

# Allergy Safety in AAPS School Gardens

## *Recommendations from the AAPS Farm to School Collaborative*

### ***FTS Collaborative Members***

AAPS – Rec & Ed

AAPS – School Nurse

AAPS – Food Service (Chartwells)

School garden coordinators and  
volunteers

Ann Arbor Farmers' Market

U of M Project Healthy Schools

Washtenaw County Public Health

Project Grow

Agrarian Adventure

**DRAFT**

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## ***Why do we need to pay attention to this issue?***

School gardens are often used as living laboratories that focus on multi-disciplinary and hands-on learning opportunities intended to supplement core curriculum. Nationwide, public school gardens have rapidly increasing in numbers at the same time that more children are being diagnosed with food allergies. The AAPS Farm to School Collaborative created the following recommendations to support principals, staff and parents in creating the safest possible gardening environment for students with food and insect allergies.



The information in this document aligns with the current AAPS District Food Allergy Handbook, available here: <http://www.aaps.k12.mi.us/aaps.forparents/files/foodallergyhandbook.pdf>

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## **1. Options for Food Consumption and Handling in School Gardens**

School gardening can look different from school to school – with volunteer-led experiences, teacher-led lesson time in the garden, and after school/summer camp programming, to name a few. Which scenarios are appropriate for a particular school building depends on several factors, including age of students, volunteer resources, comfort level of garden coordinator(s), and preference of principals. Garden coordinator(s) must communicate with and get approval from the school principal to determine a preferred method.

Produce grown in the school garden may be consumed in one or more of the following scenarios, depending on the factors noted above:

- a. In the school classroom or school garden *with the teacher present*. It is not recommended that garden food be consumed with a substitute or student teacher.
- b. In the garden during a recess program (or other garden work time) *with garden coordinator(s) and/or parent volunteers present*. It is recommended that up-to-date allergy information be given prior to consumption of any garden produce.
- c. Some schools may opt to serve garden produce during lunchtime in the cafeteria. This option requires the approval and cooperation of food service personnel and lunch room supervisors.
- d. Students at summer camps (e.g. Rec & Ed's Green Adventures Camp) may consume produce from a school garden as part of an environmental sciences curriculum. Camp staff need prior approval from principal to tend garden over the summer.

***In all scenarios for food consumption***, students, school staff, and volunteers should be instructed to wash their hands with soap and water before and after handling or consuming food in the school garden (4). Be aware that hand sanitizer does NOT wash off food allergens. Use only disposable (preferably compostable) plates, utensils, & bowls. Use of clean knives and food harvesting containers is critical to prevent cross-contamination of potential food allergens while preparing and serving food for tasting (5).

## **2. Avoid problems: Recommended roles for school staff and volunteers**

At most schools, many people are involved in maintaining a school garden. Keeping the lines of communication open and sharing relevant information regarding students with food allergies is essential. Open communication among all parties will significantly reduce the risk in the school garden. The following recommendations are for school staff and volunteers working in school gardens.

### ***Note: Use of Opt-In and/or Opt-Out Forms***

Principals and school garden coordinators may choose to use an Opt-Out form so that parents can indicate that they do *not* wish for their student to participate in school gardening. An Opt-In form can also gather valuable information from parents of children with food allergies who want their children to garden with certain safeguards. These forms can take significant time to coordinate when distributing and collecting, but can be beneficial to the school community.

Please see pages 9 and 10 for sample Opt-In and Opt-Out forms.

## ***Principal***

- Be available to meet with the garden coordinator(s) at least once during school year to discuss and approve the preferred scenario for all aspects of the school garden: communication with parents (including Opt-In &/or Opt-Out forms), consumption of school garden produce, teacher/classroom involvement, options for parent volunteers working with students during non-class time, etc.
- Oversee the recommended actions of school staff and garden coordinator(s).
- Review and document any injuries or adverse reactions that occur in the school garden.
- Communicate to garden coordinator(s) if there are staff or family concerns.

## ***Garden Coordinator(s):***

### **Prepping for school garden activity**

- AAPS school gardens should *not plant* the following foods due to high allergenic potential: peanuts, tree nuts, soybeans, wheat. (In order to comply with equal access to education for children with disabilities, it is recommended that school gardens avoid growing plants that are known food allergens for students at that school.)
- Make sure the school garden is well-defined from any non-school garden growing plots (e.g. community gardens). It is recommended that there be a fence between the two. This ensures that students and the adults supervising them do not get confused by what is/is not a part of the school garden. Schools have no control over, and often no knowledge of, foods planted in community gardens with the potential to cause an allergic reaction to students.
- If possible, attend school registration events & other events. Speak to the PTO and ask to introduce yourself at a staff meeting to help spread the word about the school garden and gain support. At many events you could set up informational tables to highlight school garden activities and solicit help.
- If the school is using an Opt-In or Opt-In form (see note above):  
At the end of the first week of school, ask the school office professional for copies of these forms. This should be done prior to students beginning to work in the school garden.
- At the end of the second week of school, contact the school nurse via email to ask for a list of students with known food allergies, stinging insect allergy, or other plant sensitivities. This list should also include any emergency medications kept at school for these students. *No garden food tastings should occur prior to receiving this list from the nurse.* Schedule a time to introduce yourself to the school nurse if you do not already know her/him.

- Also at the start of the school year, *with pre-approval from the principal*, consider approaching kindergarten teachers individually to ask about any food and/or stinging insect allergies. Typically the most allergies new to the school will be among the kindergarten student population.
- Teach students to always ask permission before tasting anything growing in the garden. If students are working in the garden and no produce samples will be offered for tasting, tell the children before work begins.

### **During gardening activities:**

- At least one adult volunteer should carry a working cell phone during every garden activity involving students. The school office number should be programmed in. Notify the office professional of this practice so they will be prepared for the possibility of a call from the school garden. The volunteer MUST be prepared to call 911, if the need should arise.
- Keep a basic first aid kit in the school garden. Recommended contents: disposable gloves, Band-Aids, Kleenex, paper towel, cleaning fluid, and quart sized Ziplock bags for disposal of waste.
- Encourage students with allergies to bring their own labeled gardening gloves that are for their use alone. Keep disposable gloves with garden supplies to be used by students with allergies if needed. (An Opt-In form could help in identifying which students need to only use his/her own gardening gloves.)
- During the growing season, information may come to your attention that a current student has a new allergy diagnosed or there is a new student with an allergy. Consider pulling plants growing in the school garden that might cause a problem for these students.
- Each year, attend and invite regular school garden volunteers to the district's Annual School Garden Anaphylaxis Training. This is scheduled to occur in January or February and is currently run by AAPS school nurse Nancy Polmear-Swendris RN ([polmear@aaps.k12.mi.us](mailto:polmear@aaps.k12.mi.us)).
- Starting in school year 2014/15 all school offices will stock an Epinephrine auto-injector for general use to treat any students' suspected anaphylactic reaction for known or unknown life-threatening allergy. However, emergency medications are locked in the school office before and after hours so would not be available during those times.

### ***School Nurse***

*(These tasks were developed by Nancy Polmear-Swendris, AAPS RN, and supported by the nursing group.)*

- Once contacted by the garden coordinator(s), provide him/her with a ‘need-to-know’ printed list of students with known food allergies, stinging insect allergy, or other plant sensitivities as soon as possible at the start of the school year. Include in this list information about students’ emergency medications kept at school. It is recommended that an updated list (of students with newly-identified food allergies) be shared with the school garden coordinator to help plan for spring growing season by February 1<sup>st</sup> each school year.
- More discussion could be necessary with the garden coordinator(s) and/or a student’s family to clarify known allergies, their severity, and potential sources of exposure in the school garden.
- A district nurse will participate in the Annual School Garden Anaphylaxis Training to teach prevention strategies to garden coordinators and volunteers along with the ability to identify signs and symptoms of food and stinging insect reactions. This will typically occur in January or February each year.
- Promptly communicate to the garden coordinator(s) updates of new students with allergies and those students with newly identified allergies as this information becomes available.

### ***Teachers***

- Share “need-to-know” information about your students’ allergies (including stinging insect allergies) with the school garden coordinator(s) and/or garden volunteers supervising a garden related activity for your students either inside the classroom or in the school garden.
- If the school is using Opt-In and/or Opt-Out forms, return these to the school office professional or School Garden Coordinator at the beginning of the school year.
- When your classroom visits the school garden take your classroom (Red Bag) first aid kit with you and be aware of the location of emergency medicines (i.e. Epinephrine auto-injector, inhaler, etc.) for your students.
- If a classroom garden experience is planned, teachers should stay with their students to help supervise the activity and also help manage students with high-risk allergies.
- Communicate to families prior to when their child will be working in the garden to let them know they can join their child for this fun activity. Suggesting they send their child in proper attire that day would be helpful, especially proper footwear.

### ***School Office Professional***

- *(If approved by principal)*, first day and Kindergarten round-up packets should include information [developed by the garden coordinator(s)] about the school garden and what kinds of activities students may participate in while out in the garden. Families

should be given the opportunity to 'opt-out' for their student, if they desire. Information about this can be added to the school website also.

- Collect the school garden opt-out forms at the beginning of the year and create a written list of students whose parents have turned in the opt-out form. Share this list with the garden coordinator(s).

### **Families**

- Notify the school of known food and/or stinging insect allergies or plant sensitivities prior to the start of the school year. Notify the school of *newly discovered* food and/or stinging insect allergies immediately.
- Every year supply up-to-date emergency medications to the school along with a consent to administer form signed by you and the physician.
- Immediately update significant allergy information to the school nurse.
- If desired, supply a pair of gloves for your child to use while they work in the garden. Make sure to write his/her name on them in permanent marker. Your child will be responsible for wearing and storing these gloves.
- Notify your child's teacher, the school nurse, and the office professional if you want your child to carry their emergency medications to the garden. This communication could be emailed.

### **3. Reducing the Likelihood of a Stinging Insect Bite in the School Garden**

- Prior to working in the garden, students allergic to stinging insects need to be reminded to alert a buddy and an adult immediately if they get stung. **STUDENTS WHO ARE STUNG SHOULD NEVER LEAVE THE GARDEN ALONE.**
- Students with a stinging insect allergy should wear long sleeves, long pants, and gloves while working in the garden.
- If there is an abundance of stinging insects in a particular area of the garden, the students need to be instructed not to work in that area.
- When stinging insects are very active in the fall extra vigilance is required.
- If a nest is found, determine if it is in a location that presents a safety concern for students. If so, it should be removed and this request should be communicated to the school office to report to grounds maintenance.



#### **4. Common Food Allergy Questions and Resources**

1. *What is a food allergy?*

This organization is our preferred resource for food allergy information:

<http://www.foodallergy.org/about-food-allergies>

2. *Can you explain anaphylaxis?*

Anaphylaxis is a whole body allergic reaction that can vary in symptoms and severity depending on the situation and the person. It is a life threatening situation. Treatment of anaphylaxis is the immediate use of an Epinephrine auto-injector (EAI). ALWAYS CALL 911. For more information visit: <http://www.foodallergy.org/anaphylaxis>

3. *How do you treat an insect sting in a student?* There are three types of reactions to an insect sting – normal, localized, and allergic. Although life-threatening reactions are rare, it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms and know how to react. Read more here: <http://www.webmd.com/allergies/guide/insect-stings>

4. *What fruits and vegetables have the lowest potential to cause an allergic reaction that we might offer for tastings at the start of the school year, if the principal approves?* All fruits and vegetables are generally safe, except legumes and any identified food allergen of a current student.

#### **5. Sources**

“Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services; 2013

[http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/pdf/13\\_243135\\_A\\_Food\\_Allergy\\_Web\\_508.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/pdf/13_243135_A_Food_Allergy_Web_508.pdf)

“Children’s food allergies are on the rise,” The Weston Forum; Jan. 13, 2014.

<http://www.thewestonforum.com/15797/childrens-food-allergies-are-on-the-rise/>

“Wash Hands and Surfaces Often,” federal food safety instructions.

<http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/basics/clean/index.html>

“Avoiding Cross Contact,” Food Allergy Research & Education

<http://www.foodallergy.org/tools-and-resources/managing-food-allergies/cross-contact>

“School Guidelines for Managing Students with Food Allergies,” Food Allergy Research & Education. Includes family’s responsibility, school’s responsibility, and student’s responsibility:

<http://www.foodallergy.org/document.doc?id=135>

AAPS District Food Allergy Handbook

<http://www.aaps.k12.mi.us/aaps.forparents/files/foodallergyhandbook.pdf>



**\*\* Sample Opt-In form for parents of students with allergies \*\***

**SPECIAL NOTE FOR PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH ALLERGIES  
REGARDING SCHOOL GARDEN TASTINGS**

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Please turn this form in no later than Friday September, 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014. School garden produce tastings will begin as soon as possible in September.

AAPS schools that have gardens may offer small tastings of garden produce during the school day in a manner approved by each school's principal. This may be in conjunction with a recess program, a class visit to the garden, or in the classroom. AAPS school gardens have been advised NOT to grow any of these most common food allergens: peanuts, tree nuts, soy, or wheat. Life-threatening reactions to fruits and vegetables are extremely rare in children. Many district students with food allergies are only allowed to eat food that comes from home. If you wish to make an exception to this so that your child can taste garden produce please indicate your preference below and turn this form in to your child's teacher or the school office. If you have any questions contact the school office or the garden coordinator.

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**SCHOOL GARDEN TASTING OPT-IN FORM**

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, my child may taste any fruit or vegetable grown in the school garden.

\_\_\_\_\_ My child can taste any fruit or vegetable grown in the school garden EXCEPT the following: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I want my child to have the opportunity to taste school garden produce. But please send it home for them to eat at home.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\* Sample Opt-Out form for all parents \*\***

**Student Participation in School Gardening**

During the school year your child may have an opportunity to help in the school garden with adult supervision. Some of the many tasks they could participate in are moving soil, laying wood chips, working with hand tools to plant seeds and seedlings, watering and weeding around plants, and learning about where their food comes from in a hands-on way. This is a wonderful opportunity for your child to experience growing food, supplement their education, enjoy the outdoors, and so much more.

Please be aware that your child may be using gardening tools (i.e. shovels, hoses, rakes, hand tools) with direct supervision. Your child could be exposed to many different types of plants, herbs, or flowers in addition to other things found out in nature like insects, bees, spiders, etc... Shared gloves will be available for student use in the garden. If you prefer, you may send in gloves marked with your child's name for their use only. If you have any questions, contact the school office or your school's garden coordinator.

If you do NOT want your child to participate in school garden related activities, please sign the form below and return it to your child's teacher or the school office. Your child WILL be allowed to participate in gardening related activities in the school garden unless you complete and turn in this opt-out form. School garden work will begin in early September.

**If you do not want your child to participate in school garden activities, please return this form to the office or your child's teacher by September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014.**

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**SCHOOL GARDEN OPT-OUT FORM**

\_\_\_\_\_ My child should NOT participate in any school garden related activity.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_