



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

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Considerations for Outdoor Learning Gardens and Community Gardens

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These recommendations are intended for managers of outdoor learning gardens (e.g., school gardens) and community gardens. Outdoor learning gardens are often affiliated with schools and provide outdoor learning and access to healthy food for students. Community gardens are sections of land collectively gardened by a group of people to produce and share affordable fruits and vegetables within their communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges across the United States. Access to healthy food options and nutrition are an important part of health and well-being. Outdoor learning and community gardens help fill nutritional gaps in places where access to healthy food may be limited, provide recreation and stress reduction opportunities, and provide a safe outdoor learning [environment](#), [🔗](#) especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Garden managers should consider the recommendations below to help ensure a safe learning environment and access to healthy food, while helping prevent the spread of COVID-19.

These considerations are meant to supplement—not replace—any state, local, territorial, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, and regulations with which organizations must comply. Garden managers can determine, in collaboration with [state and local health officials](#), whether and how to implement these considerations, making adjustments to meet the unique needs and circumstances of the local community. Garden managers should continually assess, [based on current levels](#) of spread in the community they serve, how to modify their garden operations.

Garden managers may also benefit from reviewing CDC's COVID-19 guidance and considerations on [community based organizations](#), [workplaces](#), [events and gatherings](#), [food service providers](#), and CDC's information on [people at higher risk of severe illness](#).

Preventing the spread of COVID-19

Coronaviruses, such as the one that causes COVID-19, are thought to spread mostly from [person-to-person](#) through respiratory droplets emitted when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. The droplets containing virus are spread in the air and can be inhaled in the lungs or land on the mouth, nose or eyes of people nearby. A person also might be exposed to the virus causing COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, including food or a shared tool, that has been contaminated when an infected person coughs or sneezes near it, and then touches their own mouth, nose, or eyes. However, this is not thought to be the main way the [virus spreads](#). Risk of [transmission from food and shared tools is considered very low](#), but there are other, possible routes of COVID-19 spread, such as:

- Being in close contact (within six feet) with others who do not live in the same household as you, especially people who do not wear masks. The more people you interact with, and the longer those interactions last, the higher the

risk of COVID-19 spread;

- Contact with frequently touched surfaces (e.g., gate latches, hoses);
- Touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching your own mouth, nose, or eyes.

Outdoor activities generally are lower risk than indoor activities, but there are still important ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19 that should be followed, including:

- [Staying home when sick](#)
- [Social distancing](#)
- [Wearing a mask](#)
- [Handwashing](#)
- [Cleaning and Disinfection](#)

Promote healthy behaviors

Encourage people to stay at home when sick.

- Staff, volunteers, and gardeners should [stay home](#) if they have tested positive for or are showing COVID-19 [symptoms](#), or have recently had [close contact](#) with a person with symptoms of, or diagnosed with, COVID-19.
- Develop policies that encourage sick staff and volunteers to stay at home without fear of reprisal, and ensure staff and volunteers are aware of these policies.
- Educate staff and volunteers about when they should [stay home](#) and when it is safe [to be around others](#).

Encourage people to socially distance.

- Working at least six feet apart from others, even when you are outside, reduces the chance that you will be exposed to the virus from respiratory droplets emitted by others.
- Many people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms or no symptoms, but can still spread the virus to others. Staying apart reduces your risk of getting COVID-19.
- Social distancing is most effective when it is used along with other prevention strategies, including wearing masks.

Masks

- Require staff and volunteers to use masks, as feasible. Masks are an important means of reducing viral spread, and are essential when social distancing is difficult. Provide information to all staff and volunteers on [proper use, removal, and washing of masks](#).
- If feasible, provide masks for staff, volunteers, and gardeners, and consider asking them to bring extra masks, in case their mask gets wet or soiled, as well as a sealable plastic bag or other container to store masks when not in use.



Hand hygiene

- Provide handwashing stations or [hand sanitizer](#) (with at least 60% alcohol) for all gardeners, staff, and volunteers, if feasible. Ensure hand-hygiene options can be accessed by everyone.
- Proper [hand hygiene](#) is an important infection control measure. Ensure employees and volunteers wash their hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, provide an alcohol-

based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Hand sanitizers may not be as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy and might not remove harmful chemicals from hands like pesticides and heavy metals. Key times to clean hands in general include:

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- After using the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching frequently touched surfaces
- After putting on, touching, or removing masks
- After handling money
- After taking out the trash
- After gardening

Clear signage and communications

- Ensure that all gardeners, staff, volunteers and the public are made aware of garden rules and hours. Post signs displaying hours of operation and safety precautions at each entrance to the garden and near shared areas and make the same information available on your website and social media platforms. Consider developing a communication plan that includes additional methods other than in-person or electronic communication only.
- Post [signs](#) in highly visible locations (e.g., at building entrances, in restrooms) that [promote everyday protective measures](#) and describe how to [stop the spread](#)  of germs by [properly washing hands](#) and [properly wearing a mask](#) .
- Consider developing signs and messages in alternative formats (e.g., large print, Braille, American Sign Language) for people who have low vision or are blind or people who are deaf or hard of hearing or in other common languages spoken by members.

Maintain healthy environments


Modifications to promote social distancing should include:

- Limiting the number of gardeners, staff, and volunteers at the garden to promote [social distancing](#). Consider offering virtual education or other outreach activities to reduce crowding and extend garden opportunities for those who may not be able to physically visit the garden.
- Encouraging all gardeners, staff, and volunteers to maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from others, including in commonly shared spaces (e.g., handwashing stations).
- Providing disinfecting wipes so that gardeners, staff and volunteers can wipe off tools between use.
- Implementing one-way traffic flow in garden rows and other areas to promote social distancing, if possible.
- Encouraging people to sign up in advance for community workdays or other events to decrease crowding.


Safe operations

- Be aware of local or state regulatory agency policies related to providing essential services and group gatherings to determine if your garden can be open to the public, and what rules apply, if any, regarding current restrictions limiting the number of attendees at events and/or shared spaces.
- Limit non-essential visitors, volunteers, and activities involving external groups or organizations, especially with

those who are not from the local area, and consider what, if any, exceptions apply, such as allowing direct service providers or service animals that may assist people with disabilities.

- Limit or suspend events or activities that target individuals identified as at [higher risk for serious illness for COVID-19](#), and individuals who live with, or work with, people at increased risk, if feasible. If these events or activities continue to be offered, consider creating a schedule that includes special garden hours for at-risk or vulnerable populations.
- Discourage people from eating and drinking in the garden and sharing food and beverages.
- Cancel or postpone all taste-testing and cooking demo activities, if feasible.
- Consider a regular training of staff, volunteers and gardeners so that they understand how COVID-19 is spread, how prevention strategies are helpful, and the specific prevention strategies that your garden has adopted and is promoting.
- Consider regular symptom screenings of staff, volunteers and gardeners that come onsite, and have a plan for if anyone arrives or becomes ill. For guidance related to screening of staff, please refer to CDC's [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) and the "Prevent Transmission Among Employees" section of [CDC's Resuming Business Toolkit](#)  .
- Ensure all [water systems](#) are safe to use, especially if re-opening garden facilities after a prolonged shut down.
- Limit the use of traditional sign-up and sign-in sheets that require individuals to physically sign-in with a shared writing utensil. As feasible, use alternative methods, like phone calls or online scheduling platforms, to coordinate when staff, volunteers, and gardeners will be at the garden. If a shared writing utensil is used, ensure that it is frequently cleaned and disinfected. Ensure opportunities to sign-up for time in the garden are shared in an equitable fashion for all garden users.

Cleaning and disinfection

Follow CDC and EPA's [Guidance on Cleaning and Disinfection](#) to prepare and maintain a safe environment for staff, volunteers, and gardeners. Use EPA List N-approved [disinfectants against COVID-19](#)  . Always read and follow label instructions for each product.



- [Routinely clean, sanitize, and disinfect](#) surfaces and objects that are frequently touched, such as entrance gate latches, portable toilets, water spigots, and hoses.
- Consider limiting or suspending use of shared tools and equipment. Encourage gardeners to bring their own, if feasible. If using shared tools or equipment (hand tools, wheelbarrows, garden carts, tillers, etc.), ensure that they are cleaned and disinfected before and after use. You may consider scheduling more time than usual between groups of gardeners to ensure all high contact surfaces and shared equipment/tools are cleaned and disinfected.
- If you have restrooms or port-a-potties available, set up a schedule to frequently clean and disinfect all surfaces, and replenish soap, sanitizers, or paper products.
- Use disposable [gloves](#) when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash:
 - After using disposable gloves, throw them out in a lined trash can.
 - Do not disinfect or reuse the gloves.
 - [Wash hands](#) after removing gloves.
- Ensure you have enough supplies for staff, volunteers, vendors, and customers to clean their hands and cover their coughs and sneezes. Supplies include soap, water, hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, a way to dry hands, tissues, disinfectant wipes, masks (as feasible), and no-touch trash cans.

Plan for what to do if a staff member, volunteer, or gardener gets sick by referring to relevant sections in [CDC's Considerations for Community-Based Organizations](#).

Additional Resources

[Food and Food System Resources During COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

[Communication Resources](#)

For more information on COVID-19 and food, see FAQ pages from the [S. Food and Drug Administration](#)  and the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) 

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Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\), Division of Viral Diseases](#)