



Recommendations for Gardening in Child Care Centres

Growing a garden can be a lot of fun for children and can provide many learning opportunities. Gardening is a great way for children to learn about food and nutrition and to learn responsibility by caring for plants. It can also encourage physical activity, promote eating more fruit and vegetables, can help develop teamwork and improve self-confidence. There are, however, infection risks that can be prevented by taking the following precautions.

Hygiene

- **Hand washing** should occur before and after gardening activities. This is the most important step in preventing infections.
- Don't allow eating or drinking while gardening.

Plants

- **Must not be poisonous or toxic.** Ensure plants chosen do not cause allergic reactions in children. The Canadian Child Care Federation has a [list of toxic plants](#) to avoid.
- **Teach children early on about the dangers of some plants** and how to recognize them (wild parsnip, cow parsnip, giant hogweed, and poison ivy).
- **Do not allow children to taste or eat** the plants or nectar from flowers.
- **Identify all plants and wild mushrooms** in the gardening area (including outdoor play areas). Keep a record of common and botanical names, this could assist a physician in the event of accidental poisoning or allergic reactions.
- All vegetables and fruit from the garden should be cleaned and washed prior to tasting.

Soil

Obtain from a safe source where the components of soil are known. Avoid using soil with manure or fertilizers that could potentially be contaminated by animal feces. Ensure that soil for indoor use is free from, and routinely monitored, for pests.

Water

Provide a **potable (drinking) water supply** for use in the garden. It's recommended that water basins used for gardening be changed regularly and other gardening items (e.g. pots) should be removed when not in use. Stagnant water sources can become breeding areas for mosquitoes and area contributing factor to the spread of vector borne diseases.

For tips and tricks to help your garden

grow: Find a local master gardener!

[Simcoe Country Master Gardeners](#)
[Muskoka Master Gardeners](#)

Worker and Child Health:

- Don't garden with children during outbreaks; sick individuals should not work in the garden.
- Provide protection from the sun while gardening outdoors. Use sun safe practises and consider shade gardening.
- Children and other participants should have appropriate foot wear (i.e. closed-toed shoes) and work gloves.
- Take regular breaks for hydration.

Site Safety

- Consider measures such as covers or fencing that will prevent the soil from being contaminated by animals and pests.
- Construction material should be non-toxic and free of physical hazards.
- Visually inspect garden site for signs of contamination prior to use. Contamination can include animal feces, cigarette butts, insects, sharp objects, or other foreign objects.
- Tools should be age-appropriate and maintained in good condition.
- Gardens within the licensed area of a child care centre are required to be smoke-free under the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

Maintenance

- Consider if the use of fertilizers are necessary in your garden. Pesticides and herbicides should not be used, explore safer weed control and plant growth methods.
- If used, ensure chemicals are approved for use and kept away from children. Never use these products while the children are in the centre.

** Please note that this resource is not a comprehensive guide. Many factors need to be considered when developing a gardening program at your centre.*

For additional information on infection control or safety concerns, call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809.

For more information on healthy eating and gardening call Health Connection: 705-721-7520.