

Preparing A Safe Garden for Kids

1. Before you begin your garden program, you will need to ensure that the soil, water, and working environment are safe for the students.
2. Test the soil for contaminants,
3. Know what is in soil amendments, the water and plants,
4. Determine your safety rules for working in the garden.

Soil Considerations

1. **Manure Selection:** Do not use fresh or unsterilized manure. All animal manure is potentially hazardous and may contain E. coli as well as other disease-causing pathogens. Use only sterilized or fully composted manure. Aged manure is **not** the same as composted, and can contain disease-causing organisms. For more information, contact your local county health department or cooperative extension office.
2. **Lead Contamination:** Lead is naturally present in all soils, generally in low levels. However, to be on the safe side, if you plan to plant an edible garden in an area that may have lead-contaminated soil, it is **always** a good idea to test the soil for lead before beginning an edible garden project. For information about lead testing, contact your local county health department or cooperative extension office.
3. **Water:** Make sure all water used in the garden – for watering plants, washing produce, and washing hands – is potable (drinkable) water. In addition, water for washing hands and produce should be **running** water to prevent recontamination.
4. **Building Materials for your Garden:** Do not use railroad ties, treated lumber, or old tires for garden boundaries, raised beds or anywhere in the garden. These items contain toxic chemicals that can leak into the soil and be absorbed by the plants. Contact your county cooperative extension office for more information.
5. **Chemicals such as weed killers and herbicides:** If at all possible avoid using chemicals. If you decide to use chemicals look for organic natural products and teach children to use gloves. Lock these chemicals in a safe cabinet.
6. **Provide constant supervision.**



Preparing A Safe Garden for Kids

Garden Tools

1. **Sharp tools:** Store garden tools out of reach in a locked garden shed or cabinet. Review garden tool usage with the kids and which garden tools require permission and supervision.
2. **Gloves and boots:** It is a good idea for children to use gloves especially when weeding. Boots may be needed to preserve their shoes.

Review list of harmful plants

1. **Plant Selection:** Review the list of harmful plants. For more information, contact your local county health department or cooperative extension office.
2. **Edible Plants:** Kids will enjoy planting items that they can harvest during their school year. Look for plants that have a short life cycle and that kids can eat!
3. **Allergies:** Make a list of children with allergies and the associated treatment options.

Harvesting the plants

1. **Use clean tools.** Before picking the plants, make sure all tools and supplies that will be used to harvest the vegetables and fruits are clean.
2. **Clean hands:** Teach kids to wash their hand with soap and warm water before harvesting produce and after they have finished any gardening activity.