



Steps To Becoming a Certified School Garden

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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 your school is not located in the State of Arizona or if Arizona statutes change after publication of this article, it is important to obtain the most up-to-date requirements on school garden certification in your area. Nonetheless, the information contained in this publication provides a guide to Standard Operating Procedures currently recommended to create a safe school garden.

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

<http://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/ftc>

Online school garden food safety trainings

<http://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/school-garden-food-safety-training>

UA Cooperative Extension Website (choose your county from the interactive map)

<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>

*Be aware that this site says that composting and rainwater harvesting are not allowed in certified school gardens. This has since been amended and both practices

are approved! More information on both is available below.

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>

Types of garden planters

<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/resources/types-of-garden-planters-pima.pdf>

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/grants-fundraising/>
<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 for lead. 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/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/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 the listed labs for a small fee. Harvested rainwater can also be used to irrigate your garden, however special care must be taken. The procedures for harvested rainwater are outlined on page 6.

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/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/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/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/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 his 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 ADHSschool

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/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/plant-derived-composting-sop-sample.pdf>

Manure and Plant-Based SOP template

<http://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/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.

Someone of authority should sign the attestation, as it certifies you will follow all the rules outlined in the SOP.

Plant-Based attestation template

<http://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/plant-derived-composting-attestation.pdf>

Manure and Plant-Based attestation template

<http://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/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/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/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. Someone of authority should sign the attestation, as it certifies you will follow all the rules outlined in the SOP.

Rainwater Harvesting attestation template

<http://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/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



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This information has been reviewed by University faculty.
extension.arizona.edu/pubs/az1722-2017.pdf

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extension.arizona.edu/pubs can be found at:
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