

GARDENS IN EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Navigating Rules & Regulations



OVERVIEW

School gardens come in all shapes and sizes. They provide young children with wonderful opportunities for hands-on learning. Gardens can range from a few containers on a windowsill, to larger, outdoor gardens that produce food for your program. Children benefit in many ways from gardening, including improved social and emotional skills. Garden activities in Early Care and Education (ECE) include planting, harvesting, taste tests, cooking, and more!

When starting or maintaining a garden, it can be confusing to navigate the different guidelines. This resource covers allowable costs for Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimbursements, Washington Administrative Code (WAC) regulations, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines, and Child Care licensing requirements. The goal of this resource is clarify the guidelines, and provide helpful resources, in order to support your gardening efforts.

FUNDING YOUR GARDEN

There are many options for garden funding. If you participate in CACFP, the CACFP reimbursement funds can be used for gardens. Applying for grants can give an additional funding boost for getting started.

CACFP Funds Can Be Used for Garden Materials

CACFP meal reimbursement funds can be used to purchase items for gardens such as seeds, fertilizer, watering cans, rakes, and more, as long as the produce grown in the garden will be used as part of the reimbursable meal and for nutrition education activities (such as taste tests).^{1,2,3}

Funds may not be used to purchase bulk supplies such as topsoil, irrigation supplies, fencing or any type of large equipment such as a tiller or greenhouse.⁴

Contact your Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) [CACFP Specialist](#) for more info!

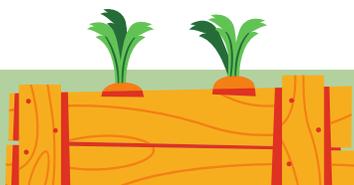
CACFP Funds Can Be Used for Garden-Grown Produce

Programs may be able to grow enough in the garden to meet some of their food needs. If using garden produce in CACFP reimbursable meals, be sure to document the weight and/or volume of the produce and save with your CACFP meal records.³

Grant Funding Resources for Getting Started

- [KidsGardening.org Grants](#)
- [Growing Spaces Grant List](#)
- [Head Start Garden Grants](#)

Tip! "Big box" stores such as Walmart, Target, Home Depot, and Lowe's may donate garden materials to help you get started. Check out nearby stores and ask about this option!



GROW & SERVE FROM THE GARDEN

What Can Be Grown?

Many types of fruits and vegetables can be grown in the garden. Start small and choose a variety of seeds or plants that grow well in your climate, environment, and for the seasons you are planning for. See an example growing guide [here](#) and [here](#).

Commonplace toxic plants or plants with poisonous leaves (for example, tomato, potato, or rhubarb) can be grown in the garden. An early learning provider must actively supervise children who are able to access a garden where commonplace toxic plants or plants with poisonous leaves are growing.⁵

Serving Garden-Grown Produce

Produce grown in the garden can be incorporated into meals and snacks or used for taste testing activities!

Prior to preparing and serving, state regulations require garden produce:

- Be thoroughly washed and scrubbed in cold, running water to remove soil and other contaminants
- Must have any damaged or bruised areas removed
- Be discarded if shows signs of rotting⁶

BEDS, SOIL, WATER, & PESTICIDES

Garden Beds

Garden beds must be made of materials that will not leach chemicals into the soil including, but not limited to, wood treated with chromated copper arsenate, creosote or pentachlorophenol, reclaimed railroad ties, or tires.

Gardens must also have safeguards in place to minimize risk of cross-contamination by animals.⁵

Resources for building garden beds

- [KidsGardening.org Raised Beds 101](#)
- [Example Raised Bed Materials](#)

Tip! Engaging parents or volunteers can be a great way to help sustain the garden. Connect with local farms - they may have extra plants or seeds!

Explore this [Introduction to Farm to ECE Training](#) for in-depth information on working with your community to start and sustain your garden and other farm to ECE work.

Soil

If gardening directly in the ground:

- Soil must be free of agricultural or industrial contaminants such as lead or arsenic⁵
- A soil test is recommended before planting. If your soil is contaminated, consider a raised bed instead. To test soil, send soil samples⁷ for analysis, or buy a soil testing kit.
- Soil testing resources:
 - [How to Sample Your Soil](#)
 - [Washington State University \(WSU\) Extension Soil Testing](#)
 - Contact your local [WSU Extension office](#)

If gardening in raised beds:

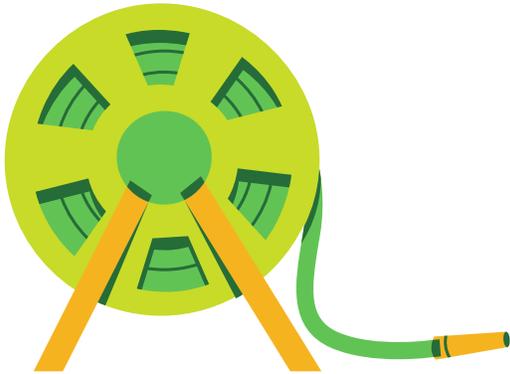
- Soil must be new, obtained from a gardening supply store or other retail store, and labeled "organic" or "safe for children"⁵
- Composted soil must be safe according to the Washington State University's extension master gardener [composting guidelines](#)⁵



Water

Gardens must use water that comes from a private well approved by the local health jurisdiction or from a public water system. An early learning provider must make water for gardens inaccessible to children if the provider uses irrigation water.⁵

Five gallon buckets or other similar containers must not be used for infant or toddler water play.⁸



Pesticides

An early learning provider must have a pest control policy that emphasizes prevention and natural, nonchemical, low-toxicity methods where pesticides or herbicides are used as a last resort.⁹

If pesticides are used:

- Parents or guardians must be notified no less than forty-eight hours before application, unless in cases of emergency.⁹
- Pesticides must be applied when children are not present and applied in accordance with the manufacturer's directions.⁹
- Please see [WAC 110-300-0255](#) for more detailed information about pesticide use in early learning programs.

Resources

- [Eco Urban Gardens Organic Pest Control Video](#)
- [Safety in the Garden](#)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who can I contact for more guidance on CACFP reimbursement?

Contact your [OSPI CACFP Specialist](#) for more information.

Can we grow tomatoes or potatoes in the garden?

Yes! See the "Grow and Serve from the Garden" section.

Are there any foods that we cannot grow in our garden?

No, but it is recommended to start with plants that generally do well in the garden. See an example growing guide [here!](#)

Can we use the garden produce in meals we serve?

Yes. See the "Grow and Serve From the Garden" section above.

Are there other funding sources to help us get started?

Yes. See the "Funding Resources" section above.

How can we sustain our garden once we get it started?

Consider building a support network around the garden, including parents and volunteers. There are also many resources in the community and across the state for support!

Learn more and connect with peers through the [WA Farm to ECE Community of Practice!](#) Contact waf2snetwork@gmail.com for more information.

More Resources

- [WA Farm to ECE Gardening Resources for growing guides and more!](#)
- [Free Training! Farm to Early Care and Education: An Introduction \(2 STARS credits\)](#)
- [Sample Growing Guide](#)
- [Starting a Garden Worksheet](#)



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REFERENCES

1. 2015 USDA [Policy Memo: Local Foods in the Child and Adult Care Food Program with Questions and Answers](#)
2. 2013 USDA [Financial Management Rev. 4 document](#)
3. 2017 USDA [Farm to Preschool Factsheet](#)
4. 2013 USDA [Allowable Use of CACFP Grant Funds](#)
5. [WAC 110-300-0148: Gardens in outdoor early learning program space](#)
6. [WAC 110-300-0196: Food sources](#)
7. USDA [Farm to School Planning Toolkit](#)
8. [WAC 110-300-0175 Water hazards and swimming pools](#)
9. [WAC 110-300-0255 pesticide use](#)

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