

# Hands-on Gardening Education During COVID-19



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## Why is gardening education critical during this time?

Gardening is associated with reduced stress and increased physical and mental well-being. Gardening offers the opportunity to experience and learn about the natural world while being physically active and producing fresh food. Outdoor gardens can be safer spaces for social distancing than indoor areas if proper protocols are followed. Gardens can also be a reliable source of healthy food during times of disruption in food supply chains. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, when children help grow fruits and vegetables, they are more likely to eat them and be interested in trying more varieties. Consuming a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables provides vital nutrients for growing minds and developing bodies.

## What is the risk level of spreading COVID-19 outside?

**The risk of spreading COVID-19 is lower outdoors than indoors.**

Current CDC guidance states: The more people an individual interacts with, and the longer that interaction lasts, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread. Location can be a factor, too, with outdoor activities generally being less risky than indoor activities.

Continue to encourage wearing masks for outdoor activities. If opting to remove masks, follow these steps to safely remove masks to go outside:

1. Wash hands and walk outside.
2. Remove mask and place in a clean, safe spot.
3. Before replacing mask to go back inside, sanitize hands.
4. Replace mask on face.
5. Go back inside.

## Can COVID-19 spread through food or surfaces?

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), there is no evidence of food being associated with the transmission of coronavirus. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the virus can survive for a short period on some surfaces. This means that it is possible for people to get COVID-19 by touching something that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.

## How can I keep the outdoor garden safe?

- ✔ Limit outdoor learning to the same small groups as indoors and sanitize high touch areas between groups.
- ✔ Coordinate schedules with other classes/groups to avoid overcrowding in the garden.
- ✔ Clean and sanitize frequently touched surfaces made of plastic or metal, such as railings, gardening tools, and watering cans. Consider rotating individual tasks that require tools daily, so that you only have to sanitize before or after your time in the garden, rather than between each student. For example, one child uses the watering can on Monday and another on Tuesday. This can help young children develop skills like self-management.
- ✔ Due to their more porous nature, wooden surfaces (garden bed structures, benches, tables) are difficult to sanitize. To clean wooden-handled tools or surfaces, consider painting them to make them non-porous, or saturate the handles with a diluted bleach solution.
- ✔ Adults and students should wear face masks if in close proximity. Otherwise, follow the safety protocol outlined above for safely removing masks to go outside.
- ✔ To disinfect non-porous surfaces (plastic, metal, painted wood, etc.):
  1. Clean dirty surfaces with soap and water prior to disinfection.
  2. Read and follow directions on EPA-approved disinfectant product labels.
  3. If no disinfectant products are available, prepare a diluted bleach solution by mixing 1/3 cup bleach in one gallon of room temperature water.
  4. Spray enough to cover.
  5. Allow the bleach solution to contact the surface for a minimum of one minute.



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## What you should know:

- ✔ Social distancing and wearing masks is important outside, as well as inside. Maintain at least six feet between each person.
- ✔ Limit the number of students in the garden in order to practice safe, social distancing.
- ✔ Students should not share food.
- ✔ Disinfect shared tools and frequently touched surfaces between uses.
- ✔ No student or adult should work in the garden who is sick and/or displaying symptoms.

## How can my classroom engage in hands-on gardening education?

The garden can serve as an outdoor classroom and is a great place to continue safe learning with groups of students; just a few modifications can create a safer learning environment. The following recommendations were consolidated from the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), CDC, and nutrition professionals.

### 1. Wash Hands!

- ✔ Adults and children should wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before and after working in the garden. Gloves are not a substitute for handwashing.
- ✔ Lead hand washing practice with students and repeat often.
- ✔ Encourage children to keep hands clean after washing by clasp hands together to “catch a ladybug!”

*Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning requires licensed CCLCs and FCCLHs to use liquid soap.*

### 2. Set up the Garden

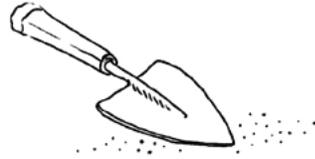
- ✔ Set up different gardening centers with at least six feet of space between each.
- ✔ Mark the gardening centers so that each student knows where their spot is.
- ✔ Make sure each student has their own gardening supplies next to their gardening space in order to limit sharing and movement around the garden.

#### Sources

FDA: <https://bit.ly/2HqIUld> | DECAL: <https://bit.ly/3iWIHGH> | NAAEE: <https://bit.ly/2RSvMAG> | EPA: <https://bit.ly/3mK3ENY> | Green Schoolyards America: <https://bit.ly/30220T1>  
Centers for Disease Control: <https://bit.ly/3mH77gm> <https://bit.ly/2G4znZj> <https://bit.ly/3hWMFV2> | American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: <https://bit.ly/3iVm8Zz>

## Gardening Activity

**Keep children engaged.** Consider splitting children into two groups: an activity group and a garden task group.



**Engage children in the activity group in a simple garden scavenger hunt, math or measuring activity, or drawing or writing prompt activity.** For example, children can write or draw about what they observe in the garden or their favorite plant, flower, fruit, or veggie.

**Children in the garden tasks group should have safely distanced “centers” to work in.** Garden tasks may include digging in a garden bed designated just for digging, watering plants, planting seeds or seedlings, pulling weeds, turning the compost pile, etc.

**Show children how taking care of a garden is fun and rewarding, and model proper safety practices.**



**If there is any produce ready to harvest, children should only harvest food that is for their consumption and not handle food intended for others.**



**Adults handling food should wear gloves and masks. Gloves are not a substitute for handwashing.**



**Adults should rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. Scrub firm produce with a clean produce brush.**

For guidance on safely engaging students in taste testing, see [Hands-on Food Education and Taste Testing During COVID-19](#).

