



WISCONSIN SCHOOL NUTRITION IN A NUTSHELL

The Lifecycle of Farm to School:



Benefits of Garden Maintenance

Food Service Benefits:

Healthier plants for a better yield and more food for your school meals, a sense of self-sufficiency for your school meals program, sustains school gardens through the summer months.

General Benefits:

Physical benefits of fresh air and movement, emotional benefits of mood, self-esteem and attention span, agriculture and nutrition education, community engagement, builds life skills.

Safety Considerations for Garden Work

Personal Safety

- Wear gloves to protect your hands from bacteria, fungi, and blisters and choose closed-toe shoes
- Avoid repetitive motions by switching tasks, taking breaks, and sharing the workload
- Be mindful when lifting and lift with your legs, not your back
- Use sun protection such as sunscreen and wide-brimmed hats and stay hydrated!

Food Safety

- Choose a garden location away from contamination sources (i.e., dumpsters, run-off)
- Be aware of harmful plants (i.e., castor beans, deadly nightshade, stinging nettles)
- Use non-toxic methods for pest control and avoid pesticides or herbicides
- Use safe water. Do not use rain barrels or cisterns where bacteria thrive.
- Set-up a handwashing station near the garden. Ensure cuts/wounds are covered.

Methods of Plant Care

Pinching: Pinching stimulates plants to redirect energy and growth. Pinching can eliminate “suckers” – extra branches that will not make fruit. Only pinch tender sprouts you can snap off with your fingertips. If the branch or stem is so developed that you need to cut it, you have waited too long.

Pruning: Pruning is like pinching except that the branch, stem, or leaf is more developed. Prune plants for larger yields and to prevent disease. When pruning, you intentionally want to leave a small stub of the stem or branch you are removing.

Thinning: Thinning allows plants the growing space they need for proper air, light, nutrients, and water. After seeds germinate, leave the strongest sprouts and “thin out” the others. Thin the seedlings by gently pulling out the weaker, thinner, or shorter shoots or use scissors/clippers to carefully snip off the unwanted sprouts at the base of the shoot.

Mounding: For some vegetables (i.e., onions, leeks, potatoes, and sweet potatoes) increase the yield by hilling or mounding soil around the plant as it grows. Since these plants grow their edible portions underground, mounding creates more growing space for growth. Mound soil around the stem of the plant, but not over the leaves.

Supporting: Provide plant support through a trellis, cage (i.e., tomato cage), or stone walls. Plant supports improve air circulation, keep the foliage off the soil where diseases can spread quickly, and make it harder for hungry animals, snails, or slugs to eat your produce. Supports are best placed when the plant is small or at seeding.

Water and Irrigation

The ideal amount of water for most plant development is 1” of water per week; however, the ideal amount will vary depending on the weather and size of your plants. Check the moisture level in the soil by sticking your finger into the top 2” or 3” of soil; if it is dry, it is time to water. If it feels cool and damp, then watering is not necessary. Water your garden during the cooler hours of the day – preferably in the morning.

If the plants look yellow, they are getting too much water; if they look wilted, they are not getting enough.

Weeding

Weeding is vital to a healthy garden because without control weeds crowd slower growing vegetable plants and reduce the amount of garden yield. Plan to weed each week. Remove weeds before they go to seed to prevent spreading. Effective weeding can be through hoeing, cultivating tools, and pulling weeds, including their roots, up by hand.

Mulch

Mulching has many benefits including soil moisture retention, soil temperature stabilization, weed suppression, pest management, providing nutrients, soil splash prevention, and insulation.

Examples of mulching materials include straw, hay, leaves, wood chips, hulls, hops, and cardboard.

Barriers

Barriers include fencing, row covers, and shade structures and can be temporary or permanent.

Barrier Types:

- **Row Covers and Bird Netting:** Row covers and bird netting are beneficial for keeping out pests while allowing in the light and moisture your plants need to thrive. Row covers also serve to protect plants from cold temperatures and snow, extending the growing season.
- **Fencing:** 8’ high fencing keeps out deer while 2’ tall fencing is suitable to keep out rabbits. Fencing materials (i.e., chicken wire, woven wire, chain link, wood/plank, and hardware cloth) have different size openings depending on what you need to keep out.

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