# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

These FAQs have been compiled and vetted through consultation with members of the Hawai'i Farm to School & School Garden Hui and our agency partners. They are offered in conjunction with the resources in the *How Does Your School Garden Grow?* training packet. In many cases, the answers will refer to the other documents in the binder, so be sure to keep this whole packet as a reference. The answers provided are based on best practices. Please contact your school administrator to clarify your school's specific requirements and internal policy.

## 1) Our school wants to start a learning garden, what should we consider?

School gardens can provide a rewarding experience for both students and teachers. Before starting a garden, consider the following:

- Be sure to get support from your school administration.
- Identify a garden coordinator, and form a school garden committee comprised of administrators, teachers, students and community members.
- Each garden will need someone primarily responsible for managing garden efforts and activities on a day-to-day basis, often even on weekends and school holidays.
- Have the garden committee develop a 5-year plan for the garden. Consider any future construction or landscaping that the school may have planned at your chosen garden site.
- Consider building relationships with community partners at the outset to help your program sustain and succeed.
- Identify ways to integrate curriculum into the school garden to ensure it is broadly used by teachers for learning. Hui partners have developed a curriculum map that can help you design lesson plans that meet educational standards in a number of subject areas.

## 2) What is a garden coordinator?

A "garden coordinator" communicates between the many stakeholders in a successful garden, and takes responsibility for necessary actions. Look for passionate individuals who can communicate well with others (school principal, an experienced teacher or an experienced gardener from the community).

## 3) Do I need to let parents know their child will be working in the school garden?

Yes, parents should know that the garden will be a part of their child's school activities.
BENEFITS: Communicating the dates can be very helpful for students to come prepared with the proper attire including close-toed shoes, sunscreen and hats. Communicating dates ahead of time have also shown to increase student attendance when they look forward to garden days.
REQUIREMENTS: Check with your school's administration about any required information about what you should be sharing with families, and if you need additional waivers.

## 4) Can students who have a cold or other communicable illness work in the garden?

Yes, if the student is well enough to be at school, they can still contribute to garden learning when not feeling well.

- Encourage ill students to be involved with non-food handling activities such as weeding, composting or raking.
- For safe food handling, a student that is ill should not be handling produce, whether it is at the time of harvesting, washing or preparing.
- Students who have symptoms including diarrhea, fever, vomiting, or jaundice, should not be at school and should not be near other students nor allowed to be in the garden. DOE policy requires students be fever free within past 24 hours. Check with your school administration for any additional guidance.

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## 5) Does the Hawai'i Department of Education (DOE) have a policy relating to school gardens?

At this time, the Hawai'i DOE does not have a standardized school garden policy at the state level. However, many individual schools have developed their own garden policies. If your school does not have a policy, consider speaking with the principal and sharing the resources in this packet to develop such a policy.

## 6) Which government agencies do provide food safety guidance for school garden programs?

In Hawai'i, there are two State government agencies with recommendations that pertain to school gardens:

- The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) recommends that all produce is washed thoroughly with potable water, and that safe food handling guidelines be followed. DOH also investigates any pesticide contamination issues in gardens/farms.
- The Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (DOA) has specific requirements for application of pesticides and compost systems (working with the EPA).

## 7) Is it okay for students to eat food from their school garden?

Yes, there is no better reward for students in the garden than eating the food they grow! Studies have shown that students are more likely to try new foods and consume more vegetables when they grow it themselves. The garden educator or teacher should be familiar with safe food handling and garden best practices as outlined in this packet:

- Any time fresh produce is distributed or consumed, be sure to follow the safe food handling guidelines and the best practices for harvesting, handling, and storage of garden produce found in this packet.
- Have children wash their hands before preparing foods, and use single-use spoons, cups, or toothpicks to allow children to sample foods once they are made.
- CLASSROOM: While the classroom is not considered a food establishment (and therefore the DOH does not have jurisdiction nor licensing requirements) the school is ultimately responsible for the safety of students, educators and volunteers.
- CAFETERIAS must follow DOH regulations for the food establishment permit, with increased regulations for produce handling.
- SENDING HOME: Harvested items sent home for students to share with their families should include a reminder to wash produce thoroughly.

## 8) Can our school serve school garden produce in the cafeteria and/or as part of a school meal program?

It depends. While incorporation of school garden produce in school meals is ultimately one goal of a Farm to School Program, there are several important criteria that must be met, depending on what type of school you work at:

- HIDOE SCHOOLS: Currently the School Food Authority does not allow any garden produce to be integrated into their meal programs. Requirements include GAP-certificatfion (Good Agricultural Practices) from the farm, with a HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) plan for processing and storing.
- CHARTER OR PRIVATE SCHOOLS: These schools can act as their own School Food Authority, and thus may have different rules for incorporating garden produce in school meals. Any procurement policies that allow for garden produce to be used in school meal programs should include their own risk management assessments and requirements. Check with your school administration for clarification and to explore opportunities.

## 9) Can our school sell or distribute school-grown produce?

Yes! Your school may explore a number of different opportunities to distribute school-grown produce and raise money to support their garden program which comply with their school's internal policies.

- CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) PROGRAMS are a positive way for schools to connect with their community, supplying school employees and student 'ohanas.
- FARMERS' MARKETS are an engaging way for the school community to recognize the garden's bounty and students to learn about marketing. Produce that is cut from the field and washed for sale does not require any Department of Health (DOH) permits. However, produce that is processed, such as a mixed salad, triggers DOH Temporary Food Permits.
- SELLING TO A RESTAURANT can be very rewarding for schools and restaurants promoting each other. Purchasers may set certain requirements to be followed.
- FUNDRAISERS: DOH Temporary Food Permits are required for value added products and food sales at a booth.
- Check your school's policies to clarify procedures for sales, accounting, facility/ equipment use, and student involvement.
- Best practices for safe food handling and storage should be followed at all times.

## 10) What is the most important food safety practice to be aware of outside in the garden?

To prevent food-borne illnesses in the garden, students should wash hands thoroughly and properly BEFORE conducting any activity in which they may come into contact with the edible portion of plants. Make sure cutting tools are clean and sanitized prior to use. See "Best Practices for Hawai'i School Gardens" in this packet for a more thorough explanation on food safety practices in the garden.

## 11) Am I allowed to use pesticides in our school gardens?

Although technically allowed, pesticides should be avoided or used minimally in school gardens. Inevitably, garden coordinators will be faced with unwanted pests and diseases in a garden, and it is best to practice an integrated pest management (IPM) approach. If you are a Hawai'i DOE school, your school's lead custodian/ groundskeeper will be the IPM lead and you should plan to work directly with him or her. See "Best Practices for Hawaii School Gardens," containing an overview of common pests and beneficial insects is included in this packet.

## 12) What about "natural" pest remedies?

A "pesticide" is any chemical intended to kill or repel a pest such as unwanted insects, weeds, rats, germs, and fungus. While we think of them as highly- toxic substances used in agriculture, there are many pesticides used everyday in our households. However, "natural" applications (i.e. spraying liquid dish soap, using powered borax, bleach, pine-oil) to kill pests are still considered pesticides. All pesticide products should be handled with care. Here are some tips to help you make informed decisions about these applications:

- "THE LABEL IS THE LAW." Pesticide label directions must be followed (application for site, crop, mixing, dosage, safety equipment, etc.) to protect the environment and by law. There are civil penalties of up to $5,000 per offense, or criminal penalties of up to $25,000 or 1 year in prison or both.
- Do not use "experimental" pesticides on food crops that will be eaten.
- Do not allow children apply any pesticides.

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## 13) What other methods can we use to prevent the presence of pests that cause problems in the garden?

Building healthy soil and using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) will go a long way toward avoiding many common pests and plant diseases. You can also try the following tips:

- Remove standing water from around the garden area, and avoid growing plants that trap water, to prevent the formation of mosquito habitats.
- Remove slug and snail hiding places and avoid over-watering and watering in the evening which could encourage their presence.
- Physically remove unwanted species from the garden area as soon as possible
- Maintain healthy soil using composting techniques

## 14) What should I do if I come across an invasive species?

Report invasive species pest issues to your IPM Manager (usually the lead custodian), who will coordinate with Department of Agriculture and Department of Health as necessary.

- LITTLE FIRE ANT: For student safety, frequent tests for Little Fire Ants (LFA) should be conducted. Your island's invasive species council should be able to provide test kits. If you ever encounter the Little Fire Ant on campus (see photo in this packet) your IPM coordinator must report the sighting to the Hawaii Invasive Species Council immediately. Please contact. http://dlnr.hawaii.gov/hisc/info/ for the contact number for your island

## 15) Is Rat Lungworm a concern in our school garden?

Yes, Rat Lungworm is a serious, potentially fatal disease that is spread through slugs and snails. Always thoroughly wash garden produce, and discard any leaves or items with visible slug or snail residue. See "Rat Lungworm Fact Sheet" in this packet for tips for making sure your school garden produce is safe from this pathogen.

## 16) Can we use rain catchment water to irrigate our edible gardens?

Yes, rain catchment water can be used to irrigate crop roots. HOWEVER, it should not be applied to the edible portion of a crop. Water quality will affect edibility of your crops, and you should test your water sources to ensure your irrigation water is safe (EPA standards are less than 126 E. coli bacteria per 100 ml of irrigation water). See "Best Practices for Hawaii School Gardens," in this packet for a deeper discussion of garden watering.

- TESTING of irrigation water can be done through local testing agencies.
- ONLY USE POTABLE WATER on edible portions of crops and to rinse harvested produce.
- DRIP IRRIGATION: If the water is not from a city source, or not potable, use drip irrigation to limit exposure to the edible portion of all food crops.