585 Kapiolani Blvd. #1212, Honolulu, HI 96814

Complete School Garden Hui listing:
<http://www.hawaiischoolgardenhui.org>

UHM CTAHR Master Gardener Program Contacts

Hawai'i (East) Master Gardener Helpline

Day: Monday, Tuesday, Friday
Time: 9 am–noon
Phone: (808) 981-5199
himga@hawaii.edu
Place: Komohana Research and Extension Complex,
875 Komohana St., Hilo

Hawai'i (West) Master Gardener Helpline

Day: Thursday
Time: 9 am–noon
Phone: (808) 322-4892

Maui Master Gardener Helpline

Day: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
Time: 9 am–noon
Phone: (808) 244-3242 ext. 228
MauiMg@ctahr.hawaii.edu
Place: Kahului Cooperative Extension Service Office,
310 Ka'ahumanu Ave., Bldg 214

Kaua'i Master Gardener Helpline

Day: Monday–Friday
Time: 1 pm–4:30 pm
Phone: (808) 274-3471
rebesu@hawaii.edu
Place: Kaua'i Cooperative Extension Service Office,
3060 Eiwa St. (State Office Bldg. Rm 210) in Līhue

O'ahu Master Gardener Helpline

Day: Monday–Friday
Time: 9 am–noon
Phone: (808) 453.6055
OahuMg@ctahr.hawaii.edu
Place: Pearl City Urban Garden Center, 955
Kamehameha Hwy.

CTAHR Master Gardener site:

www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/site/extprograms.aspx



Preparing for *and Passing* an Annual Third-Party Good Agricultural Practices Audit (a.k.a. Food Safety Audit)

School gardens do not usually sell produce or provide food for the cafeteria. Cafeteria procurement regulations for reimbursed costs by USDA have rules on what produce can be used in a school cafeteria and may exclude produce from school gardens, unless, perhaps, they are GAP-audited (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/governance/regulations.htm>). However, operating under Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs), the produce industry's best practices, is a good choice at any time. GAPs include, but are not limited to, the following:

Make sure the farm/garden has well-maintained toilets and hand-washing facilities with potable water, liquid hand soap, and single-use towels for hand washing.

Make sure employees/students are washing their hands before harvesting and handling produce.

Make sure sick or injured/bleeding employees/students are reassigned to non-food tasks, and that any blood-tainted produce is thrown away.

Use ONLY the right pesticides, fertilizers, and composts (organic or non-organic) according to their labeled (legal) directions, and record every use. This includes following the pesticides' pre-harvest interval (PHI) precisely in order to protect consumers from pesticide residues that exceed EPA allowable amounts.

Make sure that workers/students who handle or are exposed to pesticides are trained and protected based on the EPA Worker Protection Standard (WPS) rules.

Use proactive pest management strategies for rodents, birds, deer, pigs, slugs, and snails, and purposefully keep animals, including pets, and their fresh manures away from fields, orchards, and school gardens that are in production.

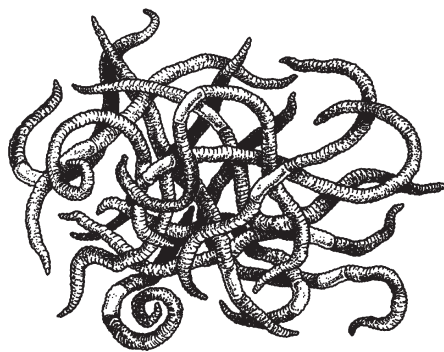
Make sure that produce that has feces contamination (from birds, rats, or other pests), or signs of being eaten by an animal, is not harvested and is only removed from the field after all other produce is harvested.

Use appropriate quality water for irrigation and crop rinsing as required by federal and state regulations or industry best practices. Farm/garden water should be tested for microbial content at an approved laboratory.

Make sure the packing shed or area, food-contact surfaces, and refrigerators are well maintained and not a potential source of food contamination.

More information

http://manoa.hawaii.edu/ctahr/farmfoodsafety/?page_id=240



Disclaimer

Reference to a supplemental information source is not intended as an endorsement or recommendation in preference to other sources that may also be suitable.

Acknowledgments

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