



# Steps To Becoming a Certified School Garden

*Natalie Robbins, Daniel McDonald and Paula Rivadeneira*

*Revised by Jennifer Parlin*



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. Then request a site visit from ADHS.

### Guidelines to be followed by PIC

<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/director/administrative-counsel-rules/rules/guidance/gd-105-phs-edc.pdf>

### Guidance for School Gardens

<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/school-garden-program/supplemental-guidance.pdf>

### **Garden Manager's Checklist**

<https://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/files/UA-Garden-Manager-Checklist.pdf>

### **Request a Site Visit**

<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/school-garden-program/request-site-visit.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**

<https://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/programs/school-garden-food-safety>

### **Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona website**

<https://www.communityfoodbank.org/how-we-help/farm-garden/>

### **Online school garden food safety trainings**

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

### **University of Arizona Cooperative Extension County Offices**

<https://extension.arizona.edu/locations>

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>

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://create.piktochart.com/output/6368197-sustainable-garden-placements>

#### ADHS FAQs about Garden Location

<https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/index.php#school-garden-program-faqs>

#### Types of Garden Planters

<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1713-2016.pdf>

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

#### Western Growers Foundation (offered annually)

<http://www.westerngrowersfoundation.org/grants>

#### Collective School Garden Network (year-round grants)

<http://www.csgn.org/grants>

#### KidGardening.org (offered at multiple times in the year)

<https://kidsgardening.org/grant-opportunities/>

## Establishing the Garden

7. If you are using existing soil that was 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

<https://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

<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1111-2020.pdf>

#### EPA Recreational Water Standards

<https://www.epa.gov/wqc/recreational-water-quality-criteria-and-methods>

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

<https://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.

#### KidsGardening.org Soil Lesson

<https://kidsgardening.org/digging-into-soil/>

## 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

<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/school-garden-program/certified-garden-food-safety-plan.pdf>

#### Manzo Elementary School Example Food Safety Plan

<https://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/files/School-Garden-Food-Safety-Plan-Example.pdf>

12. After the site visit, submit soil samples (if applicable), finalize the site map for the garden, and your Food Safety Plan.

### **School Garden Certification – Application Forms**

<https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/index.php#school-garden-program-certification-process>

13. Once your garden meets all requirements for certification, the School Garden Program will send the Garden Manager a "School Garden Certificate of Approval" that is valid for one year. In order to maintain certification, an updated food safety plan must be submitted to ADHS prior to the anniversary of your certification date.

## **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.

### **Successful garden fact sheet**

<https://extension.arizona.edu/pubs/ten-steps-successful-vegetable-garden>

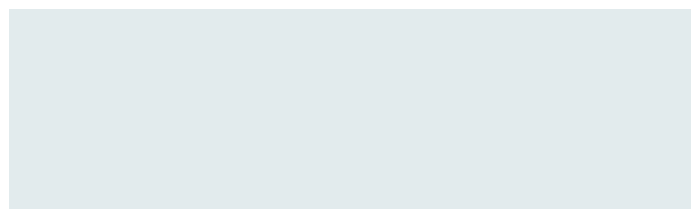
### **Video series**

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQIAy3oqAJh3\\_HV9osc8DD89QNYCkdV6](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQIAy3oqAJh3_HV9osc8DD89QNYCkdV6)

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

### **Binder Essentials**

<https://www.evernote.com/shard/s15/client/snv?noteGuid=7dd345f9-eb6c-45e6-8106-47edb5a2151b&noteKey=f78b751067192d5e&sn=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.evernote.com%2Fshard%2Fs15%2Fsh%2F7dd345f9-eb6c-45e6-8106-47edb5a2151b%2Ff78b751067192d5e&title=Food%2BSafety%2BCertification%2Bfor%2BARizona%2BSchools>



## **Composting**

### **Composting Fact Sheet**

<https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1632-2014.pdf>

### **Composting Best Practices**

<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/school-garden-program/best-practices-composting.pdf>

1. Create a standard operating procedure (SOP) for the composting system. Compost can either be **plant derived or manure and plant derived (as long as manure is only from chickens and herbivores)**.

### **Compost SOP template**

<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/school-garden-program/sop-composting-template.pdf>

### **Manzo Elementary School example of Manure and Plant-Based SOP**

<https://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/files/SOP-Manure-and-Plant-derived-Composting-Example.pdf>

2. Documents should be submitted at the same time as your food safety plan. Should you decide to implement these programs at a later date, simply submit them to the ADHS School Garden Sanitarian for approval before use.

## **Rainwater Harvesting**

### **Rainwater Best Practices**

<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/school-garden-program/best-practices-rainwater-harvesting.pdf>

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

### **Rainwater Harvesting SOP Template**

<https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/food-safety-environmental-services/school-garden-program/sop-rainwater-harvesting-template.pdf>

### **Sample Rainwater Harvesting System Photos**

<https://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/files/Rainwater-Harvesting-Photos-for-Attestation.pdf>

### **Manzo Elementary School example of Rainwater Harvesting SOP**

<https://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/files/SOP-Harvesting-Rainwater-Example.pdf>

2. Documents should be submitted at the same time as your food safety plan. Should you decide to implement these programs at a later date, simply submit them to the ADHS School Garden Sanitarian for approval before use.

## Additional Resources

### AZ Western Growers Foundation Guidebook

[http://www.csgn.org/sites/csgn.org/files/AZ%20Gardens%20for%20Learning\\_WholeBook\\_150dpi.pdf](http://www.csgn.org/sites/csgn.org/files/AZ%20Gardens%20for%20Learning_WholeBook_150dpi.pdf)

### University of Arizona Community and School Gardens Program

<https://cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/sites/cals.arizona.edu/agliteracy/files/Rainwater-Harvesting-Photos-for-Attestation.pdf>

### Farm to School Network-Arizona

<https://www.farmtoschool.org/our-network/arizona>



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Cooperative Extension

#### REVISED BY

**JENNIFER PARLIN**

*Assistant Agent, The Garden Kitchen, Pima County Cooperative Extension*

#### AUTHORS

**NATALIA ROBBINS**

*Former Undergraduate Student*

**DANIEL McDONALD**

*Director, Take Charge America Institute for Consumer Financial Education and Research*

**PAULA RIVADENEIRA**

*Former Assistant Specialist, Fresh Produce Safety*

#### CONTACT

**JENNIFER PARLIN**

[jparlin@arizona.edu](mailto:jparlin@arizona.edu)

This information has been reviewed  
by University faculty.

[extension.arizona.edu/pubs/az1722-2023.pdf](http://extension.arizona.edu/pubs/az1722-2023.pdf)

Other titles from Arizona Cooperative Extension  
can be found at:

[extension.arizona.edu/pubs](http://extension.arizona.edu/pubs)

Any products, services or organizations that are mentioned, shown or indirectly implied in this publication do not imply endorsement by The University of Arizona. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Dr. Edward C. Martin, Associate Dean & Director, Extension & Economic Development, Division of Agriculture, Life and Veterinary Sciences, and Cooperative Extension, The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or genetic information in its programs and activities.