Gardening with Children & Physical Distancing

Gardening is a great activity for kids in the early learning environment, and offers a variety of benefits. Gardening supports physical activity, access to fresh fruits and vegetables, Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) best practices to incorporate seasonal and locally produced foods at mealtime, and developmental skills among children. Fine motor skills are practiced in gardening activities, while planting, watering, and harvesting engage the senses. Learning about healthy dirt and soil encourages an appreciation of the environment, while harvesting items from the garden gives kids a sense of accomplishment and may inspire trying new foods.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, specific precautions and guidance – such as physical distancing – are needed while gardening to keep children and staff safe. Make sure current COVID-19 and licensing group sizes as well as child-to-adult ratios are followed at all times.

Below are gardening tips for child care, early learning programs and school-age care:

- Groups should be brought to the garden one group at a time unless the garden space is large enough to allow a space of 6 feet between groups. Children and staff from different groups should not mix.
- Children should be given their own garden space or pot of dirt that is 6 feet away from another child’s space. Each child gets their own set of seeds or seedlings. More than one child can plant items in an area, just not at the same time.
- Instructions are given for kids to plant only in the specified area, with adults providing demonstration first. Areas can be drawn in the dirt or marked with small stones or sticks.
- Gardening tools should not be shared and need to be washed and disinfected before another child uses them.
- If staffing allows, plan activities that groups can participate in at different times. See below for activity ideas!

Activity ideas

- Identify a garden spot by walking the yard to observe where the sun is shining and where it is shady. This can be done at different times of the day.
- Prepare the garden bed by creating a perimeter where the garden will be. Remove grass, small stones and weeds using child-sized digging tools.
- Provide bags of soil, peat moss, and compost for kids to mix in appropriate portions to be used in the garden. Planting seeds in egg cartons is helpful for children to plant one or two seeds in a small space.

Safe gardening with children

- Children and staff should wash their hands before going to the garden and after they return.
- Hand sanitizer should only be used as a temporary measure outside until hands can be washed with soap and water. Hand sanitizer is not effective on dirty hands.
- Wash all garden food items before eating. Never select items that have fallen to the ground.

Additional gardening resources

- Harvest for Healthy Kids https://www.harvestforhealthykids.org/
- KidsGardening.org https://kidsgardening.org/
- Fall and Winter Vegetable Gardens for Western Washington https://extension.wsu.edu/snohomish/fall-and-winter-vegetable-gardens-for-western-washington/
- Grow It, Try It, Like It https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/grow-it