

# Gardens and Produce

## What is an onsite garden?

Public Health supports and promotes the purchase and use of locally grown produce as a healthy lifestyle choice and valuable contribution to the local economy. Child care centres may have an interest in growing produce on site for use in programming and/or food service. Public Health will review plans for an onsite garden at the request of child care centres and may approve the use of produce grown on site if certain conditions are met.

## What are the Public Health requirements for onsite gardens?

In order to minimize the potential for foodborne illness and to facilitate the trace-back of food products in the event of an enteric outbreak Public Health requires the following:

- Ensure that the garden area is fenced in order to minimize animal and pest entry
- Do not use animal manure
- Use potable water for irrigation (e.g. do not use surface run-off water; only use water that is safe to drink). Rain water collected using rain barrels may be approved for irrigation
- Provide gloves for persons handling plants and produce
- Wash hands using soap and water after handling soil, plants, or produce
- Supervise children when working in the garden. Make sure children do not eat the fruits/vegetables until they have been washed with potable water
- **Thoroughly wash all produce** prior to consumption and/or cooking (including pre-washed produce)
- If planting an individual potted plant, review the packaging for the soil you plan to use. If the product states “keep out of reach of children” or similar, do not allow children to handle this product and find an alternative.
- Ensure that parents are informed that produce grown on site may be used in food preparation
- Have a policy and procedure in place regarding the operation of the garden and use of produce grown on site

## Can premises accept donated produce?

Parents or staff may have an interest in donating homegrown produce to the child care centre for use in food service. Public Health does not recommend that child care centres accept donated produce for the following reasons:

- Produce may have been grown using manure, increasing the potential for produce to be contaminated with animal fecal matter
- Produce may have been irrigated using a non-potable (unsafe to drink) water source
- Produce may have been contaminated during growth, handling, or transport
- In the event of an enteric outbreak it may be difficult to determine the source of the outbreak (e.g. if food items such as produce were obtained from multiple sources)
- **All food must be from an inspected source; this includes all dairy, meat, and produce**