Steps To Becoming a Certified School Garden

School gardens provide great teaching opportunities, while also encouraging healthy lifestyle choices. With sustainable school gardens growing more popular statewide, interest in serving garden grown produce in the school cafeteria is increasing. In Arizona, before produce from the school garden can be served in the cafeteria, the school garden must be certified through the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS). Certification lasts for one year and can be renewed annually. The process to become a certified school garden is outlined below.

Note: If you are viewing this document on a Mac, some links may not open if you use the web browser Safari. For best results use Google Chrome or Mozilla Firefox.

Planning the Garden-

1. Identify a person in charge (PIC) or garden manager to champion the garden and ensure proper garden procedures are being followed.

   Guidelines to be followed by PIC
   https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/director/administrative-counsel-rules/rules/guidance/gd-105-phs-edc.pdf
   Garden manager's checklist
   http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu.agliteracy/files/UA-Garden-Manager-Checklist.pdf

2. Check out the extensive online resources offered through the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension. You can also find in person resources by contacting your local Cooperative Extension office or the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona.

   UA Cooperative Extension school garden website
   http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/programs/school-garden-food-safety
   Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona website
   http://www.communityfoodbank.org
   UA Cooperative Extension Website
   http://extension.arizona.edu

3. Become familiar with good agricultural practices (GAP) and food safety. Food safety and GAPs help to ensure your school garden is run safely and that your produce will not make anyone sick. Being well versed in food safety and GAP is essential knowledge when putting together your food safety plan. Understanding these terms will explain why certain procedures are required in the food safety plan.

Overview of garden food safety
http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu.agliteracy/files/UA-School-Garden-Food-Safety-Guidelines.pdf
Explanation of GAPs for schools (pgs. 6 & 7)
http://www.starschool.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Farm-to-Schools-Manual-Final-5-30-2013.pdf

4. Locate a suitable garden site. There are many hazards to consider when deciding where to plant your garden. Gardens can be created in the ground or above ground using raised planters, depending on land availability. If the garden is planted in a raised bed, the planter material must be non-toxic and non-leeching. Examples of acceptable garden beds can be found below.

   Where to plant a garden
   https://magic.piktochart.com/output/6368197-sustainable-garden-placements
   ADHS FAQs about garden location
   http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/index.php?pg=faqs

5. Raise funds for the new garden. Many grants are available online for interested AZ schools.

   Western Growers Foundation (offered annually)
   http://www.westerngrowersfoundation.org/grants
   Collective School Garden Network (year-round grants)
   http://www.csgn.org/grants
   American Community Garden Association (year-round grants)
   https://communitygarden.org/resources/funding-opportunities/
   University of Arizona Nutrition Network
   http://www.uanutritionnetwork.org/pima/school-gardens/

Establishing the Garden-

6. Gather tools and seeds either via donation or by purchasing them. Keep in mind that some grants, especially those through the Western Growers Foundation, include seeds. Seed libraries and seed sharing programs are also great free alternatives.

   Native Seed Store
   http://www.nativeseeds.org
   Pima County Seed Library
   http://www.library.pima.gov/seed-library/
   Valley Permaculture Alliance Seed Library
    http://www.vpaaz.org/seeds

7. If you are using existing soil that is not purchased from a commercial vendor, you will have to perform a soil test. Soil tests are offered for free through ADHS. Soil must contain less than 300 ppm of lead in order for it to be safe for planting.

   ADHS soil testing
   http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/documents/soil-testing-protocol.pdf

8. The water source you plan to use on your garden must also be tested. Several water sources are acceptable; however, some may require more testing than others. All watering sources for the garden must be drinking water quality. **Municipal water** is a pre-approved source, as it is tested and treated by the municipality. If you are using **well water,** you must test it once per growing season. If you are using **irrigation water,** it must be tested three times during the growing season: once before planting, once during growing (usually at peak usage), and once before harvest. You cannot use **reclaimed water**. To be acceptable for use on the garden, the water must be tested for E. Coli and Enterococci, and must comply with the EPA Recreational Water Standards. These tests can be done through University of Arizona labs for a small fee.

   Information on water testing labs
   http://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1111.pdf
   EPA Recreational Water Standards
   http://water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/standards/criteria/health/recreation/upload/factsheet2012.pdf

9. Create a garden site map including the location of the garden beds with dimensions, walkways, fencing, buildings and parking lots. Also include where the water source is located and storage areas on your map.

   Sample garden site maps
   http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu.agliteracy/files/Garden-Map-Examples.pdf

10. Create the growing area. Bring your garden map to life by staking out the garden area. Then, create the garden beds and prepare them for planting by adding extra soil and soil amendments, if needed.

    Kids Gardening: Digging In
    http://www.kidsgardening.org/node/5267#dig

Certifying the Garden-

11. Develop a food safety plan. A food safety plan lays out the policies and procedures that are important to keep your garden running safely and prevent contamination. The ADHS provides a fill-in template, linked below.

    ADHS food safety plan template
    http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/documents/food-safety-plan.pdf
    Manzo Elementary School example of food safety plan
    http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu.agliteracy/files/School-Garden-Food-Safety-Plan-Example.pdf

12. Submit a request for a site visit to the ADHS School sanitarian, at SchoolGarden@azdhs.gov. In the request you must include: a map of the planned garden site, a food safety plan, a copy of your soil test results (if you are using existing soil) and a "Request for School Site Visit" application.

    Entire ADHS site visit packet
    http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/documents/welcome-letter.pdf

13. The ADHS School Garden Sanitarian will conduct a site visit of the garden to determine compliance with the guidelines. Once your garden is in compliance, the school will be issued a certificate good for one year. Renewal is easy, as it just involves verifying your garden is still operating and in compliance.

Maintaining the Garden-

14. Review the "10 Steps To A Successful Garden" fact sheet and video series to help you foster a thriving and plentiful school garden.

    Video series
    https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQIAy3oqAJh3_-HV9osc8DD89QNYCkdV6
    Successful garden fact sheet
    http://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1435.pdf

15. Maintain a binder of the essential documentation for your school garden.

    What to keep in your binder
    https://www.evernote.com/shard/s15/sh/7dd345f9-eb6c-45e6-8106-47edb5a2151b/f78b751067192d5e

16. During the year, the ADHS School Garden Sanitarian will visit the garden and observe a harvest, usually around six months after certification. Be sure to take this into account when planning your harvests, and contact SchoolGarden@azdhs.gov when the time nears.

Bonus: If you are interested in setting up a composting program or rainwater- harvesting program at your school, you can use them in your edible garden. However, before doing so you must follow the steps below to gain approval from ADHS.
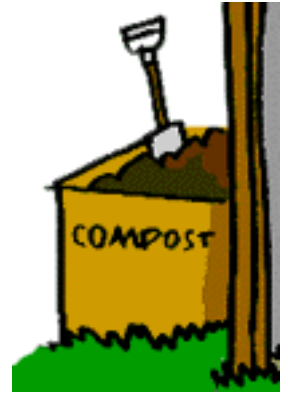
Composting-

Composting fact sheet
https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1632-2014.pdf
Sample compost system photos
http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu.agliteracy/files/Composting-Photos-for-Attestation-Example.pdf

1. Create a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the composting system. Compost can either be **plant derived** or **manure and plant derived**. Templates are available for both.

   Plant-Based SOP template
   http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/documents/plant-derived-composting-sop-sample.pdf
   Manure and Plant-Based SOP template
   http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/documents/manure-and-plant-derived-composting-sop-sample.pdf
   Manzo Elementary School example of Manure and Plant-Based SOP
   http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu.agliteracy/files/SOP-Manure-and-Plant-derived-Composting-Example.pdf

2. An attestation is also required to affirm you will follow the rules outlined by ADHS.

   Plant-Based attestation template
   http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/documents/plant-derived-composting-attestation.pdf
   Manure and Plant-Based attestation template
   http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/documents/manure-and-plant-derived-composting-attestation.pdf

3. Both documents will be submitted at the same time as when you place your request for a site visit. Should you decide to implement these programs at a later date, simply submit them to the ADHS School Garden Sanitarian for approval before use.

4. As you begin to compost you may run into some issues, especially with trying to achieve a hot enough compost temperature. Below is a resource for getting your compost temperatures hotter.

   Composting troubleshooting
   https://magic.piktochart.com/output/6570248-compost-troubleshooting

Rainwater Harvesting-

Rainwater Harvesting Guidelines
http://communityfoodbank.com/sites/default/files/CFB%20Rainwater%20Harvesting%20Guidelines.pdf

1. Create a standard operating procedure for the rainwater harvesting system.

   Rainwater Harvesting SOP template
   http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/documents/harvesting-rainwater-sop-sample.pdf
   Sample Rainwater Harvesting system photos
   http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu.agliteracy/files/Rainwater-Harvesting-Photos-for-Attestation.pdf
   Manzo Elementary School example of Rainwater Harvesting SOP
   http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu.agliteracy/files/SOP-Harvesting-Rainwater-Example.pdf

2. An attestation is also required to affirm you will follow the rules outlined by ADHS.

   Rainwater Harvesting attestation template
   http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/fses/school-garden/documents/harvesting-rainwater-attestation.pdf

3. Both documents will be submitted at the same time as when you place your request for a site visit. Should you decide to implement these programs at a later date, simply submit them to the ADHS School Garden Sanitarian for approval before use.

Other Resources:
AZ Western Growers Foundation Guide Book
http://www.csgn.org/sites/csgn.org/files/AZ%20Gardens%20for%20Learning_WholeBook_150dpi.pdf
AZ Specialty Crop Guide (handy planting schedule)
http://arizonagrown.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CropGuide_2015FINAL.pdf